

Virginia Theological Seminary

Journeying with the Celtic Saints: Living Our Baptismal Covenant

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Doctor of Ministry Program
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry
in the
Christian Spirituality Track
by
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Alexandria, Virginia
March 16, 2017

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Abstract

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An adult education program invited participants to reflect on their own spiritual gifts and response to the Baptismal Covenant in light of material presented about four Celtic saints: Saints Brendan, Brigid, Columba, and Patrick. The material presented included stories, songs, and visual art about each saint. Using open-ended questionnaires, small-group discussion, journaling, and semi-structured interviews, participants were able to express that they had engaged more deeply with the Baptismal Covenant as a result of the program; the majority also identified ways they intended to more faithfully live out their baptismal identities in the future.

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Acknowledgments

It takes a village, as they say—and I am grateful for the many “villagers” who have accompanied me on this portion of my journey:

I give thanks for my Doctor of Ministry advisor, The Rev. Dr. William Roberts, and thesis readers Dr. Kathy Brown and Dr. Amy Dyer, all of Virginia Theological Seminary, for their wisdom, guidance, and friendship.

I give thanks for my fellow “D.Minions” in the first Christian Spirituality cohort at VTS; I love you all!

I give thanks for the words of wisdom when I needed them from The Rev. Dr. Ellen Clark-King, Dr. Susan Orshan, and The Rev. Dr. Carol Jablonski.

I give thanks for my soul-friends Liz Ward and Alberta Aikin, who listened, calmed my anxieties, and pointed me back to the deep knowing of the Celtic saints.

I give thanks for my friends and colleagues The Rev. Martha Bonwitt and The Rev. Larry Harris, for all of the holy mischief we plotted over club sandwiches.

I give thanks for my colleagues in the Southern Maryland Clericus.

I give thanks to the Episcopal Diocese of Washington and the administrators of the Angus Dun Fellowship Fund for a continuing education grant that defrayed tuition.

I give special thanks to the parishioners of St. Thomas' Parish, Croom, MD, for their support and participation throughout the D.Min process. “She has a D.Min!”

I give thanks for the clergy and parishioners of Trinity Episcopal Church, Upper Marlboro, MD; St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Baden, MD; and St. Philip's Episcopal Church, Baden, MD, for the years of shared Lenten programs.

I give special thanks to the parishioners who participated in the study from St. Thomas', Croom and Trinity Episcopal Church, Upper Marlboro—especially the women who consented to the interviews. I learned *so* much from you, and I am very grateful.

I give thanks for Saints Brendan, Brigid, Columba, and Patrick for what they have taught me over the years—especially about finding my voice and singing my truth.

And finally, but by no means last, I thank my family: My children, Ian and Cait, and my husband, Brad, for their support, humor, love, and putting up with my flights of fancy over the years. OK, guys—what's next?

Debra Brewin-Wilson
Lent 2017

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INTRODUCTION

The parish in which I served as Rector during my initial work in the Doctor of Ministry program is a small Episcopal parish in southern Maryland that was established as a mission of the nearby “mother church” in 1745. The parish consists of both St. Thomas’ Church and the Chapel of the Incarnation, about ten miles south of the Church. Services are held weekly at both locations.

Long-term members speak of the “glory days” of the 1960’s and early 1970’s, when pews were full and the parish was a hub of social activity for church members and the wider community. By the last decade of the twentieth century and into the first decade of the twenty-first century, however, conflict (either among parishioners or between serving Rectors and the Vestry) had become an established relationship pattern. Attendance began declining; financial support for the parish declined; and Rectors were either being asked to leave or leaving of their own accord after serving for three to four years.

Entering as Rector in October 2009, I had been told only a small part of the above story. I learned that parishioners saw the parish as a friendly and welcoming one, citing the feeling of truly being a family when they spoke about what they liked about the parish. And yet, several potential members attended services for a period of months and then left, telling me the reason they were leaving is that they felt they had not been welcomed by parishioners. They struggled with discerning how to become part of the “family” they could observe and felt drawn toward joining, but felt barred from entering.

When conflict predictably arose between the Vestry and me, I sought help from God, my spiritual director, Diocesan staff, a coach, and a clergy colleague group. After

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weathering the most volatile part of the conflict, I decided to apply for admission to the Doctor of Ministry program in the Christian Spirituality track at Virginia Theological Seminary. For my personal spiritual growth and professional sanity, I believed that entering into such a course of study would help me to find firmer footing as an ordained leader and that my course work would help me to discern the next step to take in leading the parish.

I believed that helping people to connect with basic Christian practices would empower parishioners, as individuals, to focus on what it meant to be followers of Christ. By encouraging church members to adopt such practices, I believed such actions would help the parish to stabilize and become healthier—perhaps leading to a growth in attendance and a deepening commitment to the parish that could alleviate some financial stress. As always, God was up to something in the midst of the conflict.

As part of the Doctor of Ministry work, the required institutional study conducted with the help of a team of parishioners yielded some interesting data. It confirmed that while parishioners perceived the parish to be friendly and outreach-oriented, newcomers struggled to connect with long-time members. Mission was often directed at keeping the church open and operating, rather than connecting with the wider community.

In the community survey portion of the institutional study, we learned that members of the wider community appreciate the parish's presence and believe it serves as an important site of community gathering. And yet, many of those interviewed did not realize that our parish was an active worshipping community—they thought that the parish Church and Chapel were unused historic sites. Members of the team were surprised at this information. We reported it to the Vestry and the parish. Vestry members

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wanted to take steps to alleviate that misconception. We discussed what actions we could take, and how they could help us to grow spiritually as a leadership team.

As a Rector, I follow the rubrics of *The Book of Common Prayer* concerning the use of “The Renewal of Baptismal Vows” when no baptisms are scheduled for the days considered to be “especially appropriate” for Holy Baptism—the Easter Vigil, the Day of Pentecost, All Saints’ Day, and the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord (BCP, p. 312). Whenever I am leading a congregation in either “The Baptismal Covenant” or “The Renewal of Baptismal Vows,” I am always struck by the final three promises we are asked to make:

- Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?
- Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
- Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? (BCP, pp. 293-294)

Those questions summarize, for me, what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Perhaps because of that, I sometimes find that I am vocally emphasizing those three questions as I lead the renewal of the baptismal vows. One day, after we had renewed our baptismal vows, a member of the Vestry mentioned to me how difficult she found it to keep those final three promises. We talked about what they meant and how we could seek to carry out those promises in everyday life.

After an opportunity arose to mention that conversation in a sermon, several other parishioners brought up the topic with me. The essence of those conversations was the same: We know this is what we’re “supposed” to do—but how do we *do* it?

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At the same time that these conversations were occurring, our parish was continuing to develop collaborative relationships with nearby Episcopal parishes and the local ecumenical group that supports the town food bank. One of the most successful collaborative efforts was a program that began with five nearby Episcopal parishes joining together weekly during Lent for a simple supper of soup and bread, followed by an educational presentation. The clergy shared leadership responsibilities for the educational content, and the parishes took turns hosting the programs, which focused on Bible study or spiritual growth issues. The presentation content varied, but usually consisted of a lecture on a subject, followed by a small group exercise or guided discussion, concluding with corporate prayer. Over time, two of the parishes dropped out of the group, although they were still invited to participate each year.

Given the findings from the community survey, I saw a need for our parish to explore its self-identity and consider how it could become more “friendly” and welcoming to others. Given the conversations I had experienced with parishioners, I saw a need for parishioners to engage more deeply with their own spiritual journeys, connecting their daily lives more closely with their relationship with God and how they could better support one another on their journeys. I also saw a need to make the Baptismal Covenant of the Episcopal Church more immediate for parishioners. I believe these needs are not unique to this parish; I believe these are wider issues in the Church.

As a result of the conversations held with parishioners about the baptismal covenant and the parish’s involvement with the collaborative Lenten programs, I wondered if an adult education program could be designed to help parishioners grapple with the final three questions of the baptismal covenant and perhaps even explore ideas

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on how to live out those promises more faithfully. My interest in and familiarity with Celtic Christian practices and traditional Scottish and Irish music suggested a framework for designing a program that would allow participants to explore how to live into those final three baptismal promises.

By focusing on one spiritual gift of each of four prominent Celtic saints, participants would be invited each week to consider their *own* spiritual gifts in relation to the highlighted one. They would also be asked to consider it in light of the baptismal promises from the Baptismal Covenant. Participants would be encouraged to consider how their faith community assisted them in living out those promises. A fifth session would invite the participants to consider taking these ideas back into their faith community and perhaps even design a collaborative project that the churches could work on together.

To test the viability of this idea, the author sent an e-mail to a convenience sample of 29 Episcopal priests (both active and retired) who were fellow participants in the Southern Maryland Clericus. Members of the group serve in the southern portions of the Dioceses of Maryland and Washington (D.C.). Five priests responded to the questionnaire, which consisted of the following four questions:

- a. *Has a member of your parish/congregation ever engaged in a conversation with you about one or more of the baptismal promises listed above?* Three indicated that they had and provided examples, which were all incidents that occurred when the Covenant was forcing the parishioner to confront an issue in his/her own life. Two priests stated they could not recall ever having such a conversation with a parishioner.

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- b. *Have you ever preached about how to live out one or more of the baptismal promises? If so, is that something you do periodically?* Four priests responded that they do preach about the Baptismal Covenant, usually when there is a baptism or renewal of vows, but one noted specifically referencing it when preaching about a Christian response to terror attacks and gun violence. One priest could not recall ever preaching about the Baptismal Covenant.
- c. *What value, if any, do you perceive in helping parishioners to better relate the Baptismal Covenant to their daily lives?* This turned up some interesting answers. Two priests said there is always value in reviewing it, while another said that although he was not sure what effect it had on his listeners, it always helped him! Another priest spoke about liturgical renewal and that the Baptismal Covenant did not need to be cited directly in sermons in order to be transformational. The fifth respondent told a story of how his parish engages with donating to the local food pantry as a way to live out the Baptismal Covenant.
- d. *What value, if any, do you perceive in helping parishioners to better relate the Baptismal Covenant to their faith community?* One priest responded, “The implications of this could be enormous! Actually share the good news and not just have the clergy do it? Proactively love neighbor? See dignity in every human being! Wow!” Another stated that reciting the Covenant together is a “powerful communal experience.” One noted that her parish struggles with living out these promises with those outside of the church community. One did not answer, and the fifth combined the responses to “c” and “d” into one answer.

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Although few in number, these responses were encouraging. It appeared that other priests and members of their parishes struggled with these same questions and would appreciate ideas to help Episcopalians to become more faithful followers of Christ by living into the promises we are asked to make at baptism and again, every time we renew our Baptismal Covenant.

I believed that if an adult education program offered participants the opportunity to reflect on their spiritual gifts and baptismal promises in light of material presented about the spiritual gifts and spiritual journeys of several Celtic saints, then the participants would demonstrate an increased awareness of their own baptismal identity and they would be able to identify how to live out that baptismal identity in a way that is potentially transformative both for themselves and for their communities.

The question now revolved around how to design an intervention to help accomplish these ambitious goals.

CHAPTER ONE

RE-ENGAGING WITH BAPTISM

Baptism is recognized by the Episcopal Church as one of “the two great sacraments given by Christ to his Church.”¹ The Catechism states, “Holy Baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us as his [*sic*] children and makes us members of Christ’s Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God.”²

While that is, indeed, Good News, what does that mean in practical terms in our everyday lives? How are we to behave as God’s children? How are we to function as members of Christ’s Body? How are we to feel assured that we will inherit the kingdom of God?

Theologian and former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, writes:

The baptized person is not only in the middle of human suffering and muddle but in the middle of the love and delight of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. That surely is one of the most extraordinary mysteries of being Christian. We are in the middle of two things that seem quite contradictory: in the middle of the heart of God, the ecstatic joy of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; and in the middle of a world of threat, suffering, sin and pain. And because Jesus has taken his stand right in the middle of those two realities, that is where we take ours.³

Williams goes on to suggest that when one is baptized, one shares in the life and identity of Jesus, who was “anointed by God to live out a threefold identity: that of prophet, priest and king.”⁴ These sound like lofty identities, especially in twenty-first century America, where prophets are often portrayed as doomsayers, priests may be

¹ *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 858.

² (BCP 1979, 858)

³ Rowan Williams. *Being Christian: Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, Prayer*. Kindle electronic edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), 6-7, location 148-161.

⁴ (Williams 2014, 11, location 199)

viewed as potential frauds and abusers, and kings often rely on wealthy and powerful king-makers. Not precisely the baptismal identity Williams is trying to convey.

And yet, the Catechism of the Episcopal Church states that one of the names for the Church is “a royal priesthood.”⁵ The Church affirms the ministry of the laity as follows: “The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.”⁶

Perhaps an adult education class could encourage baptized Church members to explore these ideas, helping them identify the gifts given to them and how to use them to represent Christ and carry on the work of reconciliation in the world. While it may be a stretch for most Christians to fully claim the titles of prophet, priest, and king for themselves, perhaps there are *aspects* of those identities with which they may resonate.

Prophet, Priest, King

Williams notes that the role of the *prophet* “is always to be challenging the community to be what it is meant to be—to live out the gift that God has given to it.”⁷ It also means, for Williams, that a Christian serving in this prophetic role would ask questions to help the community clarify its role by leading it back to the beginning of its story with God. The prophet in the church would also hold the community accountable for focusing on the “essentials . . . baptism, Bible, Holy Communion and prayer.”⁸

⁵ (BCP 1979, 854)

⁶ (BCP 1979, 855)

⁷ (Williams 2014, 12, location 215)

⁸ (Williams 2014, 13, location 225)

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Both ordained and lay leaders are tasked with helping each baptized member of the Church learn how to identify his or her own gifts and how to use them for the good of the wider community. One's individual gifts also relate to the gifts of the faith community as a whole—what is God calling a particular Church or parish to do and to be and how does each individual fit into that wider calling?

The role of *priest*, states Williams, is “. . . to mend shattered relationships between God and the world, through the power of Christ and his Spirit.”⁹ The priestly role focuses on building bridges between God and God's people, facilitating connections between them and using one's own gifts and presence to re-build broken or strained relationships. The priest is called on to proclaim that Jesus “has restored everything,” and in prayer, to point to the relationships or areas of the world where that restoration needs to be reclaimed in order for people to flourish.¹⁰

As Christians, we are to carry on Jesus' work of reconciliation. Our world today often seems to be more about pointing out the divisions among us, rather than emphasizing our common humanity. Thoughtfully considering the priestly role could lead Christians to try to build bridges grounded in love in order to begin the work of reconciliation. Donald Romanik, in his treatise on the Baptismal Covenant, states that “. . . all of us must be ready, willing and able to help bring Christ to our broken world.”¹¹ He notes that congregations thrive when spiritual practices are emphasized for individuals and the gathered community. The importance of the faith community was raised by Williams, as well.

⁹ (Williams 2014, 15, location 239)

¹⁰ (Williams 2014, 15, location 242)

¹¹ Donald Romanik, *Beyond the Baptismal Covenant: Transformational Lay Leadership for the Episcopal Church in the 21st Century*. Kindle electronic edition. (New York: Episcopal Church Foundation, 2010), location 387.

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The *king* or *royal*, in the Hebrew Bible, addressed God on behalf of other people, usually in the context of seeking God’s justice. Notes Williams, for the baptized Christian, “. . . that ‘royal’ calling is about how we freely engage in shaping our lives and our human environment in the direction of God’s justice, showing in our relationships and our engagement with the world something of God’s own freedom, God’s own liberty to heal and restore.”¹²

Asking Christians to participate in bringing about God’s justice in our world brings to mind words such as *love*, *freedom*, and *mercy*, inviting people to reflect on what those words mean to them—and how they see them being acted out in the world around them. How can our words and actions lead us to make decisions that will make God’s justice a reality in our world, especially in areas where we see injustice abounding?

Williams points out that it is critical to not only speak to God, but to *listen* to God, as well, in order to learn what words we are being called to use to identify spiritual gifts, to build bridges, to shape justice.¹³ Perhaps, above all else, he concludes, “So the baptized life is a life that gives us the resource and strength to ask awkward but necessary questions of one another and of our world.”¹⁴

Asking Awkward Questions

As a priest, I have found myself asking spiritual questions of others, especially in Vestry meetings or small adult education groups, in an effort to introduce God into the leadership equation. Trying to help build a bridge for others to connect God to their lives and work in lay leadership in the Church, I would often feel frustrated when my questions were met with blank stares or averted eye contact. I wanted to help people know the

¹² (Williams 2014, 16, location 247)

¹³ (Williams 2014, 22, location 286)

¹⁴ (Williams 2014, 16, location 249)

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reality of God's presence with them; to help them know that they had gifts God was calling them to use on behalf of the community; to help them know that *they* could be instruments of God's reconciliation and justice in our world.

The more I read and learned in my Doctor of Ministry program, the more I began to believe that I wanted to help people transform their lives—to supportively challenge them to take whatever the next step would be in their spiritual development in order to live out those final three promises of the baptismal covenant.

“Transformation” became my new byword—*that's* what I wanted in my own life and in the lives of the people I served. If we could all walk together along this road of transformation, I thought, we could listen more deeply to God's call in our lives—individually and collectively—and discern where God is leading us. Transformational learning presented one clue on how to design a project that could, potentially, help bring about that discernment.

Transformational Learning

Jack Mezirow was a pioneer in developing the academic educational discipline of Transformative Learning for adults in the 1970's. He continued to research and refine his theory for the rest of his life. In 2009, he wrote:

Learning may be understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience to guide future action. Transformative learning may be defined as *learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change.*¹⁵

¹⁵ Jack Mezirow, "Transformative Learning Theory" in *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education*, ed. Jack Mezirow, Edward M. Taylor and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 22.

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Mezirow points out that transformational learning occurs when adults learn how to reason for themselves, reflecting critically on ideas in order to understand how they reached the conclusion they did. This incorporates understanding that *how* we assess something will affect the results we see, as well as understanding the emotional and psychological influences in our lives.

Says Mezirow, “Transformations may be epochal (involving dramatic or sudden changes) or incremental and may involve objective (task oriented) or subjective (self-reflective) reframing.”¹⁶ When we are presented with a problem and work to understand it from a new or different frame of reference, we may find that our understanding of the problem has changed and we can approach it or solve it in a new way. In doing so, we may help expand the repertoire of “usual” responses to such a problem.¹⁷

Mezirow draws on Jungian psychology to help further explain transformative learning. Just as Jung described that a person may relate to the world and make judgments either by analyzing a problem through several steps in order to reach a conclusion, or go with “gut reactions” without bringing logic into the equation, so does Mezirow say that adults may learn through intuition or critically thinking about their assumptions. Other researchers have added to Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning over the years, bringing in the work of the unconscious; the role of trauma in learning; spiritual development and transformation; the role of imagination in learning; and how such learning may differ in men and women.¹⁸

Critical reflection, defined as “. . . questioning the integrity of deeply held assumptions and beliefs based on prior experience,” is one important characteristic of

¹⁶ (Mezirow 2009, 23)

¹⁷ (Mezirow 2009, 23)

¹⁸ (Mezirow 2009, 25-28)

transformative learning.¹⁹ Journaling is one particular practice that aids in critical reflection. As a regular practice, journaling helps the learner to process his or her experiences by offering the learner time and space to reflect on emotions, physical reactions, spiritual concerns, and other thoughts or reactions that arose in a situation. Journaling also offers the learner a way to engage in dialogue with him- or herself, allowing the person to rehearse different perspectives on an experience.²⁰

Engaging in dialogue with others is another aspect of critical reflection. When people can share their thoughts in a safe environment, trusting their dialogue partners, transformation can begin as different perspectives are shared, different cultural norms are discussed, and a mutual willingness to enter into unknown territory is expressed. In this zone between comfort and discomfort and the known and unknown, transformation can begin.²¹

Art and Soul

John Dirkx has studied how to nurture the soul in learning. He explains that transformative learning involves both the *logos*—“the realm of objectivity and logic”—and the *mythos*—“learning through soul,” which encompasses “imaginative and poetic expressions of self and the world.”²²

Transformative learning seeks to ask learners to consider the entirety of their life experience in order to learn. Dirkx suggests that “learning through soul” opens us to an even wider range of experience than Mezirow suggested. Says Dirkx:

¹⁹ Edward W. Taylor, "Fostering Transformative Learning" in *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education*, ed. Jack Mezirow, Edward M. Taylor and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 7.

²⁰ (Taylor 2009, 9)

²¹ (Taylor 2009, 10)

²² John M. Dirkx, "Nurturing Soul in Adult Learning," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 74 (Summer 1997): 79-80.

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Soul is nourished within our lives through story, song, myth, poetry, and the concreteness of our everyday experiences. . . . To nurture soul is to recognize what is already inherent within our relationships and experiences, to acknowledge its presence within the teaching and learning environment, to respect its sacred message, to give it space and consideration, and to provide it a voice through which to be heard. When we nurture soul in adult learning, we assume that the unconscious represents the primary source of creativity, vitality, and wisdom within our lives—is the source of life itself.²³

“[T]he soul thrives on open spaces,” writes Dirkx; “[t]he soul responds to less structured environments and to activities that bring one’s inner life together with the outer world.”²⁴ John (Jack) Miller writes that “. . . spiritual learning . . . is transformative in that it allows us to see the world anew. We begin to see the interconnectedness of life at every level of the cosmos. This leads to a natural compassion. . . .”²⁵ Miller goes on to point out that whereas traditional methods of learning depend on mastering material, spiritual learning “requires humility” because “we also realize that there is much that we cannot control . . .”²⁶

Other authors note there are *many* ways of knowing, including spiritual, artistic, and creative ways. Art “. . . links artistic exercises to spirituality by giving form to the images that arise in the mind’s eye, our dreams, and our everyday lives.”²⁷ These authors noted that although people attest to how art has changed their lives anecdotally, little

²³ (Dirkx 1997, 83-84)

²⁴ (Dirkx 1997, 85)

²⁵ John Miller, "Learning from a Spiritual Perspective," in *Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative Learning*, ed. Edmund V. O'Sullivan, Amish Morrell and Mary Ann O'Connor (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 100.

²⁶ (Miller 2002, 101)

²⁷ Chad Hoggan, Soni Simpson and Heather Stuckey, "Transformative Learning, Multiple Ways of Knowing, and Creativity Theory in Progress," in *Creative Expression in Transformative Learning: Tools and Techniques for Educators of Adults*, ed. Chad Hoggan, Soni Simpson and Heather Stuckey (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 2009), 22.

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documentation has been made of such change. They urge educators to undertake such documentation in order to aid reflection and education in our society.²⁸

The possibility of achieving transformation through using music was explored by another author in the field. Colleen Wiessner wrote of an experience she had facilitating change within her church synod, using music as the vehicle. “Participants experienced the cultural change message through music, in addition to words and visual images. Instead of receiving a lecture passively, they participated collectively in exploring this major culture change. We made music while we made change together.”²⁹ Wiessner urges educators to incorporate music into their teaching to help facilitate learning. It does not matter what *kind* of music you bring in, said Wiessner; anything from a small chime to call attention to beginning a session to inviting a guest musician in to sing a song related to the topic being studied can make a difference. “Try something,” she wrote.³⁰

As a priest, it is important to remember that even as one is leading others toward transformation, one is also participating in that transformation. You are sharing the learning of those you are leading, albeit from a different perspective. And so the leader also benefits from critical reflection.

Perhaps the most maddening thing about being a priest and leading others in transformative learning is that one never knows what effect such leading and learning will have on others. As Miller stated:

In a sense we can view ourselves as vessels attempting to assist others in awakening; yet we can never ultimately know the energies that are both within and surrounding us and what effects these energies will have on

²⁸ (Hoggan, Simpson and Stuckey 2009, 27)

²⁹ Colleen Wiessner, “Noting the Potential for Transformation: Creative Expression Through Music,” in *Creative Expression in Transformative Learning: Tools and Techniques for Educators of Adults*, ed. Chad Hoggan, Soni Simpson and Heather Stuckey (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 2009), 111.

³⁰ (Wiessner 2009, 126)

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others. Teaching and learning from [a] spiritual perspective requires us to trust ourselves and the larger forces in the universe that we are connected to in deep and mysterious ways. Learning to trust ourselves, and these larger forces, allows us to teach in a way that does not succumb to the pressures of modern society.³¹

As priests and leaders in the Church, we are called to build the bridges of connection between God and the people we are called to serve. Educator and spiritual director Elizabeth Liebert notes that research in the field of spiritual development has increasingly emphasized the importance of the web of relationships in which each individual plays a part. When we speak about spiritual development, we are no longer speaking of an individual's relationship solely with God; changes in our culture (indeed, in cultures throughout the world) require that we take into account the person's faith community and wider community, as well.³²

Liebert goes on to note three important ideas when considering an individual's spiritual growth, and although she is speaking of spiritual directors, these insights apply to clergy and church leaders, as well: "God is in charge. . . our 'connected knowing' is our deepest offering to those we accompany in spiritual direction. . . [and] honoring God's action wherever we are able to recognize it, in creation, in ourselves, in our directees, and in our communities remains the essence of the spiritual director's task."³³

Courage, compassion, and connection have become a mantra for me when considering my work in the Church, thanks to reading, absorbing, and working with Dr. Brené Brown's material on shame resilience.³⁴ I see examples of these behaviors not

³¹ (Miller 2002, 101)

³² Elizabeth Liebert, *Changing Life Patterns: Adult Development in Spiritual Direction* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 171.

³³ (Liebert 2000, 186)

³⁴ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly* (New York: Gotham Books, 2012), 58-111.

only in Jesus' life, but also in the stories of saints that have been passed down to us.

These stories of saints' lives provide examples of learning to trust not only God, but also our companions on the journey—not to mention learning to trust oneself.

A New Frame of Reference

One way to venture into the waters of trusting oneself as a spiritual leader is to reflect on what has meaning for oneself and offering it to others as a starting point in making their own connections . “We make meaning of our experience through acquired frames of reference,” wrote Mezirow.³⁵ We learn to expand our horizons through seeing from another's viewpoint.

Offering adult learners a new frame of reference—a pilgrimage in place using Celtic saints—became the basis of my act of ministry that incorporated story, art, music, and poetry in an effort to help participants engage more deeply with their own spiritual journey in relation to the final three promises of the baptismal covenant.

As a Celtic folk musician, I have found that many people respond to Celtic music and stories of the Celts, even if they lack prior knowledge of things Celtic. “Celtic” symbolizes certain qualities that people either can relate to or reject—but it draws a reaction.

I have always found those last three promises we make in the Baptismal Covenant to be the heart of what it means to be a follower of Christ, and yet I know that I, myself, fall short in carrying them out. Having my experience confirmed by others made me wonder how I could help others form a connection with those final promises of the Covenant in their own lives. Building on prior relationships in our local Episcopal

³⁵ (Mezirow 2009, 29)

Chapter One: Re-Engaging with Baptism

community, I designed a Lenten program as my act of ministry that focused on four Celtic saints.

My thesis is that an adult education program that engages participants' imaginations through encounters with four Celtic saints via story, song, and visual art, and which provides opportunities for individual and communal reflection, would allow each participant to engage with the Baptismal Covenant and lead him/her to identify a concrete act of ministry to be undertaken in order to live out one of the final three vows of the Baptismal Covenant (proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ; seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself; and striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being).³⁶ As a result of the program, the participants would demonstrate an increased awareness of their baptismal identity and identify how to live this out in a way that is potentially transformative both for themselves and for their communities.

By highlighting how these saints lived out those covenantal promises through the use of their gifts and through their actions, participants would engage the Covenant and their own spiritual journey in a different way. Rather than being printed promises we recite from a page, this work would ask participants to examine their hearts and minds in order to make connections and learn how the actions they take can help them transform themselves and the world in Christ.

Hearing stories, participating in prayers about or written by the saints, and looking at artwork about the saints would give participants information about additional ways to relate to God and others. Singing songs about the saints would not only offer additional insights about the saints and their spiritual gifts, it would also offer a community-building

³⁶ (BCP 1979, 305)

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experience by making music together, which engages a different part of the participants' brains. Small-group discussions would allow participants to hear others' insights and provide the opportunity to wrestle with different viewpoints. Reflection through journaling (writing or photography or drawing, for example) would encourage participants to internalize the spiritual gifts/actions talked about and consider where they either possess similar gifts or could begin to take action in similar ways to make connections with the wider community in order to live out the Baptismal Covenant.

My hypothesis was that after participating in the program, participants would express a new understanding of how the Baptismal Covenant relates to their own lived spirituality. I also predicted that participants would be able to name how they could engage one spiritual gift/action in order to more effectively connect with the wider community and carry out one of the promises made in the Baptismal Covenant. My overarching hope was that engaging in the program would lay the groundwork for spiritual transformation in the participants.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PROJECT

The overall structure of the act of ministry was based on a pre-existing format that had been used successfully by the participating parishes in the past, which had begun the joint Lenten program as a way to introduce collaboration among the parishes. The project was conducted as a mid-week Lenten adult education series over five weeks. Announcements about the program were made verbally and printed in weekly service bulletins of three Episcopal parishes in Prince George's County, Maryland, which had hosted joint Lenten programs in the past: St. Thomas' Parish, Croom (the parish then served by the author), Trinity Church, Upper Marlboro, and St. Paul's Parish, Baden. (The other two parishes that had previously participated in Lenten programs were invited, but declined to participate.)

The group met once a week on a Wednesday evening for a dinner of soup and bread, followed by the program. The location varied each week in order to share the burden of providing weekly meals; St. Thomas' hosted three times (weeks 1, 3, and 5) and Trinity (week 2) and St. Paul's (week 4) each hosted once.

One did not have to agree to participate in the study in order to attend the Lenten program. Consent forms were provided to the rectors of the three parishes for distribution to parishioners willing to participate in the study. Twenty-one consent forms (Appendix A, pages 91-92) were returned (7 from St. Thomas'; 14 from Trinity; 0 from St. Paul's), of which only three were from men.

For those who agreed to participate in the study, three different questionnaires were sent throughout the study period, either via e-mail or the U.S. Postal Service, as

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requested by the participant. A pre-program questionnaire was sent one week before the program began; a second questionnaire was sent one week after the program ended; and a third questionnaire was sent four weeks after the program ended. All three versions of the questionnaire asked either the same or very similar questions, to allow for across-time comparison. Further information about the questionnaires is provided below and in Appendix A.

In addition to answering the questionnaires, some participants agreed to keep a weekly journal and share a copy of it with the author. Other participants agreed to be interviewed by the author after the program ended. In an effort to capture some sort of response each week from a majority of participants in the program, attendees were asked to write down and share with the author one word that they would reflect on from that night's work.

Attendance varied at the weekly sessions, and there was a mix of male and female attendees and white and African-American attendees. Of the consent forms received, two people (the only male participant who had signed up from St. Thomas' and one female participant from Trinity) did not attend any of the weekly sessions. Some people attended every week; others did not. Not including the author, 27 attended the first week; 20 attended the second week; 23 attended the third week; 29 attended the fourth week; and 20 attended the fifth week.

One person had asked for a consent form and was given the consent form and pre-program questionnaire but did not complete and return them. This individual attended all of the sessions and then, several weeks after the program had ended, turned in the pre-

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program questionnaire and journaling exercises from several weeks, then submitted the consent form a week after that. These responses were not included in the study.

Outline of the Program

The actual content of each week, including the music and handout, may be found in Appendix B. Each week followed the same format of gathering and eating; opening prayer; listening to stories about the featured saint and his or her highlighted spiritual gift; small group reflection times; large group reflection times; singing two songs about the saint (one an original song by the author, the other a traditional song); a short time of silent reflection; a review of the evening that included participants identifying a “word of the week;” and closing prayer, blessing, and dismissal.

Week One focused on St. Brendan the Navigator and his spiritual gift of Exploring for Christ. Week Two focused on St. Brigid of Kildare and her gift for Embodying Hospitality. Week Three featured St. Columba of Iona and his gift of Building Community. Week Four highlighted St. Patrick of Ireland and his gift of Seeking Justice. The final week’s theme was Journeying Home, and two stories were featured. One spoke about a legend concerning the re-interment of the bones of Patrick, Columba, and Brigid in Ireland; the other story introduced St. Ita, who had been one of St. Brendan’s teachers. The final small-group discussion questions that people were asked to discuss during week five were: How can we bring what we have learned back to our parishes? Are there things in our parishes that need to be exhumed, blessed, and re-interred in order for our parishes to move forward? Especially in collaborative efforts?

The overall format seemed to work well, since it was one used previously by the clergy and many of the participants. In contrast to prior years of Lenten programs,

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however, participants were permitted to self-select their small groups, simply using each table where people sat for dinner as a small group. This may have affected small-group participation, depending on how comfortable people felt in expressing themselves in front of others, especially strangers. Another difference was the regular use of music, which had not done before. The singing was enthusiastic, perhaps helped by the presence of several choir members among the attendees. An additional difference was that participants were asked weekly to offer some feedback, which had not been done before.

Data Review

This study sought qualitative data in order to look for themes identified by the author and self-identified changes made by the participants. Data from the word of the week were grouped according to theme on larger adhesive notes by the author. For the responses offered on the questionnaires, the author transferred participants' responses first to an Excel spreadsheet, then to color-coded adhesive notes, grouped by theme on larger adhesive notes to provide a visual diagram in addition to a spreadsheet. Journals were read in order to identify themes, which were listed in an Excel spreadsheet. Themes were also identified in the responses to interview questions, which were listed in an Excel spreadsheet.

Word of the Week Responses

Each week, participants were given time toward the end of the evening to use the colorful adhesive notes and markers provided to write *one word* that they would take away with them from that evening's presentation. They were then asked to post the notes on a large adhesive note placed next to the door by which they would leave the session. Some found it difficult to restrict themselves to one word, but the majority of each evening's

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participants completed the exercise: all 27 participants responded the first week; 18 out of 20 participated the second week; all 23 participants responded the third week; 25 out of 29 participated the fourth week; and 19 out of 20 responded on the final week.

Completing this exercise during the first evening of the program proved the most challenging. Reluctance to participate was expressed, either directly or through “joking” with the author, who circulated around the room and answered questions or provided clarification when asked. Having not been asked to offer feedback like this in programs offered in prior years, the idea of committing to paper something that had caught one’s attention or would provide a source of reflection flummoxed some people. As indicated by the response rate, however, even the reluctant participants were able to identify one thing they had learned or found themselves thinking about at the end of the evening. This exercise appeared to become easier each week for the participants, especially if they felt a kinship with the saint or spiritual gift discussed.

Two primary themes emerged from the “Word of the Week” exercise. First, participants reflected on *personal qualities* each saint possessed that enabled him or her to live out his or her faith in daily life. These qualities had either been mentioned explicitly in the stories and songs used, or were qualities inferred by the participants. Second, participants reflected on the *spiritual gift* highlighted weekly for each saint, noting the ways in which the saint expressed that gift.

Secondary themes emerged from the program structure and from week five’s emphasis on taking ideas back to the participants’ parishes. One theme focused on the *format of the program*, with participants indicating they either had a continuing engagement with the ideas presented in the program or expressing appreciation for the

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content—including the soup! One theme that arose on week five identified the *qualities needed to make a journey as did the saints*, relating it to the future of the Church.

Another theme noted on week five was *community*, as participants thought about what the saints had done in their lives and journeys. The final secondary theme noted on week five was *qualities a parish needs to thrive*, as participants sought to apply what they had learned and experienced to life back in their parishes.

Overall, the participants' responses to the "Word of the Week" indicate that they engaged with the material each week and were attempting to integrate it into their knowledge base and their viewpoint on what it means to be a follower of Christ. The responses from Week 5 indicate that at least one-fifth of the participants were more deeply engaged with the material, as it seems to have awakened some spiritual question(s) within them, while other participants were willing to reflect on how the material related to their parish community and its future.

Questionnaire Responses

The pre-program questionnaire was slightly different from the two questionnaires sent after completion of the program; these differences are noted in the description of responses below, and the questionnaires themselves may be found in Appendix A; responses to the questionnaires are summarized in Appendix C. Despite those differences, the questionnaires were designed to help participants explore their own spiritual journeys and gifts in light of those of the saints.

Thirteen people completed and returned the pre-program questionnaire; nine completed and returned the questionnaire sent one week after the program ended (all

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white women); and the same nine women completed and returned the questionnaire sent four weeks after the program ended.

Favorite Saint

Prior to the first week of the program, 13 people responded to this question, six of whom said they did not have a favorite saint; two of those respondents stated they had been raised as Methodists and saints were not discussed. Four respondents listed St. Francis of Assisi as their favorite saint, citing either a connection with nature or animals or admiration for how he gave up his wealth and organized followers. One person each listed St. Teresa of Avila, St. Joan of Arc, and St. Brigid because they admired qualities of the saint and thought they had something in common with her.

One week after the program ended, nine people responded to the question of which saint *from the program* they resonated with the most. Three listed St. Brigid; two listed St. Columba; two did not list a favorite; one each listed St. Patrick and St. Ita (mentioned in Week 5 in conjunction with St. Brendan); and none mentioned St. Brendan. Four weeks after the program, however, the same nine people responded, and this time four listed St. Brendan; three listed St. Brigid; two listed St. Columba; and none mentioned St. Patrick. The reasons the four respondents gave for naming St. Brendan concerned his willingness to give up everything he knew and set off on a dangerous journey into the unknown. One person linked that with her own current “journey,” preparing to sell her house and move to another state.

Observing that thoughts about Brendan had shifted in respondents’ consciousness from one week immediately after the program to one month after the program was a surprising finding; he had gone from a vote of “no confidence,” as it were, to becoming

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the saint almost half of the respondents thought about the most one month after completing the program. One possible conclusion is that in the intervening weeks between hearing the presentation about Brendan and responding to the final questionnaire, the participants made an internal association between their lives and the story of Brendan's. They found themselves resonating with qualities of his personality or his story as time passed that had not been apparent to them immediately after the program ended. This conclusion could be borne out in the areas where participants perceived changes in themselves, which they associated with their participation in the program.

Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual Journey

Over the course of the program and follow-up, four women indicated that something had changed in their thinking about spiritual gifts because of their participation in the program. In the first post-program questionnaire, one person stated that she was able to now understand that she *has* spiritual gifts, and her perception of what she does well had changed. The second person stated that her notion of spiritual gifts had changed, and that she understands that whatever service one offers has value. Four weeks after the program ended, one participant stated that she had not really thought about spiritual gifts before, but that her ideas about such gifts have grown and changed. A fourth person made a connection between her long-neglected love of creating calligraphy and the copying of the psalter done by Columba; she also made a connection between her love of singing sacred works in choral groups and the monks of Iona chanting in Latin, noting that these were activities from which she derived joy but had not considered them to be “spiritual gifts.”

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When considering the idea of a “spiritual journey” before the program began, the majority of respondents stated it was something that was life-long and offered opportunities for growth. One week after completing the program, however, the majority of respondents expressed an understanding that the definition could be much broader than that. One respondent stated that she now understood that a spiritual journey could involve loss of family and freedom; it may involve hurt and suffering; and it may mean doing good for others, who may not believe. Another said that she now understood a spiritual journey means to always seek to do more, and learning is ongoing, while another stated it is seeking direction from God to lead us into the unknown. One respondent said the spiritual journey is living with the awareness of seeking Christ in daily life; striving to grow and improve self and relationships; and to become more Christ-like. One respondent expressed surprise at realizing that a spiritual journey could mean an actual, physical journey, and it involved a great deal of faith to do so. Finally, one respondent said it involves learning more about God and how to be open to hearing God’s plan in and for her life.

Four weeks after the program ended, three of the nine respondents said their idea of a spiritual journey had not changed, but six indicated they perceived changes in their understanding of spiritual journeys. One person stated that the saints featured in the program teach us by example—they had to overcome problems, just as we do, and they lived as Jesus taught, loving their neighbors. Another respondent believed that she needed to do more and consider the contributions made by others that may be overlooked. One stated she felt challenged to be more proactive about her faith. One-third of the women stated specifically how participating in the program had influenced her thinking: One said

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that by participating in the study, “I was forced to focus on these ideas; I will be more aware of taking a spiritual journey.” Another stated that she found she now has time for morning and evening prayer or reflection, which she had not always been faithful in doing. Another felt that she could better follow a rule for living, as St. Columba advocated in his community.

Baptismal Covenant & Personal Ministry

The pre-program questionnaire asked participants to name *past* ministries or actions they had carried out that related to each of the final three promises of the Baptismal Covenant, while the two post-program questionnaires asked participants if they had agreed to undertake a *new* act of ministry related to those same three promises. The three promises are:

- Proclaim by word and example the Good News of Christ
- Seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself
- Strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being

The majority of respondents to the pre-program questionnaire stated they already lived out these promises, citing the ways in which they did so. In the post-program questionnaires, a shift in responses occurred. In the questionnaire administered one week after the program, one-third indicated they had taken steps to begin new ministries that would help proclaim the Good News of Christ; one person indicated that she was becoming involved in more “hands-on” (outreach) ministry in her church as a way to fulfill the second and third promises, above; and another person related how she had recently volunteered at an organization that works for justice for children. In the

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questionnaire administered four weeks after the program ended, the same one-third indicated they were continuing to seek these new opportunities in ministry.

These responses indicate that the program did, indeed, help about one-third of these participants to relate the baptismal promises to events in their everyday lives as well as to ministry opportunities offered within their church communities. Another one-third of these respondents considered their already existing and ongoing participation in ministries at church sufficient; they did not feel called to take on a new action or drop any current commitments in order to attempt something new.

Baptismal Covenant & Faith Community

The pre-program questionnaire asked participants to name *past* ministries or actions their *faith communities* had carried out that related to each of the final three promises of the Baptismal Covenant (listed above), while the two post-program questionnaires asked participants if they had committed to undertake a *new* act of ministry relating to one of the final three promises of the Baptismal Covenant *with other members* of their faith community.

The majority of respondents to the pre-program questionnaire cited specific ministries in which their faith communities participated that related to the final three promises of the Baptismal Covenant. In the questionnaire sent one week after completing the program, one-third of the respondents indicated that they had, indeed, undertaken a new act of ministry in their parish that related to the first two promises. The third promise—“Strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being”—presented more difficulty, with none citing any actions related to keeping that promise in relation to her faith community.

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This same question, asked four weeks after the program ended, revealed an even larger gap between the promises and actions taken to live out the promises in community. The majority of the respondents left the questions blank, stated “not yet,” or cited ongoing ministries. One-third of the respondents indicated they would take an initial action to begin a new ministry—one for each of the three promises.

Three conclusions may be drawn from these findings. First, it appears that the participants felt that their church communities already offered many ways that one may choose to live out one’s baptismal promises. By citing so many outreach ministries, the participants clearly felt there were numerous points of connection available for any member of their respective churches who wished to engage more deeply with their baptismal promises.

Second, given the responses where new actions *were* suggested by participants, it appears that they believe their faith communities are open to new ideas about ministry and new ways to offer members opportunities to engage with their baptismal promises.

Third, one must acknowledge that engaging with one’s baptismal promises is difficult. Some participants noted that they had never really thought about this before—the very observation from a parishioner (who did not participate in the study) that led to the entire line of thinking about this study in the first place! Participating in the study triggered new perceptions and alternative ways of looking at the Christian life for some respondents. The long-term value they derive from their participation remains to be seen and would benefit from further study.

Story, Art, and Music

Participants were asked in the pre-program questionnaire what best helped them relate to God: story, art, music, or something else. The post-program questionnaires took a different experiential tack, asking the participants what aspect of the program on Celtic saints resonated with them the most: a story, music, or visual art. The majority of respondents to all three questionnaires cited combinations of story, art, and music; *or* something else in combination with one or more of those choices. One could conclude that—as is often the case with art of any type—people may say, “I don’t know much about art, but I know what I like!” when it comes to exploring their spirituality through different art forms, as well. Personal preferences and learning styles factor into this, which were not accounted for in this study.

Additional Thoughts from Participants

The questionnaire administered one week after the program asked the question: Is there anything you would like to add about how the program affected you and your faith journey? The questionnaire administered four weeks after the program ended added “thus far” to that same question. While the responses to the first questionnaire were rather non-committal, the responses to the second one indicated that several respondents had been doing a great deal of reflection.

One person stated that we can learn from the saints’ struggles and hope for a better future for humanity. Another wrote that she learned “there are many paths toward faith.” Another respondent found the program “enlightening and encouraging.” Two respondents made additional connections: One wrote that it was “helpful to do Lenten study with others and appreciate their points of view; [it] has helped me to focus on

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Baptismal Covenant as never before.” Another said, “My hope is that we can grow our congregations by taking some of the lessons learned from these Celtic saints; it would be nice to have some fun activities involving all our neighboring churches.”

These final two responses indicate an interest in furthering ministry efforts with others. They could also indicate that those respondents are well on their path to universalizing faith.³⁷ The responses also made the author, when she read them, smile, do a fist pump, and exclaim, “Yes!”

Journaling

Prior to the beginning of the program, 19 people had said they would complete the journaling exercise. Actual participation, however, was far less: Six people participated in this exercise, but not every week: four wrote on week 1; five wrote on weeks 2 and 3; four wrote on week 4; and none wrote for week 5. All of the participants in this exercise were white females; all had answered the questionnaires; and all also participated in the interviews.

Each week, the take-home handout given to participants listed the spiritual gift of the saint for that week and asked that those completing the journaling exercise reflect on that gift to guide their journaling, looking for signs of that gift in their lives as they moved through their week.

At the start of the program, a handout offering suggestions on how to journal was given to all of the attendees. The suggestions included a reminder that journaling could take many different forms, including drawings or photographs. The program asked that those participating in journaling make a copy to give to the author each week. As noted

³⁷ James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 54-57.

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above, four to five journals were given to the author each week, covering weeks one through four of the study presentations. The author read the journals and highlighted themes for each week. Throughout the weeks of journaling, each woman reflected on many personal issues that were arising for her as she participated in the exercise, seeking to connect her life with the lives of the saints being studied. Themes are noted below; the data are summarized in Appendix C.

- a. **St. Brendan/Exploring for Christ:** The theme of journey/pilgrimage/travel was mentioned by four of the five responders. Two each mentioned spiritual gifts, friends, music, nature, family, spiritual life, and change. While four wrote daily or almost-daily entries, one person wrote just once for the week, drawing and doing free-form writing, while the others wrote cohesive paragraphs.
- b. **St. Brigid/Embodying Hospitality:** Brigid captured the imagination of three of the journal-keepers, citing her hospitality, her faith and trust in God, and how she looked for Jesus in others. Three women also mentioned church, and two journaled about friends.
- c. **St. Columba/Building Community:** Four women wrote about church, discussing church community through fellowship, ministries, and building community. Three wrote about friends; two women wrote about spiritual gifts, hospitality, and Columba. One mentioned that she was fond of Columba because he seemed human, not a character in a fairy tale, while the other commented on his connection with his fellow monks and the conflict he had had with his family.
- d. **St. Patrick/Seeking Justice:** All four women who journaled this week had several thoughts about justice. Two were particularly concerned with justice

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relating to women and persons of color—one remarked that not much has changed for these groups over the years. One woman went to lobby in Annapolis (the state capital of Maryland) with an organization to which she belongs, and she reflected on the lawmaking process. The fourth woman looked up definitions of justice and came up with a list of actions she will take because of this: “Vote. Show up-volunteer-act. Speak up. Is my money supporting my beliefs? Where I buy things, where I invest?”—and she noted she had to work on that final step! This topic appeared to carry special impact for these women, as they thought about their lives and what they observed happening in the world around them.

- e. **Journeying Home:** This was the final week’s presentation, and no one submitted any journals for that topic.

The participants who journaled gave time and thought to the exercise, which is reflected in their responses. They were able to integrate thoughts about the featured saint with people, relationships, and events occurring in their own lives. It was gratifying to see them making these connections and taking the time to reflect on their relationships with God.

Interview Responses

One-on-one interviews were conducted with the author, beginning one month after the Lenten program had ended. In giving their consent to participate in the study before the program began, 16 participants—a mix of male and female, African-American and white respondents—had said they would agree to be interviewed after the program; however, only 7 scheduled and kept interviews with the author. As with the journaling exercise, all

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of these participants were white females, and all had responded to the questionnaires. These data are provided in Appendix C.

Perhaps the most notable finding from the interviews is that all seven respondents indicated that they pray at regular times during the day, with two stating they talked to God “all the time.” Involvement in music, reading devotional material, hiking, practicing centering prayer, and using an Advent wreath were cited as spiritual practices, as well.

Six of the seven women interviewed had also participated in the journaling exercise, and they universally declared it difficult. Three respondents indicated it remained a difficult task and they were not continuing; but three found that they either enjoyed it or learned something about themselves, and so they planned to continue journaling as an ongoing spiritual practice.

All seven respondents indicated, to varying degrees, that participating in the program had sparked some difference in their thinking about their spiritual life. For some, it was recognizing a spiritual gift of which they had not been aware. Others experienced a sense of kinship with one or more of the saints highlighted in the program, drawing parallels between her life and that of the saint or saints. They were able to look at their own spiritual journeys in a different way, often mentioning how the various saints persevered in the face of difficulties in order to follow God’s call and make a difference in the world.

The respondents were enthusiastic about their faith communities, citing the outreach opportunities, friendly atmospheres, and educational programs offered—especially the programs offered collaboratively among the local churches, so new ideas could be exchanged and different viewpoints expressed.

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Wrestling with the final three promises of the Baptismal Covenant led some of the participants to new insights. As one stated, “The questionnaires *made* us think about these things—and it’s good to do that.” The majority of the respondents cited the third promise—“Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?”—as the most difficult to carry out. Several mentioned “voting” as one way to live out this promise in a major election year.

The respondents who were 70 years old or older all indicated ministries in which they had been involved in the past or in which they currently served that addressed all three of the baptismal promises. Although they were not necessarily actively seeking more involvement at this time, they acknowledged that participating in the program had made them review their ministry participation and they would be willing to participate in other ways, should the opportunity arise. Said one, “It’s [a lack of] energy, now, more than time” that she finds an obstacle to doing ministry.

In contrast, the two respondents who were less than 70 years old indicated an interest in becoming involved in new opportunities that would help them live out their baptismal promises and/or grow spiritually—“second chapter” work, one called it, likening her life up to this point as the first chapter of her life. As her adult children leave home and she begins to look toward retirement, she is curious about what that second chapter of her life will bring.

Overall, the responses given in the interviews indicated that the program did, indeed, help the respondents to examine their spiritual growth from several different viewpoints. Learning about the saints and their spiritual gifts allowed them to draw parallels with their own lives, which helped them examine their spirituality and what they

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offer to others as they follow Jesus. Several of the responses indicate that groundwork has been laid for spiritual transformation in the lives of those participants.

The responses also helped the author to understand that using a variety of educational techniques helps people to better absorb facts, integrate them into their daily lives, and then apply such learning to their spiritual journeys. For some motivated individuals, simply providing defined opportunities for them to reflect on their lives and then discuss their reflections, one on one, with a clergyperson or spiritual friend offers them enough support to make transformative decisions in their spiritual lives. As faith leaders, if our goals are to help people to grow spiritually, follow Jesus, and lead lives of transformation, it would behoove us to consider engaging different senses, learning styles, and methods of reflection and evaluation in the educational programs we offer.

CHAPTER THREE

REFLECTION ON THE CHRISTIAN JOURNEY

Our baptism brings us into the “middle of the muddle,” as Rowan Williams said, right into the midst of everyday life even as it initiates us into Christian community.³⁸ Marked as Christ’s own, forever, our baptism provides an invitation to explore what it means to follow Jesus. We are free to choose if, when, and where we accept the invitation.

Some people *never* accept the invitation. But those who *do* find themselves taking a journey of transformation that challenges their understanding of themselves and their faith. Transformation is rarely easy, and those determined to pursue this path will encounter challenges that may lead to spiritual, emotional, or psychological pain—or some combination of all three.

Transformation in Love

Taking that transformative path of following Jesus brings us face-to-face with the Great Commandment to love God and love our neighbor as our self.³⁹ Says theologian Oliver Davies, “In the face of a divine imperative of love then, the only possible free response for us is equally one of enacted love. . . Loving acts are infectious: they challenge our experience and our imagination. They unbalance the shallow conventions of society with their radical spontaneity.”⁴⁰

Davies is developing a reorientation of theology that he calls Transformation Theology, which

seeks to make explicit here what is already implicit in faith: namely that Christ is real, that he genuinely shares our space and time, and that he is

³⁸ Rowan Williams, *Being Christian: Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, Prayer*. Kindle electronic edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), Location 162.

³⁹ (Matthew 22:37-40, NRSV)

⁴⁰ Oliver Davies, *Theology of Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 20.

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known in power as the one who effects change, through the Holy Spirit. Moreover, this is a kind of change in which I too am taken up. In my being changed, others too are changed; just as I am changed by the transformations in them brought about in Jesus Christ in the power of the Father and Spirit. Nothing is more personal than this kind of reorientation of life. But it is precisely where my life becomes most personal in this sense of undergoing real change, that I find myself positioned, in unity with others, before God the Triune Creator in Jesus Christ. At the point where I am most me, I find that I am most him, or he is most in me, as I am in him. Where I am most in my space and time, I find, in the encounter of faith, that I am most in Easter space and time, and so most in Church. This is an inclusive, life-giving Trinitarian space.⁴¹

This echoes Jesus' teaching in the Farewell Discourse in the Gospel of John 14:19-21, 23, NRSV, when he tells his disciples,

In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them. . . . Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

Through this mutual indwelling of the Father, Son, and Spirit, and the mutual indwelling of Jesus Christ and those who love him, Christ's followers are brought into unity with God. Standing fully as ourselves before God, we are present with our Trinitarian God and held in love. Davies says that in that moment of being known and loved so fully by God, we are present in a world transformed by God, and *that* is the source of the changes we experience in our lives. In turn, we contribute to change in those around us as we reach out to respond, in love, to God.⁴²

Exploring this from a different angle, Jürgen Moltmann suggests that our world—including the concept of death—"does not exist outside God, but that from the very

⁴¹ (Davies 2013, 18)

⁴² (Davies 2013, 18)

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beginning it lies within the mystery of the Trinity: the Father creates the world out of love for the Son—the Son redeems the world from sin and death through his emptying of himself out of love for the Father.”⁴³ Looking toward the eschaton, Moltmann suggests that “God does not desire to be without those he [*sic*] has created and loves, and therefore waits for them to repent and turn back, leaving them time, so that he [*sic*] may come to his [*sic*] kingdom together with them.”⁴⁴

God’s Love is characterized not only by its might, but by its patience. God holds and preserves creation, providing freedom and room for all creatures to respond to God’s loving invitation to grow and transform into the beings God calls them to become.⁴⁵ Says Moltmann, this

‘waiting’ is never disinterested passivity, but the highest form of interest in the other. Waiting means expecting, expecting means inviting, inviting means attracting, alluring, enticing. By doing this, the waiting and awaiting one keeps an open space for the other, gives the other time, and creates possibilities of life for the other. . . . God who in patience bears and endures the history of nature and human beings, allows time and gives time, and in so doing makes possible ever-new possibilities, which are either realized or not realized, and can be used for further development but also for annihilation. . . . The goal of God’s kenosis in the creation and preservation of the world is that *future* which we describe with the symbols of the kingdom of God and the new creation, or ‘world without end.’⁴⁶

God invites us to become co-creators of what Jesus called the kingdom of God, and God is willing to sustain us and wait for us as we struggle to learn and grow enough to visualize the possibility of becoming part of God’s new creation. At least until that

⁴³ Jürgen Moltmann, “God’s Kenosis in the Creation and Consummation of the World,” in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 141.

⁴⁴ (Moltmann 2001, 148)

⁴⁵ (Moltmann 2001, 149)

⁴⁶ (Moltmann 2001, 149-151)

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time when the kingdom is fully realized, we will continue to grow and become as we respond to God’s call. Our time on this planet seems short in comparison with the trajectory of the unfolding universe; yet our faith tells us that we have no time limits on *becoming*, as we dwell with and in and through our eternal God. Our faith suggests that God waits patiently for us to respond to the invitation offered to us to fully become the beings God calls us to be, and so our transformation will continue after death, as we await the day of Resurrection.

The paradigm Davies uses is Christ’s “. . . *continuing* glorification by the Father and Spirit, in space and time as Lord of space and time.”⁴⁷ Citing our evolving understanding of the universe and insights from quantum physics, Davies posits that when we carry out a loving act, “we are most fully integrated as creatures who are both body and mind,” present in time and space, acting through the Holy Spirit for the benefit of another. He continues, “The risen and exalted Christ is the transformational centre of the universe and is transformatively active for us in the ‘crowded spaces’ of the power and powerlessness in our world, as well as in the body of Christ, his Church.”⁴⁸ Having ascended, Christ “is now hidden. . . by the material order itself,” says Davies, and Christ’s visible return “will be the coming together of heaven and earth in a New Creation.”⁴⁹

Divine “hiddenness” does not mean Divine “absence,” as Davies points out. We intuit this from our own encounters with the Divine through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, calling us to transformation through Christ in the sacraments—and in the

⁴⁷ (Davies 2013, 58)

⁴⁸ (Davies 2013, 59)

⁴⁹ (Davies 2013, 60)

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loving actions we take for others and which others take for us. In all these things, we declare that God is present to us through the risen Christ.⁵⁰

This, says Davies, “is the astonishing transformation that is at the heart of Christian Easter belief: that [Christ] lives and that world is changed in him, and that the Spirit communicates this reality to us and conforms us to it.”⁵¹ Awakening to the idea that we live in this way, integrating all aspects of ourselves as we live and move and have our being in the world, requires a shift in our thinking.

Love and Evolution

One of the challenges Christians face today is how to develop a new understanding of how Christ is present with us in our world. Early and medieval theologians found it unremarkable to think about Jesus, bodily ascended and sitting at God’s right hand, high above the firmament, ruling over heaven and earth. As science advanced and began to see beyond the clouds to the depths of space, this image has shifted for many everyday Christians into a metaphorical interpretation of Jesus’ current location. While our cosmology changed, the way we spoke about Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension did not. In order to harmonize scientific advances with Christian doctrine, Davies indicates that many have substituted the presence of the Spirit for the presence of Christ in our time. By not developing another way to view the ascension of Jesus, “theology has failed to serve the Christian community in its affirmation of Christ’s continuing reality which is at the heart of the Church’s traditional faith.”⁵²

⁵⁰ (Davies 2013, 60-61)

⁵¹ (Davies 2013, 238)

⁵² Oliver Davies, “The Interrupted Body” in *Transformation Theology: Church in the World*, Oliver Davies, Paul D. Janz, and Clemens Sedmak. (London: T&T Clark International, 2007), 39.

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Davies reminds us that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. Thus, the accounts about Jesus in the Gospels and Acts—and our lived experience as Christians—indicate

the progression that we see is the movement from the embodiment of Jesus in which the humanity predominates (birth) to an embodiment in which the divinity predominates (Ascension and heavenly session). The former is an historical and therefore passing event in time, while the second is an irreversible and continuing state, with eschatological meaning.⁵³

By becoming Incarnate, our Creator forever changed the nature of our world, and changed us, as part of that world. The difficulty lies in what “resurrection” and “ascension” mean to us, today, and what applicability those terms may have in our own very human lives. Davies suggests that Jesus’

post-resurrection body was a transitional state, to be superseded by his irreversible Ascension into the presence of the Father in heaven and the granting of the Spirit of Pentecost. . . . the body is now both local, by virtue of his humanity, and, by virtue of his divinity, is glorified as a world-body, which is to say as a body which contains the world, a body which the world itself can now be said to be ‘in;’ and thus we too, as part of this transformed world, can also be said to be ‘in.’⁵⁴

This is, indeed, a new creation in which we live and move and have our being. The Holy Spirit’s work is all about transformation, says Davies. When we are baptized, we become part of the Body of Christ, although we may not be able to perceive that with our usual senses. Baptism brings us into a loving relationship with God that can transform us, if we live into our baptismal vocation and engage in the spiritual practices and sacraments offered to us by the Church, one local expression of the Body of Christ.

⁵³ (Davies 2007, 47)

⁵⁴ (Davies 2007, 50)

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The ascended body of Christ always has the power to step “urgently and disruptively into our ‘everyday’ lives,” says Davies.⁵⁵

And this disruption too is a sign of the Church, perhaps indeed its primary sign [by which] . . . we are taken up into the urgency of love which is the Father’s own presence to the Son, and which defines his bodily existence for us as itself sending and self-giving: made real for us by the Spirit in the actuality of our sensible living.⁵⁶

We struggle to find words to explain what our hearts comprehend of the disruptive power of our ascended Lord in our lives and in the new creation which we are to help build. Sometimes, we see this power at work in our lives or in the lives of those around us, and we marvel and give thanks. And yet, others may look at the same incident and explain it away without mentioning Christ at all.

Contemporary physics tells us that how we view something influences its behavior: if we expect to see light act as a wave, it does; if we expect it to act as a particle, it does. Our presence and our observations influence the world around us. Davies suggests that our understanding of the living, ascended Christ “may be closely bound in with an evolution in our own self-understanding of human beings.”⁵⁷

Concludes Davies:

Christ himself, living and exalted, must be the real meaning of history: its certainty and depth, its promise and fulfilment. We can better understand today that he calls us to himself not just in history but also *through* history. More deeply than ‘world,’ history is to name the place of causation and where we too can become human material cause for another. It is in our enacted love that he comes to meet us, one whose own act is saving; as one who goes before.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ (Davies 2007, 57)

⁵⁶ (Davies 2007, 57)

⁵⁷ (Davies 2013, 253)

⁵⁸ (Davies 2013, 253)

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Pierre Teilhard de Chardin suggested something similar, writing about evolution in *The Divine Milieu*:

We may, perhaps, imagine that the creation was finished long ago. But that would be quite wrong. It continues still more magnificently, and at the highest levels of the world. And we serve to complete it, even by the humblest work of our hands. That is, ultimately, the meaning and value of our acts. Owing to the interrelation between matter, soul, and Christ, we bring part of the being which he desires back to God *in whatever we do*. With each one of our *works*, we labor—in individual separation, but no less really—to build the *pleroma*; that is to say, we bring to Christ a little fulfillment.⁵⁹

Teilhard's vision of the "pleroma" was the fullness of union between God and the universe. He spoke of a "cosmic Christ" who "gathers up the whole of creation" as the universe evolves toward the "Omega"—an ultimate point at which Christ stands and toward which the universe is moving.⁶⁰ Teilhard also theorized that love was the essential energy of the universe, calling it "a general property of all life."⁶¹ Teilhard noted that "Love alone is capable of completing our beings in themselves as it unites them;" indeed, he said, "A love that embraces the entire universe is not only something psychologically possible; it is also the only complete and final way in which we can love."⁶²

Teilhard concluded there are three aspects of Christianity that explain its vitality and importance to the universe. First, "Christianity is characterized by personalism and universalism"—a personal God who loves the universe and reveals God's self to

⁵⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "Le Milieu Divin: An Essay on the Interior Life (excerpt)," in *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: Writings Selected with an Introduction*, ed. Ursula King (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 74.

⁶⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "The Heart of the Matter, an Excerpt," in *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: Writings Selected with an Introduction*, ed. Ursula King (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 115.

⁶¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Human Phenomenon: A New Edition and Translation of le Phénomène*, trans. Sarah Appleton-Weber (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2015), 188.

⁶² (Teilhard 2015, 189, 190)

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humanity through Christ, who gathers and transforms all that is, gathering it all into the center of God. Second, there is the “qualitative value” of “Christian love.” Teilhard remarks that this is not a theoretical concept; centuries of practice have shown the existence of this love. Finally, there is the “power of growth,” which Teilhard states is “to be able literally to say to God that we love him [*sic*], not only with our whole body, our whole heart, and our whole soul, but with the whole universe in process of unification—is a prayer that can only be made in space-time.”⁶³ The love that is the basis of all existence continues to carry along our world, in the process of growing in love, reaching for that Omega point, the culmination of God’s love in all and through all.⁶⁴

Building on Teilhard’s work, Beatrice Bruteau speaks of the relationality inherent in creation, as perceived within the Holy Trinity. Each person of the Trinity says, “I am; may you be.” Says Bruteau, “These acts of affirming the other’s I AM=MAY YOU BE” are the way Being’s self-communicating tendency shows in persons. Being is be-ing when it is communicating being, and person is person when it is affirming person. This affirmation/being-communication is what we call love. . . The Trinity. . . is the dynamic reality of love.”⁶⁵

Jesus demonstrated the basis of this self-giving love throughout his life and in his teaching, as when he is quoted in Matthew 16:25 (NRSV): “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” This dynamic outpouring of love characterizes the relationships among the person of the Trinity and the flow of love throughout the universe as it evolves.

⁶³ (Teilhard 2015, 210-213)

⁶⁴ (Teilhard 2015, 214)

⁶⁵ Beatrice Bruteau, *God’s Ecstasy: The Creation of a Self-Creating World* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 28-29.

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Bruteau theorizes that

Incarnation says that both the Infinite and the Finite are thoroughly present, each aspect in its own proper way, and the Whole is one. . . We are in a position to realize ourselves as incarnate divine creativity. This has two effects. It makes the whole thing intensely meaningful. . . It can easily be seen as a gigantic artwork, full of whatever it is that comes out as ‘feeling’ when it becomes incarnate. We are part of this, creative contributors to this. And this is the other effect: we bear some responsibility. We have to take our part in the work.⁶⁶

Thus, we are called to recognize God’s presence in the world in the very stuff of nature *and* we are to engage creatively with the world, bringing our presence—our being—into relationship with the world, recognizing our union with the Divine in doing so. We are evolving even as we participate in the evolution of the universe.

Contemporary theologian Ilia Delio points out, “Evolution is not background to the human story; it *is* the human story.”⁶⁷ Delio clarifies one of Teilhard’s concepts, which he called “amorization” and by which he meant “the process of unfolding love in evolution.”⁶⁸ She explains that this does not refer to an increasing amount of love or emotion in the universe; instead, it refers to the idea that when elements or individuals come together, they differentiate, which leads to “greater union.”⁶⁹ Through this process of differentiation as described by Teilhard, “the center of one’s personhood becomes more authentic in love through union. Hence, amorization is growth in consciousness and depth of being.”⁷⁰ Just as the concept of differentiation in systems theory explains how by becoming more fully oneself, one contributes to the healthier function of others

⁶⁶ (Bruteau 1997, 178)

⁶⁷ Ilia Delio, *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution, and the Power of Love* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 98.

⁶⁸ (Delio 2013, 99)

⁶⁹ (Delio 2013, 99)

⁷⁰ (Delio 2013, 99)

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in the system, so does amorization help us to grow more fully into ourselves, even as it moves us toward unity with God, “the hidden depth and core of being that makes wholeness of being possible.”⁷¹ God is not separate from us or in another dimension; “the self-emptying of God into everyday reality is what Incarnation is all about,” says Delio.⁷² “God is truly in our midst, as one of evolutionary us.”⁷³

God in our midst means that death and resurrection are part and parcel of this amorization of the universe. Delio proclaims:

What resurrection says is that human life has cosmic meaning in the heart of Love. We die individually, but we are part of a larger whole. Christ belongs to the whole. Christ symbolizes the personal center of love that bursts forth in Jesus and empowers our own lives to converge in love. Christ represents the capacity of every person to live in love and hence in God.⁷⁴

Accepting one’s part in the wholeness of Christ presents a challenge, especially for those not accustomed to thinking of one’s spiritual journey or beliefs in such a way. For many who struggle with feelings of shame or guilt and who fear Christ’s judgment because their religion has told them they *should* experience such feelings because of things they have done and left undone, the idea of a mutually indwelling God holding us in Love and calling us to new life may seem so foreign as to be heretical. One could even suggest that the challenges of declining membership in mainline churches could be the result of this disconnection between the energizing God of Love and the tendency in many struggling churches to resist change and hold on tightly to their past practices, beliefs, and history.

⁷¹ (Delio 2013, 100)

⁷² (Delio 2013, 103)

⁷³ (Delio 2013, 104)

⁷⁴ (Delio 2013, 105)

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Delio explains that Teilhard's mysticism foresaw a time when human beings would accept this call to Love offered by God, as he expressed in this passage:

The day will come when, after harnessing the ether, the winds, the tides, gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And, on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, human beings will have discovered fire.⁷⁵

As such spiritual fire burns, it transforms, drawing the elemental qualities of the person into union with God's wholeness. This transformation is not only for individuals who seek God along this path, it is also available to the faith institutions of which they are members. Indeed, the whole world may be transformed by this process. Explains Delio:

The path to this transformation is wisdom. Science is knowledge that opens windows to the inner depths of the cosmos, but religion involves a type of knowledge that includes the heart, the core of cosmic personalization. Wisdom is knowledge deepened by love and leads to greater wholeness because it knows and sees with the inner eye of the heart. If love is absent from the core of knowledge—whether on the level of science, university education, or Christian faith—the end result is division, confusion, and separation. Love goes further than knowledge alone, because love is the essence of all that exists.⁷⁶

Christianity has had too many centuries of division, confusion, and separation. As small congregations struggle to survive and the spiritual fire is banked within them, a new call for them to love is needed. Delio reminds us that love “is the deepest creative power in human nature” and “Christianity . . . is the drama of evolving love and the art of creating (and being created) in love.”⁷⁷ She concludes:

In the end it is love that matters; all else will pass away. . . . Ours is the age of something radically new; it is more than a reformation; it is an

⁷⁵Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "The Evolution of Chastity," in *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: Writings Selected with an Introduction*, ed. Ursula King (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 159.

⁷⁶ (Delio 2013, 182)

⁷⁷ (Delio 2013, 185)

evolution in love. It is not simply we humans who are in evolution but God seeks to evolve—to become more being in love, more conscious, more God at the heart of the universe. This is the truth that sets us free, the light that eludes our sight: *we* are the privileged bearers of transcendence. . . . Divine love can do no other than make whole.⁷⁸

If Davies, Teilhard, Bruteau, and Delio are correct, then change is—literally and figuratively—in our genes. We are created to grow and create and evolve and contribute to the ultimate fulfillment of the world to be realized at Christ’s return. If that is so—why is it so difficult to facilitate change in church communities? Why is not Bruteau’s idea of love expressed as “I AM=MAY YOU BE” a more widespread phenomenon? Why is Delio’s idea of human beings bearing divine transcendence so difficult to accept? If we assert that Jesus Christ is ascended; and if we accept that baptism changes us and marks us as Christ’s own, forever, why are those last three promises of the Baptismal Covenant so hard to fulfill? Spiritual developmental psychology may offer clues.

Spiritual Development

James Fowler’s classic work, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, is regarded as a classic of spiritual developmental psychology. In 2000, a revised version of this work was published, in which Fowler incorporated more recent psychological research findings and information in order to explicitly explore *Christian* faith development regarding one’s vocation. In responding to critics of his earlier work, Fowler indicated that he had done a good bit of reflective thinking concerning his theory, which led him to further clarify two important theological factors that he believed are involved in faith development: nature and grace.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ (Delio 2013, 207)

⁷⁹ James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 58.

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Considering “natural” faith development, Fowler thought that one’s progression from Primal Faith (infancy) to Conjunctive Faith (mid-life) parallels usual human development. Moving from Conjunctive to Universalizing Faith, however, involved the person undergoing a transformation that most developmental psychologists were reluctant to call “natural” because it was a path not trod by many. Individuals who were assessed at being in the Universalizing stage had set their “oneness with the Transcendent” as their core value. Although they maintained relationships with others, those relationships were secondary to the longing to unite with the Transcendent. Entering into partnership with the Spirit, and experiencing “synergy” with the Spirit is what Fowler calls “grace.”⁸⁰ Wrote Fowler:

Human development toward wholeness is, I believe, always the product of a certain *synergy* between human potentials, given in creation, and the presence and activity of the Spirit as mediated through many channels. The most crucial factor differentiating the quality and movement of a person or group’s development in faith, therefore, has to do with the conscious and unconscious availability of that person or group’s potentials for partnership—for synergy—with Spirit. . . . When one who was previously blocked experiences the effective breakthrough of Spirit that brings release and new openness to synergy with Grace, we are in the presence of what Christian theologians have traditionally called salvation, or saving Grace. Christians have traditionally called the condition of enmity toward Grace or blockage to synergy with Grace sin.”⁸¹

Fowler was quick to point out that this idea of wholeness was not a state to work toward achieving. Instead, he said, “it is a way of being and moving, a way of being on pilgrimage. . . .” This pilgrimage takes us on a journey where—no matter who we are or where we are in community—the Spirit is available to help transform us. Indeed, said Fowler, the goal “. . . is for each person or group to open themselves, as radically as

⁸⁰ (Fowler 2000, 59)

⁸¹ (Fowler 2000, 59-60)

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possible—within the structures of their present stage or transition—to synergy with Spirit.”⁸²

Both building upon and departing from Fowler’s earlier work, Nicola Slee conducted a study of women’s spirituality and faith development in the late 1990’s. Identified as an example of “feminist practical or pastoral theology,” Slee conducted interviews with 30 women who identified themselves as being currently or formerly Christian in order to identify “patterns and processes of women’s spirituality and faith development.”⁸³ Since, in my study, the respondents to all three questionnaires and the interviewees were all women, Slee’s work helped in the analysis of my findings.

Slee found that Fowler’s work deeply informed her own, especially when a woman was moving from one stage of faith to another. However, she also identified four areas of women’s faith development that were *not* accounted for in Fowler’s earlier work.⁸⁴

First, she found that Fowler did not account for “the role of intuitive knowing, imaginative, metaphoric and concrete forms of thinking in the movement to owned, responsible and self-consciously chosen faith.”⁸⁵ The second area in which she noted a difference involved the importance of relationships to the women studied. Whereas Fowler identified relationality with earlier stages of faith development, Slee suggests this is a more core concept for women’s spirituality, no matter what their developmental stage. She also noted that this finding may “illuminate in significant ways men’s

⁸² (Fowler 2000, 60)

⁸³ Nicola Slee, “Women’s Faith Development: Patterns and Processes (Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), 4-5, 52.

⁸⁴ (Slee 2004, 163-165)

⁸⁵ (Slee 2004, 165)

struggles towards a faith in which connectedness to the other and the preservation of one's own selfhood are not in competition, but in harmony.”⁸⁶

By using an open-ended interview technique, Slee found that each woman's interview was unique and yet contributed to the overall picture that was emerging about women's faith development. This contrasted with Fowler's methodology, she said, which was semi-structured and therefore pre-supposed a certain order and outlook.⁸⁷

The final area in which she departed from Fowler's work was identifying that in contrast to a continual movement toward the “next” or “higher” stage of faith, Slee found that women often experienced times of “paralysis, impasse, lack of movement, even regression.”⁸⁸ These experiences could not be accounted for using Fowler's work, leading Slee to state, “The very strengths of stage development theory. . . are also its weaknesses.”⁸⁹ Slee called for further research in order to develop a wider variety of models to help assess spiritual developmental models.⁹⁰

In her study, Slee identified six “faithing strategies” used by women to engage with their faith development. These strategies are not hierarchical, and more than one may have been used simultaneously.⁹¹ These strategies are:

1. Conversational faithing: The women were able to verbally express how their spiritual journey had progressed over time, allowing them to connect with parts of their spirituality that they had not previously considered.⁹²

⁸⁶ (Slee 2004, 166)

⁸⁷ (Slee 2004, 166-167)

⁸⁸ (Slee 2004, 167)

⁸⁹ (Slee 2004, 167)

⁹⁰ (Slee 2004, 168)

⁹¹ (Slee 2004, 62)

⁹² (Slee 2004, 62-65)

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2. Metaphoric faithing: The women used a wide range of metaphors and images to convey meaning about different aspects of their spirituality.⁹³
3. Narrative faithing: Story-telling was the primary way women communicated their faith stories in the interviews. Within this category, the stories fell primarily into sub-categories concerning identity; significant people in their lives; a particular event in their lives; a struggle, conflict, or choice they faced.⁹⁴
4. Personalised faithing: Related to story-telling, these were stories about heroines and heroes of faith. Women cited parents; mentors; friends; partners and lovers; and people met in passing who exhibited some aspect of faith that captured the women's imaginations.⁹⁵
5. Conceptual faithing: Some women applied psychological or theological concepts to their faith journey, especially if they had experience in those areas.⁹⁶
6. Apophatic faithing: "Some women employed a means of shaping faith typified by its negative, denunciatory or contradictory quality, in which faith was named. . . in implicit, indirect, negative, or contradictory terms."⁹⁷ Slee noted that three groups of women fell into this category: those who perceived religion to be a "negative or oppressive force in their lives;" those who were "in transition from old patters of spirituality;" and finally, "women whose journey of faith had brought them to a point where paradox. . . was of the

⁹³ (Slee 2004, 65-67)

⁹⁴ (Slee 2004, 67-70)

⁹⁵ (Slee 2004, 70-74)

⁹⁶ (Slee 2004, 74-76)

⁹⁷ (Slee 2004, 76)

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essence of faith and for whom, therefore, apophatic language seemed the most appropriate means of expressing the mystery of faith.”⁹⁸

Slee identified three overarching themes that she called “patterns of women’s faith development,” and labeled “alienation, awakenings and relationality.”⁹⁹

Alienation was experienced as “a profound loss of self, of authentic connection with others, and of faith.”¹⁰⁰ Despite the prevalence of this experience among the women interviewed, they often did not discuss it with others. Feeling disconnected from others did not necessarily paralyze them, however; Slee notes, “their accounts also reveal a remarkable creativity which is suggestive of transformation and hope.”¹⁰¹

Awakenings “to new consciousness and spiritual vitality” occurred for many women in their everyday lives. Says Slee, “The majority of the women emphasised the embeddedness of their spirituality in the world of the everyday.”¹⁰² The women also cited the importance of “intuition, bodily knowing and instinct” in these experiences.¹⁰³ As they experienced this new vitality, women identified feeling that strands of their identity were being woven together into a new being, recognizing a new reality for themselves.¹⁰⁴

Relationality was the final generative pattern identified in Slee’s research. Many of the women defined “faith as being in relation with God and/or the Other, or offering other relational metaphors and models of faith.”¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ (Slee 2004, 77)

⁹⁹ (Slee 2004, 14)

¹⁰⁰ (Slee 2004, 81)

¹⁰¹ (Slee 2004, 106)

¹⁰² (Slee 2004, 109,133)

¹⁰³ (Slee 2004, 133)

¹⁰⁴ (Slee 2004, 134)

¹⁰⁵ (Slee 2004, 139)

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In summarizing her study and pointing toward the future, one of Slee's recommendations is to attend to "the significance of imagination in women's religious education and pastoral care."¹⁰⁶ Rather than attempting to meet women's spiritual needs in exactly the same way as men's, she suggests reclaiming traditional forms of women's spirituality, such as "poetry, hymnody, craft forms and popular piety," which have nourished women's spiritual needs for millennia.¹⁰⁷ Engaging women's creativity as they explore their spirituality could prove fruitful for them, for their faith communities, and for the world.

Both Fowler and Slee point toward faith development practices that will help people to make their spiritual journey toward wholeness lived in God. Davies might say we could do this by carrying out a loving act for another, demonstrating Christ's presence in the world through this enacted love. Teilhard might suggest that we are helping to transform the world with everything we do. Bruteau might urge us to be as creative as possible in our actions. Delio might advise us to lovingly use wisdom in order to move toward transformation as we learned more about ourselves, the world around us, and the new creation opening out before us as we move toward the Christ-Omega. But how could this thinking be incorporated into an adult education program that would encourage people to move toward transformation through engaging with our baptismal promises?

Wrestling with those last three promises of the Baptismal Covenant suggested that they actually *did* provide guidelines on *how* to love our neighbor:

- Proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ

¹⁰⁶ (Slee 2004, 176)

¹⁰⁷ (Slee 2004, 176)

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- Seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself
- Strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being

Perhaps the challenge lay in how to creatively engage with the promises in order to translate them into “enacted love.” If we could strive to enact these promises, then our lives would be transformed. And if *our* lives are transformed, the world around us and all those with whom we come into contact will also be transformed.

As our understanding of the universe and the physical laws ordering it shift and expand, it becomes easier to conceptualize how material, bodily being could transform into energetic, spiritual being, a part of the whole and yet remaining distinct being. We may not be able to describe what this is like, and yet we somehow *know* this is the truth passed on to us in the Gospels, the Book of Acts, and St. Paul’s letters where he describes his encounter with the ascended Christ. We are invited to become part of this wholeness of God, to be transformed in, by, and through God’s Love. As my act of ministry, I wanted to offer participants an opportunity to begin living into this transformation.

Taking Beatrice Bruteau’s advice to be creative and drawing on my passion for Celtic music and mythology, taking to heart Fowler’s movement toward wholeness as a pilgrimage, and considering Slee’s recommendations to use traditional women’s forms of hymnody and story-telling, I developed a program that would offer participants a “pilgrimage in place” with Celtic saints so that they could explore how engaging with the final three Baptismal Covenant promises could help them grow toward wholeness in God.

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Stories about the saints were drawn from primary and secondary sources, as noted in Appendix B and the Bibliography. While legends about these saints abound, I chose anecdotes and writings that supported the highlighted spiritual gift of each saint. One of the hallmarks of Christianity in the Celtic countries is how down-to-earth the saints come across in the legends about them. At the same time, some of the feats attributed to the saints are difficult for twenty-first century Americans to accept as having “actually” happened. As the presenter, I would have to encourage people to listen to those stories with their hearts rather than their heads—to seek the truth being told in the tale, even if the tale itself sounded unbelievable to them. In order to further flesh out the saints as “real” people and facilitate the participants making connections with the saints, I sought other ways to introduce material about the saints, which would necessitate providing people with a grounding in Celtic Christianity.

Celtic Theology

While some debate whether or not the people called “Celts” actually existed, those who immerse themselves in the music, myth, language, art, and spirituality of the people who lived (and live) in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, the Isle of Man, and Brittany have no doubt who the Celts were and are. The Celtic Diaspora reaches around the world, and “wannabe” Celts today in non-traditionally Celtic cultures are distilling whisky, playing bagpipes, and sporting Celtic knotwork tattoos. While purists may balk at such multi-cultural expressions, others are busily considering what the attraction is when it comes to things Celtic—especially Celtic Christianity. What truths or myths have survived the centuries that people find so attractive about the ways in which the Celtic peoples lived

out their faith before the Synod of Whitby convened in the seventh century? What could we learn about our own faith journeys by studying them?

Before the Synod of Whitby

Not much is truly known about the spread of Christianity to the British Isles and Ireland in the ancient world. Perhaps traders or Roman soldiers brought the faith with them in their travels. But according to the Venerable Bede, in the year A.D. 156, a British king named Lucius wrote to the Roman Emperor, asking to be made a Christian, “. . . and the Britons received the Faith and held it peacefully in all its purity and fullness until the time of the Emperor Diocletian.”¹⁰⁸

Diocletian became Emperor of Rome in A.D. 286 and with his co-Emperor Herculius, began a persecution of Christians that reached to Britain, but which subsided when a new Emperor came into power. According to Bede, Christianity continued to grow in Britain during that time, at least until A.D. 409, when the Goths sacked Rome and Roman protection of Britain ended. Without Roman might to defend Britain, the Picts and Irish often invaded British lands. Less than a half-century later, groups of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes were invited to come to Britain to help defend the territory granted to them from other invaders. While bishops were periodically sent to Britain and Ireland during those centuries, once again according to Bede, it was not until A.D. 597, when Pope Gregory sent Augustine and an entourage to preach the Gospel to the British, that Christianity found a solid foothold against the paganism in Britain.¹⁰⁹

As with many accounts written by historians, Bede was presenting a particular political slant and not simply an unbiased recitation of dates and events. His approach

¹⁰⁸ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People, revised edition*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price and R. E. Latham (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 49.

¹⁰⁹ (Bede 1999, 50-77)

glosses over the contributions of people such as Ninian, whose community at Whithorn and its missionary work in southern Scotland is at least as important as Columba's contributions to Christianity in that region.¹¹⁰

Bede's purpose, writing less than a century after the Synod of Whitby convened in A.D. 664, was to enforce the decision to solidify the practices of the Roman Church in a land where differing Christian practices had existed side by side for centuries, led by bishops, priests, abbots, and abbesses. Uniformity of practice was now called for, and Bede played his part in trying to make that a reality for the Church. But is there ever *truly* uniformity of practice in the Church?

Local Theologies and Celtic Christianity

Theologian Thomas O'Loughlin explains, "Wherever there is a group of Christians . . . with a shared language, culture, and social and economic conditions, then a local theology will develop."¹¹¹ Working with historians to dig back through the centuries, he says, theologians could work to uncover the theology of an area, thus giving credence to the idea of a "Welsh" theology or an "Irish" theology. Having historians and theologians operating separately from one another means there is a gulf between what each group researches and reports and how the two disciplines inform each other. He also points out the importance of acknowledging particular contributions to Christianity that did, indeed, arise in the islands of Britain and Ireland during the first millennium: systemizing canon law and the development and codification of penitential practices.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ John T. McNeill, *The Celtic Churches: A History, A.D. 200 to 1200* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 23-27.

¹¹¹ Thomas O'Loughlin, *Celtic Theology: Humanity, World, and God in Early Irish Writings* (London: Continuum, 2000), 9.

¹¹² (O'Loughlin 2000, 9)

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Although pointing out where the notion of a Celtic Church has been used for political reasons—from the Synod of Whitby (if not before!) to today—O’Loughlin finally returns to his notion of “local theology:”

The notion of ‘local theologies’ is an attempt to hold links and differences in tension. As such it is ‘Celtic’ or ‘Irish’ not because it can be brought into contrast with some other theology imagined as a highly consistent unity, but because its practitioners would have recognized their common links with a particular island, and that in many ways they shared cultural and linguistic experiences which set them apart from their fellow Christians elsewhere in the Latin West.¹¹³

Other theologians and scholars, however, are not afraid of daring to describe a distinctly Celtic Church, especially in Ireland and the regions we now know as Scotland and Wales during the first half of the first millennium of Christianity.

In his history *Scotland’s Music*, author and music scholar John Purser acknowledges the controversy concerning the reality of a “Celtic” Church while noting items that are specific to Celtic Christianity: a non-hierarchical organization centered in monasteries; emulation of the Desert Fathers and Mothers; a form for determining the date of Easter that differed from the Roman Church; a different style of tonsure; a unique style of writing; different construction of crosses, bells, and bell-towers; differences in liturgy and the division of the day for times of prayer; and finally, the use of the local language, Gaelic, in prayers, poetry, commentaries, and other writings.¹¹⁴

While other scholars acknowledge some of those same items do belong primarily to the Church in the areas we now call Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, others cite more *spiritual* differences from the Roman Church as opposed to more easily observed

¹¹³ (O’Loughlin 2000, 23)

¹¹⁴ John Purser, *Scotland’s Music*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2007), 51.

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physical differences that have come down to us through writings and archeological research.

James Mackey notes the following in his introduction to the collection of essays titled *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity*:

The nearness, the ubiquitous *presence* of the spiritual in all things and at all times, though needing its special times and places too as a picture needs a frame in order to focus its universality, is indeed a powerful, permanent, and characteristic Celtic conviction. And I mention it at the beginning because in the end it may prove to be the most important contribution which the Celtic mind can still offer to the modern world.¹¹⁵

Mackey goes on to note that another Celtic Christian belief is that God's grace resounds throughout Creation and in humankind—and “[t]his natural world, this human nature, is good through and through as the Genesis refrain insists. . .”¹¹⁶ The ideas of grace, goodness, and blessing were strong and guided the approaches that holy women and men took with the lay folk they encountered in Ireland and Britain during the early centuries of the Christian era.

For another distinctive Celtic Christian characteristic was wandering for Christ. Although some cultures wandered in order to fight and conquer other peoples, the Celts rarely did so. Instead, they seemed to wander in order to expand their own horizons. They picked up bits of other cultures and would leave some ideas of their own behind without totally assimilating the other culture. When Celtic clerics wandered, they appear to have followed those same principles, willing to live side-by-side with folk of differing

¹¹⁵ James P. Mackey, ed. *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 11.

¹¹⁶ (Mackey 1995, 15)

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practices without feeling the need to convert them entirely to their own ways of worship.¹¹⁷

A homily dating from the seventh or early eighth century is the earliest known homily written in Old Irish. It is known as “The Cambrai Homily” because it was copied and is housed in Cambrai, France; yet the theology expressed in it connects with the Irish monks who migrated to mainland Europe to spread the Gospel. The homily notes three types of martyrdom that a Christian may experience that are one’s cross, expressed as colors: Someone experiences white martyrdom when he or she leaves behind home, family, and all he or she knows and loves in order to serve God; blue (or green; it depends on how one translates the Irish word *glas*, the meaning of which has changed over the centuries) martyrdom involves fasting and hard work in order to control one’s desires or repent of a sin; and red martyrdom occurs when someone dies for the sake of one’s faith.¹¹⁸

The holy men and women who left behind their homes in Ireland and Scotland for the sake of the Gospel experienced the white martyrdom. This fits in with the notion of what Pierre Teilhard de Chardin called “Le Christique,” according to theologian N. D. O’Donoghue. Whereas Teilhard connected the Christ-presence (“Le Christique”) with a “total, all-encompassing, intimate and ecstatic” experience of encountering Christ, O’Donoghue suggests the same idea is expressed in the ancient *lorica* (protection prayer), *St. Patrick’s Breastplate*. This particular *lorica*, says O’Donoghue, connects the one who prays it with Christ and with everyone the person encounters. *St. Patrick’s Breastplate* celebrates “. . . radiance and connectedness and a deep holy respect for all human

¹¹⁷ (Mackey 1995, 18)

¹¹⁸ Oliver Davis, trans. and Thomas O’Loughlin, collab., in Bernard McGinn, *Celtic Spirituality: The Classics of Western Spirituality*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 370.

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relationships. In this vision of Christ in everybody the whole of creation becomes luminous, and the shadows of Satan are pierced if not dissipated.”¹¹⁹

Drawing again on Teilhard’s work, O’Donoghue sees that a Christian “wayfarer” maintains his or her own identity, even while Christ’s presence and protection surround and even penetrate within the person.¹²⁰ The kind of relationship modeled in this thinking allows for individuals to form a new identity in their relationship, while maintaining their unique individual identities. It also appears to have been a guiding principle for the Celtic holy men and women who set out to bring the Gospel to new places or to serve as soul-friends to others in their own communities.

Focus on People

In his history *The Celtic Churches*, John T. McNeill stated, “The history of Celtic Christianity is a story of persons far more than institutions.”¹²¹ Not interested in establishing their own hierarchy and geographically isolated from Rome, leaders in the Celtic Churches carried out their work without consulting much with the Church authorities, according to McNeill. Cultural norms, such as a love for poetry and art, blended with the work of the Gospel for the holy women and men of the Celtic Churches.

Even after the Synod of Whitby, when recognition of the authority in the Church became more unified, distinctive forms of art and learning continued to characterize the faith communities in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Britain. One distinctive feature the wandering monks brought with them was their music.

¹¹⁹ N.D. O’Donoghue, “St. Patrick’s Breastplate” in *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity*, James Mackey, ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 62.

¹²⁰ (O’Donoghue 1995, 61)

¹²¹ (McNeill 1974, 223)

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Small quadrangular bronze hand bells were used by Scottish monks from at least the Middle Ages, and some survive to this day. John Purser's research indicates that these particular bells play three different notes (two sides play the same note), spanning a minor third. He suggests they could have been used to provide different intoning notes for chanting, or to represent the Holy Trinity by being chimed during a mass, or even to simply call the brothers to prayer.¹²²

Gaelic texts speak of both the secular and religious importance of the harp and lyre in Scotland. It seems that stringed instruments that were both quadrangular and triangular were played in church services to accompany chanting. Chants and poems dating back to the Middle Ages praise the *cithara*, using the ancient Greek and Latin word for the lyre. The sweetness of the sound and the placating qualities the instruments offer to those who hear them are praised.¹²³

Archeological evidence indicates that small harps with eight strings were carried by monks on their belts.¹²⁴ Such a portable instrument would be useful to provide pitches or intervals for singing chants—or offer a creative monk an opportunity to compose his own work or praise or thanksgiving or lament. These instruments also could have traveled with the monks as they spread throughout the northern islands and into continental Europe from at least the sixth through the tenth centuries, bringing not only the Gospel and formalized education, but their music, as well.

McNeill wrote, “The so-called Dark Age was in fact characterized by deep craving for scholarly knowledge, and the monastic schools of Ireland were everywhere

¹²² (Purser 2007, 43)

¹²³ (Purser 2007, 52)

¹²⁴ (Purser 2007, 58)

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esteemed as offering the best opportunity of acquiring it.”¹²⁵ The monks brought not only Biblical learning, but practical wisdom, scientific learning, Latin poetry and even some early study of Greek—and of course, they brought their native language and poetry, as well, sometimes translating it into Latin. Known as *peregrini* for their tendency to wander, the monks annoyed some people and enthralled others, but they indisputably left their mark on the Church and education in mainland Europe.¹²⁶

“The Celtic mission planted a form of Christianity unimpeachably orthodox but singularly lacking in preoccupation with doctrinal issues. . . . Ireland . . . with some cooperation from Celtic Britain and from Irish-trained Englishmen, exerted for six centuries a pervasive, life-giving influence upon the major part of Europe.”¹²⁷

Some scholars and theologians maintain that this “life-giving influence” of Celtic Christianity remains a strong influence in the Church today. John Philip Newell may be the most well-known contemporary proponent of such thinking; in the Introduction to his book *Listening for the Heartbeat of God*, Newell says:

. . . Celtic spirituality is neither a thing of the past nor a twentieth-century phenomenon. Rather, it is a spirituality that characterized the young British Church from as early as the fourth century. Although it was pushed out to the Celtic fringes of Britain after Augustine of Canterbury’s Roman mission in 597, it has always managed to survive in one form or another, usually on the edges of formal religion.¹²⁸

The contingent of Christians formed by the Iona tradition who were present at the Synod of Whitby looked to John the Evangelist for inspiration. In the image of John leaning against Christ’s breast at the Last Supper, they saw him listening for the heartbeat

¹²⁵ (McNeill 1974, 177)

¹²⁶ (McNeill 1974, 177-191)

¹²⁷ (McNeill 1974, 192)

¹²⁸ John Philip Newell, *Listening for the Heartbeat of God* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 2-3.

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of God that is present in *all* of creation. Newell sees this idea as the central idea of the spirituality of the Celtic Church, connecting it not only with folk traditions and ancient Celtic poetry and the monastery at Iona founded by Columba, but tracing it back even further to contemplative spirituality present in the Hebrew Bible.¹²⁹

In *Listening for the Heartbeat of God*, Newell highlights the contributions made by a number of people to the Celtic Christian tradition, but one in particular who seems to serve as a bridge between the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries was Alexander John Scott, who lived from 1805 to 1866 and who served as a minister in the Church of Scotland—until he was deposed on a charge of heresy for saying that the Church tried to limit God’s love. “. . . Scott emphasized that the realm of Christ encompasses . . . all life, for Christ is the Life of the world. The Spirit of God, he said, is ‘impregnated’ throughout the whole of creation. Where there is life and goodness, there is God. God exists wherever there is love and creativity.”¹³⁰

As the Industrial Revolution blossomed around him, Scott tried to hold out a vision of uncreated God being present in the midst of all creation; he “. . . described creation as ‘a transparency through which the light of God can be seen.’”¹³¹ Newell is quick to point out that Scott did not automatically assume that *everything* to be found in creation was good; but he believed that we had the ability to discern God’s presence, which lay deeper than any destructive forces we may witness. Scott also advised that we study not only the Bible but “‘that other volume,’ namely, the great and holy book of creation.”¹³²

¹²⁹ (Newell 1997, 3-7)

¹³⁰ (Newell 1997, 64)

¹³¹ (Newell 1997, 66)

¹³² (Newell 1997, 66-67)

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Scott's theology sounds remarkably contemporary, and one can understand why he ran afoul of officials in the Church of Scotland in his day: "The Infinite, said Scott, is 'consubstantiated with the human,' so that what is most truly human is what is most divine. 'There is no part of our nature,' he declared, 'as God made it and means it, that is not brought into the dearest nearness to Himself.'"¹³³

Scott's particular teachings provide examples of the distinctive Celtic spirituality, always looking to God at the heart of everything, including ourselves. It also points back toward the Gospel of John, with its emphasis on the Word being present in the beginning and how "John's way of seeing makes room for an open encounter with the Light of life wherever it is to be found."¹³⁴

Encountering and nurturing that Light in others was an important emphasis for the holy men and women of the Celtic Christian tradition.

Revered Saints

In Ireland and Scotland, three saints in particular stand out in the surviving literature as being special friends to the common folk: Patrick, Brigid, and Columba (in Gaelic, Columcille). Two collections of poems, songs, charms, and blessings helped scholars and others to understand the saints' importance in those countries: the *Carmina Gadelica*, poems, blessings, stories, and charms collected in the highlands and islands of Scotland and translated by Alexander Carmichael in the nineteenth century; and *The Religious Songs of Connacht*, similar works collected in Connacht, Ireland by Douglas Hyde and published in the early twentieth century. To this day, Brigid, Columba, and Patrick are still honored, loved, and invoked in prayer by people around the world.

¹³³ (Newell 1997, 70)

¹³⁴ (Newell 1997, 97)

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Pre-Christian Celtic culture emphasized music, poetry, art, law, a love of learning, attention to genealogy, and a warrior spirit. Christianity was folded gently into that mix, so that Christ might be referred to as the High King and songs composed about him and his followers in the bardic tradition. And Christianity, as expressed by many of its leaders in the Celtic countries before the Synod of Whitby, did its best to share the Gospel without eradicating all elements of the ancient culture in which it was growing.

After all, Saint Columba himself was a member of the great Irish clan O'Neill and had quite a reputation as an artist, poet, and singer. Two poems attributed to him survive to this day, showing how Christian and Celtic imagery inform and build on each other.¹³⁵

Two prose works by Saint Patrick survive: his *Confessio* or *Confession*, in which he relates how God has been at work in his life; and “The Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus,” in which Patrick speaks of justice to soldiers who had captured and then executed newly-baptized Christians. He further berates them for selling others into slavery. Both of these writings offer a glimpse of the great (and greatly beloved) bishop.¹³⁶

Unlike Columba and Patrick, Saint Brigid has no extant works from her own hand. What we *do* have, however, is a plethora of stories, poems, songs, incantations, and blessings about her. Brigid, seen as a foster mother to Jesus in the Scottish tradition, is beloved to this day in Ireland and Scotland, where many traditions concerning her remain alive. What becomes clear as you read the stories about her is how accessible

¹³⁵ Columba, “Altus Prosator” and “Adiutor Laborantium” in *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, trans. Thomas Owen Clancy and Gilbert Márkus (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 44-53, 72-73.

¹³⁶ Patrick, “Patrick’s Declaration of the Great Works of God” and “The Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus” in *Celtic Spirituality*, Bernard McGinn, ed., Oliver Davies and Thomas O’Loughlin, trans. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 67-83, 84-89.

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people believed—and believe—her to be. She truly was a soul friend to many who crossed her path.¹³⁷

Another Celtic Saint who exemplifies the idea of “white martyrdom” or peregrination is Saint Brendan the Voyager. The medieval manuscript *The Voyage of Brendan* was a medieval “best-seller,” copied by monks and taken throughout Europe as they traveled. Considered today to be a metaphor for one’s spiritual journey, it was accepted as gospel for hundreds of years; indeed, until the eighteenth century, maps of the Atlantic Ocean indicated where one could find “St. Brendan’s Isle.” The manuscript also provides evidence of how an Irish monastic day unfolded, with its times of prayer and the music sung at each office.¹³⁸

All of these sources indicate how the meeting of Celtic and Christian cultures informed the lived theology of the early saints and the people with whom they interacted. The love of art, poetry, music, and learning that were part and parcel of the Celtic culture dovetailed beautifully with the Christian teachings and love of the Bible. The openness to other cultures brought by the Celts, combined with the wisdom and leading of the Holy Spirit brought by the early saints, transformed life not only for the Celtic lands, but for the entire world by contributing to spreading the light of Christ and learning into Europe and beyond.

¹³⁷ “The Brigit Tradition” in *Celtic Spirituality*, Bernard McGinn, ed., Oliver Davies and Thomas O’Loughlin, trans. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 121-154; Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica: Hymns and Incantations Collected in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland in the Last Century* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1992); Douglas Hyde, *The Religious Songs of Connacht: A Collection of Poems, Stories, Prayers, Satires, Ranns, Charms, Etc.* Reprint of 1906 ed., v ol. 1 of 2 vols. (Delhi: Facsimile Publisher, 2015); Oliver Davies and Fiona Bowie, *Celtic Christian Spirituality: An Anthology of Medieval and Modern Sources* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

¹³⁸ “The Voyage of Brendan” in *Celtic Spirituality*, Bernard McGinn, ed., Oliver Davies and Thomas O’Loughlin, trans. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 34, 155-190; *The Voyage of St. Brendan*, John J. O’Meara, trans. (Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Limited, 1991).

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I discovered, in presenting the Lenten program as my project, that the contributions of Celtic Christianity to contemporary Christian practices go largely unrecognized by people in the pews. I hoped that drawing on information from social sciences, neuroscience, music, and art would allow me to craft the presentations in such a way that the participants would be eager to learn and apply the information discussed in their lives. Please see Appendix B for the specific material about each saint highlighted that was used in the project.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM SOCIAL SCIENCE

Episcopalians value well-crafted words, grounded as we are in *The Book of Common Prayer*. Words are not the only way human beings communicate with one another, however. All of our senses are involved in offering and receiving information about one another and the world around us. We face a barrage of sounds and images everywhere we go; it is difficult to escape video screens and the insistent call to arms from mobile telephones that ping and vibrate to keep us on schedule throughout our day. Our brains learn to attenuate, helping us to ignore repetitive sounds or sights that we determine are non-threatening.

But attenuation may also pose a danger: If we become *too* complacent to our surroundings, we may miss an alarm or a change that may knock us off our feet, figuratively or literally. Is the same not also true of our spiritual journeys? If God invites us to “be more,” then it would be desirable to explore new ways of praying, new ways of strengthening our relationship with God, and new ways of being in the world. While we tend to draw comfort from the familiar, God is always calling us forward into new life.

Wanting to address the tension that arises in that tug-of-war between the comfort of the familiar and the fear of the unknown when people contemplate their relationship with God led to the idea of intertwining stories, music, art, and small-group discussion as part of the act of ministry offered as a Lenten adult education program. The overall format would be familiar to many of the participants, but the content would differ from their past experiences. This act of ministry would deliberately incorporate art and music

and spiritual reflection as part of the program to encourage the participants to engage more deeply with their baptismal vows. Using art and music would seek to bypass certain cognitive processing pathways and engage a different part of the participants' hearts and minds.

Creative Engagement Through Art

Although Alejandro García-Rivera writes of Hispanic/Latino theology and aesthetics in his book, *The Community of the Beautiful*, much of what he says about art can apply to other cultures, as well. He points out that while beauty originates in God, beauty must also be received. So an important question to keep in mind when thinking about theology and art is: *How* is beauty perceived by the person regarding any aspect of creation—whether made by God or human? He suggests that “a work of art is, essentially, an incarnation involving a triadic relation of object, medium, and the human imagination.”¹³⁹ Perhaps the old maxim, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” is true, indeed.

“Beauty,” wrote García-Rivera “. . . reveals its theological dimension in ‘difference,’” which “is at the heart of sign.”¹⁴⁰ Defining sign as “a visible signifier standing for an invisible signified,” García-Rivera notes that this difference of sign reveals the True, the Good, and the Beautiful.¹⁴¹ Quoting the work of theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, García-Rivera explains that “the loss of belief in beauty is the

¹³⁹ Alejandro García-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 10; 13.

¹⁴⁰ (García-Rivera 1999, 61)

¹⁴¹ (García-Rivera 1999, 31, 61)

unraveling of the transcendentals that manifests itself as nihilism”—and yet, “. . . the true, the good, and the beautiful refuse to be annihilated.”¹⁴²

García-Rivera posits that the Incarnation embodies this understanding of difference. Through the mystery of God taking on human flesh, Jesus Christ unites the divine and the human, bringing Divine Love into the everyday world. García-Rivera views this as “a gracious epiphany, a loving revelation.”¹⁴³ The work of both García-Rivera and Von Balthasar seeks to understand how human beings “see” God, and how those visions of God may differ and yet be valid. Within the realm of Hispanic/Latino theology, García-Rivera insists there is an additional question to ask, which Von Balthasar did not: “Can these visions change the world?”¹⁴⁴

Exploring the work of other philosophers whose work revolved around signs of the True and the Good, García-Rivera concludes that differences are what help us to understand our Being, and our Being in relation to the Other—first, the difference between God and God’s creatures, and second, the difference between God’s creatures. Says García-Rivera, “God’s ordained power . . . reveals a love of difference, a love for *this* world.”¹⁴⁵ Through exploring the relationship between Beings, an appreciation grows for the beauty that such difference signifies. In looking at creation in all its diversity and relating to the differences evident among all creatures, God’s *human* creatures catch a glimpse of God’s Love, poured out into our reality, as García-Rivera clarifies: “By loving the universe into being, God ordered the universe not according to the laws of design but by the laws of the “heart.” In other words, the universe is ordered

¹⁴² (García-Rivera 1999, 64)

¹⁴³ (García-Rivera 1999, 73)

¹⁴⁴ (García-Rivera 1999, 76)

¹⁴⁵ (García-Rivera 1999, 157)

less by the laws of design than by the laws of difference. The love of difference orders the world in ways that a machine would never be designed.”¹⁴⁶

Meditating on these differences is the work of the community—and when the community comes together to engage with art in order to imagine a new vision of its future, it becomes the “Community of the Beautiful” and is moved to praise the Creator.

García-Rivera states how this theological aesthetics can be viewed:

A theological aesthetics involves, in a sense, an ultimate triadicity, the ultimate triadic sign. This ultimate triadic sign consists of the origins of reality (the ‘artist’), the ends of reality (the finished ‘work of art’), and the creatures whose experience ‘makes’ and ‘behold’ reality. . . This dynamic ‘imaginative’ interpretation of Being takes place in the ‘heart’ as a movement of the ‘heart’ towards good or evil. . . this movement of the heart is the ‘spark,’ the ‘lighting of the fuse,’ which inspires and sets in motion the interpretation of the Good and the True.¹⁴⁷

When the Community of the Beautiful engages with art and explores differences between the origins of the art, the work of art, and the community’s experiences as they engage with the art, they are moved to praise God. Proclaims García-Rivera, “The Glory of the Lord returns as praise and thanksgiving because the Glory of the Lord is a community that has caught sight of a marvelous vision, a universe of justice emerging from a community’s experience of divine Beauty, the ‘lifting up the lowly.’”¹⁴⁸

The Baptismal Covenant invites Episcopalians to lift up the lowly by working for such a vision of justice, with God’s help. Exploring the arts in community could ignite a spark of connection or creativity for someone that would enable him or her to engage more deeply with the Baptismal Covenant. Identifying differences among members of the community and differences in their reactions to various arts and artworks could

¹⁴⁶ (García-Rivera 1999, 169)

¹⁴⁷ (García-Rivera 1999, 185)

¹⁴⁸ (García-Rivera 1999, 195)

clarify what the community views as “good,” “true,” and “beautiful,” allowing the members of the community to find the next step forward on their path toward heeding God’s call.

In his classic book *A Theological Approach to Art*, Roger Hazelton quotes Pablo Picasso as saying, “Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth.”¹⁴⁹ While noting that perhaps “lie” is too strong a word, Hazelton says that it is “. . . only through images thrown up alongside the real can what is real come home to us, speak to us, take shape in us.”¹⁵⁰

Art may be understood as a “trap for meditation,” says Hazelton. “It must have within itself the power of attracting and then holding one’s attention, of engaging the listener, reader, or spectator for at least a passing moment on its own terms, not his.”¹⁵¹ By meditation, Hazelton does not mean a protracted time of sitting with a work and contemplating it; instead, he means art should invite us to pause in order to allow space for the work to disclose something to us. Such disclosure may lead to our discomfort, however, as something within us is touched and connections are made between us and the work. The discomfort we experience provides an opportunity for our spiritual growth:

Here again is art taking the form of a disclosure of the unexpected and the paradoxical, making use of symbols not to tell us what we know already but to break through crusts of complacency and to shrink the distances which would otherwise keep the work of art from getting at us. If such art gives us pleasure—and it does—it is not the pleasure of agreement but of challenge and response, of being drawn into a ‘disclosure situation’ where the usual defenses against our being really spoken to have been deftly and craftily removed by the artist.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Roger Hazelton, *A Theological Approach to Art* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1967), 16.

¹⁵⁰ (Hazelton 1967, 19-20)

¹⁵¹ (Hazelton 1967, 21)

¹⁵² (Hazelton 1967, 23)

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Disarmed, discomfited, and defenseless before the art, reactions stir within us and invite us to engage more deeply with the work and with God. Therefore, if art is a “trap for meditation,” it may be viewed as a Divine trap. Hazelton sees that “the creative imagination, as manifested in the arts, has a threefold aspect which is strikingly akin to the trinitarian understanding of God in the Christian faith.”¹⁵³ Citing the work of Dorothy Sayers, W.H. Auden, and Howard Boardman, Hazelton suggests that the artist’s vision of the art is “the image of the Father.” The artist is above and before and present in the work, and although the vision of the piece may change, the creator is giving life to the work. Investing energy to create the work is “the image of the Word, or Son.” The vision becomes embodied in the work, made independent of its creator and yet dependent upon and in relationship with its creator. Finally, as others encounter and interact with the art, their response provides “the image of the indwelling Spirit.” The responses cannot be dictated by the creator and creation, but in the dialogue that results between the observer and the work of art, new possibilities for creativity arise.¹⁵⁴

The concept of “art as celebration” is an important one for Hazelton, and akin to it is the “vision of the unity of man [*sic*] and nature.”¹⁵⁵ He goes on to explain: “Our common creaturehood before God in the world which God loves—this is a Christian statement of the truth on which all metaphor, image, or melody is premised and made possible. It is the truth to be rejoiced in, celebrated, by both art and faith.”¹⁵⁶

Hazelton, writing in 1967, felt the pressure of modern society impinging upon that idea of “common creaturehood.” Citing technological advances and cultural changes

¹⁵³ (Hazelton 1967, 65)

¹⁵⁴ (Hazelton 1967, 65-67)

¹⁵⁵ (Hazelton 1967, 135)

¹⁵⁶ (Hazelton 1967, 137)

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that separated human beings from nature, he held out the vision that the arts could help people remain connected to their fellow creatures and that unity of human beings and nature.

The pressures that Hazelton felt in the late 1960's have only increased in the succeeding decades. Our technology has advanced far beyond the state about which he wrote; and yet, we still seek to praise God through the arts that have existed for millennia. We continue to look back at our past in order to help us discern a path to our future.

Many of the stories of the Celtic saints have the “Otherworld” quality of Celtic legends that seem far removed from our everyday reality in the early twenty-first century. Bringing forth some of those stories to help participants confront truths about following Christ, I hoped to make Hazelton’s point that “. . . art therefore ministers the mystery of the real to us.”¹⁵⁷

Hazelton also echoes Teilhard’s thoughts when he says “that to be a creature means to participate in the intention and action of the Creator.”¹⁵⁸ Indeed, Hazelton suggests that “One might therefore almost define the saint as an artist of the spiritual life, since these same qualities [power of concentration, intense detachment, and courage to follow through a vision] are much in evidence among artists. . . . The life of the saint becomes his own creative disclosure and embodiment of the grace of God which in Christ has been let loose in the world.”¹⁵⁹

Stories of the featured saints and even writings by them would help participants to engage with this creative disclosure. Perhaps visual art could provoke an encounter with the participants that would engage a different part of their brains, leading to a disclosure

¹⁵⁷ (Hazelton 1967, 43)

¹⁵⁸ (Hazelton 1967, 55)

¹⁵⁹ (Hazelton 1967, 115)

of a truth for them and for the gathered community. What types of artwork related to these saints might be available, to help increase the participants' understanding of the saints lives and ministry—and how the saints' lives might intersect with their own?

Dr. Kathy Brown, the Associate Director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Virginia Theological Seminary, introduced me to the work of Brother Mickey McGrath (see Appendix B). Brother Mickey's portrayals of Celtic saints are bright, vivid, centered in stories of their lives, and contain elements traditional to Celtic art. They certainly seemed to celebrate the glory of God and lift hearts in praise of God, as Hazelton suggests art in the Church should.¹⁶⁰

Brother Mickey was happy to make available for purchase five pieces of art related to the saints being studied—Brendan the Navigator, Brigid of Kildare, Colum Cille (Columba) of Iona, and Patrick of Ireland—and a fifth, larger work that related to a legendary saying of Brigid's and which featured the Trinity and many of the Celtic saints. In addition to Brother Mickey's engaging artwork of the saints, I also sought music about the saints that would draw the community together to creatively contemplate what these saints had to teach us about our lives.

Creative Engagement Through Music

In a lovely passage from an essay in *Music as Prayer*, Thomas Troeger writes:

To be a musician is to be continually on the way toward a fuller realization of the sonic richness suggested by those flagged notes and measures on a page. We are on the way; we have not arrived. There is always something more awaiting our discovery, something that is in the music yet beckons us onward. To play and sing music, particularly to play and sing in a church, is to feel, to experience, to intuit something of the very dynamic that is part of the journey of faith.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ (Hazelton 1967, 155)

¹⁶¹ Thomas Troeger, *Music As Prayer: The Theology and Practice of Church Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 55.

Singing is a very incarnational experience. We breathe deeply, our vocal cords vibrate, our bodies resonate with the sound produced—and sometimes, when singing with a group of people, you become aware that you are breathing and moving as one—you are no longer individuals; and with that realization, extra energy and grace wash over you.

Don Saliers writes about the debate in Christianity as to “. . . what should be sung about God and whether it should be accompanied by instruments or sung at all. . .”¹⁶² Like theology, says Saliers, music is “. . . a set of related practices. One domain is *music making*. . . a second domain. . . is *listening to music*. . . A third domain is *interpretation in the hearing of music*.”¹⁶³ This has led to much debate about the place of music in liturgy and if there is a “theology of music” or if it is subsumed in some other area of theology. All of the debate and the wide variety of music and how people react to it simply points to this truth: “Music has powers beyond language to describe.”¹⁶⁴ Saliers notes that people in every culture sing

because singing activates things that seem so central to human life itself: bodily, emotional, intellectual, and moral animation. To sing requires breath, physical production of sound, emotional resonance, use of the mind, and characteristically collaborative patterns of listening and participation. If these things are so, then the act of singing to God is a deeply theological act, which may also be a political act. . . While singing may also teach or inform faith about theological doctrine, its primary drive is to form and express faith in the realities about which worshipping congregations sing.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Don E. Saliers, *Music and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 17.

¹⁶³ (Saliers 2007, 19)

¹⁶⁴ (Saliers 2007, 30)

¹⁶⁵ (Saliers 2007, 61)

I tried to tap into these ideas by drawing together the participants to sing songs about the saints—an original song highlighting the featured spiritual gift of the saint and a traditional song about the saint. By singing about these topics, I hoped to bypass some of the more “logic-oriented” parts of the brain in order to engage a deeper, more intuitive part of the brain that could make a connection between the singers’ hearts and God’s call.

Songs Shape Us

The work of Daniel Levitin provided direction in this area. Levitin heads the Laboratory for Music Perception, Cognition and Expertise at McGill University in Montreal, Québec, Canada. His book, *The World in Six Songs*, presents the compelling thesis that six types of songs have helped to shape human beings and our cultures: “friendship, joy, comfort, knowledge, religion, and love.”¹⁶⁶ His research has led him to believe that music developed in our ancient ancestors before language, with an area in the prefrontal cortex of our brains responsible for both language and art evolving as did our species. Says Levitin:

This new neural mechanism gave us the three cognitive abilities that characterize the musical brain. The first is *perspective taking*: the ability to think about our own thoughts and to realize that other people may have thoughts or beliefs that differ from our own. The second is *representation*: the ability to think about things that aren’t right-there-in-front-of-us. The third is *rearrangement*: the ability to combine, recombine, and impose hierarchical order on elements in the world. . . These three abilities, alone and in combination, are the common foundation of language and art.¹⁶⁷

But the evolution of our musical brain not only helped us to communicate with one another and grow culturally—Levitin states that it actually played (and plays) a role in human survival. Building on the work of other neurobiologists, Levitin suggests that

¹⁶⁶ Daniel Levitin, *The World in Six Songs* (New York: Penguin Group, 2008), 4.

¹⁶⁷ (Levitin 2008, 15)

music, with its patterns of tension, resolution, and occasional surprises, provides a simulation of potentially dangerous or novel situations. Thus, music helps us to rehearse our responses by triggering the release of varying neurochemicals in the brain that are released in other situations that trigger stress or tension in us.¹⁶⁸

Just as music is found in all human societies, so is religion. Levitin notes that religions use sets of rituals, and music is incorporated into those rituals more often than not. Research has shown that during communal singing, our brains release oxytocin—an important hormone for trust-building that is also released during childbirth, lactation, and orgasm.¹⁶⁹ It would seem that a good old-fashioned hymn sing operates on more than one level!

“The power of music,” says Levitin, “. . . serves to tie an aesthetic knot around these different neurochemical states of our being, to unite our reptilian brain with our primate and human brain, to bind our thoughts to movement, memory, hopes, and desires.” Additionally, religious music, specifically, helps to motivate our actions—especially repetitive ones—and bring closure in situations that have felt unresolved to us.¹⁷⁰

Music and the Christian Faith

Musician and missionary Maeve Louise Heaney writes about how music can help human beings to link the physical and the spiritual, bypassing the distinctions we often make between the flesh and the spirit. Heaney states:

Music can teach us to feel differently: to experience reality as dynamic and corporal at the same time. Understanding reality in this way is fully Christian. God is relation: three Persons in constant interaction with one

¹⁶⁸ (Levitin 2008, 104-109)

¹⁶⁹ (Levitin 2008, 189-198)

¹⁷⁰ (Levitin 2008, 226)

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another, and with the created world which is not far or distant, but somehow redeemed, assumed and loved within and as part of the Body of the Son. This is our faith. The growing awareness and presence of music in culture and the Christian churches could be read as one way in which the Spirit is pushing us towards a fuller living out of human life in Christ, and its understanding: the “language” of beauty as expressed through music, capable of leading or even introducing us into the realm of our triune loving God, who is beauty.¹⁷¹

Music helps us to bridge the gap between the reality in which we move and the sense of hope engendered within us by engaging with beauty, especially in music. Instead of cognitively analyzing events or emotions experienced in our contemporary culture, Heaney suggests that music cuts through divisions we may see or hold within ourselves, inviting us into an experience of unity with God. “Sometimes right and wrong, black and white, major and minor inhabit our world and make more sense played and held together than analyzed and differentiated to neatly organize our human existence,” she writes.¹⁷² Music integrates what we might characterize as opposites and clarifies experience or thought processes that may become bogged down in theological terminology. Holding together these tensions in a different way for us to process, music transforms us.¹⁷³ Indeed, says Heaney, “Art as communication can have a transformative effect on the person because it can literally give us a new way of seeing, hearing, feeling, and so on.”¹⁷⁴ In giving us a new way of perceiving, music can help us to understand that “the truth of the ascension and the Mystical Body of Christ is just this: God’s love is not distant; the Creator not only loved us enough to incarnate Himself so as

¹⁷¹ Maeve Louise Heaney, *Music as Theology: What Music Says About the Word*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series, Kindle electronic edition. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), Location 4530.

¹⁷² (Heaney 2014, Location 5184)

¹⁷³ (Heaney 2014, Location 5686)

¹⁷⁴ (Heaney 2014, Location 5820)

to reveal and redeem, but also to remain implicated in the world, assuming us in Himself, in his Body.”¹⁷⁵

Heaney asserts, “The encounter with Jesus Christ *changes* a person.”¹⁷⁶

Although that might seem obvious, she explains that the change results as we begin to understand that we are held and loved within the body of Christ. Heaney believes music can help us to navigate this new, transformed reality.¹⁷⁷ Music, which so affects our bodies as we listen, sing, or play an instrument, is an embodied experience, and so immersing ourselves in music may help us to accept our embodied existence, laying the groundwork for further transformation.¹⁷⁸ As we continue to grow and transform as Christians, we realize that we are not only part of the body Christ; we are called to build up the body of Christ, as well.¹⁷⁹ Living the reality of being loved by God, being empowered by that love to reach out in love to others, and then connecting with and expressing that love through music all help us to see the Beautiful in one another and in creation.

Theologian and musician Jeremy Begbie approaches this same topic from a different direction. Music has powers brought about by “equilibrium-tension-resolution (ETR),” echoing the “orientation-disorientation-reorientation” of the Psalms, as described by Walter Brueggemann.¹⁸⁰ Various ETRs operate simultaneously in music, which is one of its distinctive powers. Meter, downbeats, tones, and timing all come into play. Begbie explains that “. . . music subverts the common assumption that there are only two

¹⁷⁵ (Heaney 2014, Location 7575)

¹⁷⁶ (Heaney 2014, Location 7786)

¹⁷⁷ (Heaney 2014, Location 7792-7814)

¹⁷⁸ (Heaney 2014, Location 7850)

¹⁷⁹ (Heaney 2014, Location 7911)

¹⁸⁰ Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth (Engaging Culture): Christian Wisdom in the World of Music*, Kindle electronic edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), Location 5686.

types of time: linear and circular. Although directional, musical time is neither linear nor circular—it is multistoried.”¹⁸¹ Begbie relates this multistoried nature to the arc of Biblical stories, from Genesis through to the Resurrection, allowing us to perceive hope because we are operating on more than one level at a time.

He goes on to highlight three particular ideas that embody the power of music for Christians. The first is freedom to engage in relationships with others, including God. This freedom helps us to grow as individuals and to grow in relation to others, much as a plucked harp string will cause its harmonic siblings to vibrate with it—each string is separate, yet they vibrate in sympathy with one another and produce harmonic tones.¹⁸²

The second powerful concept is that “music can serve to bring and hold together different dimensions of the gospel.”¹⁸³ Using the example of J.S. Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*, Begbie explains how different notes sounding together, the use of contrasting keys within the piece, and even the layering of words over top the music all help to express the layers of meaning within the Gospel of Matthew’s Passion in ways that theologians struggle to make clear.¹⁸⁴

The third concept Begbie proposes is that “music can serve to embody the kind of Trinitarian space in which we are invited to share.”¹⁸⁵ Rather than treating the Trinity as a “mathematical conundrum,” Begbie suggests using the metaphor of a three-note chord to consider the Trinity: “Father, Son, and Spirit mutually indwelling, without musical exclusion, and yet without merger, each occupying the same space, ‘sounding through’

¹⁸¹ (Begbie 2007, Location 5746)

¹⁸² (Begbie 2007, Location 5898-5966)

¹⁸³ (Begbie 2007, Location 5968)

¹⁸⁴ (Begbie 2007, Location 5969-5996)

¹⁸⁵ (Begbie 2007, Location 5996)

one another, yet irreducibly distinct, reciprocally enhancing, and establishing one another *as other*.”¹⁸⁶ For musicians, this is an appealing aural illustration of the Trinity.

Music has great emotional power, as well, notes Begbie, a truth that has been controversial at times in the history of the Church. On one level, as we listen to music or make music, the sounds themselves may evoke a response in us, so that a phrase we consider beautiful engenders emotions within us. On a second level, as those emotions are aroused within us, we associate them with our surroundings.¹⁸⁷ The emotions we associate with that particular musical piece will be tapped every time we hear the music after that. But there is another way music can affect our emotions—as Daniel Levitin also reported, music can help us to rehearse our responses to different situations without having to fully experience the stress associated with it. We can grow emotionally by connecting with the music and how it affects us. Begbie states, “By being drawn into a fictional situation like this, my emotional life can be exercised, stretched, widened, and deepened. . . without the immediate need to do anything about the situation.”¹⁸⁸

What is true for us emotionally is also true spiritually. While stepping back from positing any theories to fully explain the connections between music and emotion, Begbie observes that music

can concentrate our emotional life, thus representing us and in the process educating, shaping, and reshaping us. This dynamic, we have discovered, bears a striking resemblance to a movement at the heart of our transformation in Christ: Christ concentrating and re-forming our emotions as he represents us before the Father, a movement that is integral to Christian prayer and worship. . . [M]usic can be part of the process itself, part of God’s work of emotional renewal.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ (Begbie 2007, Location 6008)

¹⁸⁷ (Begbie 2007, Location 6091)

¹⁸⁸ (Begbie 2007, Location 6117)

¹⁸⁹ (Begbie 2007, Location 6264)

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As we seek to strengthen our relationships with God and the members of our faith community, music may help us to get in touch with our emotions and also to respond more accurately to the emotions expressed by others. Researchers find that music helps us to make subconscious connections about the world around us. They suggest that music is an “honest signal,” indicating that we perceive the emotions expressed by a singer to be more truthful than emotions expressed by someone simply speaking to us. Levitin believes this is why we respond so strongly to love songs, and also why so much anger is directed toward a singer who is caught lip synching. This connection between truth, love, and song relates to the vulnerability we experience when we love someone. As Levitin says, “Real love requires an almost irrational trust and faith in another person.”¹⁹⁰

Vulnerability

Love requires vulnerability. Love requires us to let down our guard and be honest with another person. Even when that other “person” is God. Perhaps most *especially* with God.

Our culture teaches us to not be vulnerable, but instead to self-protect or even go on the offensive in order to prevent someone else from hurting us, physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Many Christians have been wounded by clergy or fellow parishioners, and companies that insure churches do their best to provide training to mitigate such disasters. People expect churches to be communities where trust, empathy, and love flourish among their members, who then bring those qualities back out into the world.

¹⁹⁰ (Levitin 2008, 270-271)

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Social worker, counselor, and researcher Brené Brown points out how subversive vulnerability is in our culture and how much work it takes to be vulnerable with someone else. “We need to feel trust to be vulnerable and we need to be vulnerable in order to trust,” she notes.¹⁹¹ She goes on to state that disengagement—withdrawing from a relationship—is the “most dangerous in terms of corroding the trust connection.”¹⁹²

Brown points out that religion provides an example of where disengagement occurs in our culture. This stems in part from religious leaders who do not live out the values they profess; when their hypocrisy is revealed, their followers feel betrayed. A second reason for this religious disengagement, says Brown, is a result of the frightening times in which we live. People are searching for certainties, and religious leaders often teach a black-and-white form of spirituality that does not help people grapple with the ambiguous realities of the world in which we live. People would benefit from having their religious leaders “teaching and modeling how to wrestle with the unknown and how to embrace mystery. . . . Spiritual connection and engagement is not built on compliance, it’s the product of love, belonging, and vulnerability,” says Brown.¹⁹³ We experience disconnection and disengagement because, she says, “We can’t give people what we don’t have. Who we are matters immeasurably more than what we know or who we want to be.”¹⁹⁴

Brown emphasizes the importance of clarifying our values and taking note of any disparity “. . . between our practiced values (what we’re actually doing, thinking, and

¹⁹¹ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly* (New York: Gotham Books, 2012), 47.

¹⁹² (Brown 2012, 52)

¹⁹³ (Brown 2012, 176-177)

¹⁹⁴ (Brown 2012, 177)

feeling) and our aspirational values (what we want to do, think, and feel).”¹⁹⁵ Brown calls this gap between our practiced and aspirational values “the disengagement divide.”¹⁹⁶ When we do not act in accordance with our values, we disconnect from ourselves. Others perceive that and disconnect from us, in turn; without attending to those dynamics, others will disengage and withdraw.

Drawing on the “Mind the Gap” signs from the London Underground, Brown explains:

We have to pay attention to the space between where we’re actually standing and where we want to be. . . [W]e have to practice the values that we’re holding out as important in our culture. Minding the gap requires both an embrace of our own vulnerability and cultivation of shame resilience. . . We don’t have to be perfect, just engaged and committed to aligning values with action.¹⁹⁷

Engaged Leadership

Brené Brown’s theories on leadership guided me as I developed the act of ministry and planned to carry it out. In choosing which stories about the saints to include, which of their spiritual gifts to focus on, which prayers to use, and in writing an original song for each week, I dared to be vulnerable with the participants in the Lenten adult education program.

I felt nervous and even fearful as I planned the act of ministry for my Doctor of Ministry degree. I felt that I was stepping out on a limb with the adult education group by putting together material to which the participants had not been previously exposed and by engaging with my own creativity. Would the participants engage with the

¹⁹⁵ (Brown 2012, 177)

¹⁹⁶ (Brown 2012, 177)

¹⁹⁷ (Brown 2012, 181-182)

material? Would they connect with the stories, the music, and the art about the saints? Would they grow bored, having the same presenter each week?

Brown says, “For leaders, vulnerability often looks and feels like discomfort.”¹⁹⁸ Brown considers it crucial for organizations to normalize discomfort, writing, “If leaders expect real learning, critical thinking, and change, then discomfort should be normalized and leaders should tell those with whom they are working: ‘We believe growth and learning are uncomfortable so it’s going to happen here—you’re going to feel that way. We want you to know that it’s normal and it’s an expectation here. You’re not alone and we ask that you stay open and lean into it.’”¹⁹⁹

These are words of wisdom for today’s church leaders, lay and ordained. Rather than moving deeper into isolation within our church communities, shutting out those who do not worship in the same way or who value different styles of liturgy, leaders could work to bring about encounters with new or different liturgy, music, and art. Encouraging parishioners to identify their discomfort and examine the differences that are contributing to that feeling could provide an opportunity to look for the beauty in the diversity before them.

Normalizing discomfort is not the only leadership value Brown espouses. She reminds leaders that respect and ensuring the dignity of all individuals are the highest values that an organization can hold—values espoused in the Baptismal Covenant. In addition, she notes that empathy, accountability, and belonging are all critical values that help organizations build the kind of culture where growth and learning thrive.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ (Brown 2012, 211)

¹⁹⁹ (Brown 2012, 198)

²⁰⁰ (Brown 2012, 196)

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While Brown considers empathy to be a core value for any leader of an organization that wants its members to thrive, Edwin H. Friedman believed that empathy was undermining our society. Friedman believed that society had regressed, with leaders depending on data instead of clear decision-making and using empathy instead of accountability.²⁰¹ Friedman argued that the use of the word “empathy” had strayed far from its original meaning in the field of aesthetics, “to feel in” as one observed a work of art of any type, putting oneself into the work in order to experience it from a different level.²⁰² As the word traveled outside its original field of use, said Friedman, and began to be defined as “feeling for others,” its use led to people become less self-aware and less self-differentiated.²⁰³

Having used Friedman’s work for a decade before encountering Brown’s work, this collision between two major influences in my life and work concerned me. In re-reading key parts of their works, however, I have concluded that the difference lies in the basic understanding of empathy. Brown writes, “Empathy is connecting with the emotion that someone is experiencing, not the event or the circumstance. . . . It’s simply listening, holding space, withholding judgment, emotionally connecting, and communicating that incredibly healing message of ‘You’re not alone.’”²⁰⁴ For Brown, empathy empowers the one who receives it, helping him or her to live more fully into his or her potential. Despite Friedman’s curmudgeonly rant against empathy, the end point appears to be the same for Brown and for him: What Brown would call “daring greatly,”

²⁰¹ Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury Books, 2007), 24.

²⁰² (Friedman 1999, 136)

²⁰³ (Friedman 1999, 136-137)

²⁰⁴ (Brown 2012, 81)

Friedman would call “differentiation,” defined as “the capacity to become oneself out of one’s self.”²⁰⁵

Friedman stated, “Differentiation refers to a direction in life rather than a state of being.”²⁰⁶ It is a lifelong path to follow that involves practices of remaining non-anxious when others are anxious; taking an “I” position when others are insisting on “we” positions; being clear on one’s boundaries; and taking responsibility for one’s own emotions and responses, not blaming others.²⁰⁷ He goes on to explain, “Differentiation is . . . being *rooted* in the leader’s own sense of self rather than focused on that of his or her followers. . . Furthermore, the power inherent in a leader’s presence does not reside in physical or economic strength but in the nature of his or her own being. . .”²⁰⁸ This dovetailed nicely with the definition of differentiation as explained by Teilhard (please see Chapter Three).

Doing my best to incorporate the ideas of both Brown and Friedman assisted me in carrying out my work in the Doctor of Ministry program. I sought to walk that path of self-differentiation, and when sabotage occurred (as Friedman notes it always will), Brown’s work on shame and vulnerability helped me to view the congregational culture in which I functioned from a different angle.²⁰⁹ Embarking on this act of ministry was a step in *my* self-differentiation. It allowed me to hold up values important to me (the Baptismal Covenant; the concept of spiritual gifts; the belief that we can learn from studying the saints; the importance of the arts in shaping our values; and the belief that God is calling us to “be more”) and say to the participants, “This is what I believe. What

²⁰⁵ (Friedman 1999, 183)

²⁰⁶ (Friedman 1999, 183)

²⁰⁷ (Friedman 1999, 183)

²⁰⁸ (Friedman 1999, 230-231)

²⁰⁹ (Friedman 1999, 246-247)

about you?” I hoped that in exploring the lives of these saints through the arts and story, we would embark on a journey together that would help us to understand ourselves better as individuals, as a parish, and as parishes seeking to work together in order to glorify God.

Spiritual Leadership

Missional leadership specialist Reggie McNeal writes about the challenges of being a spiritual leader. “Spiritual leadership is so critical because what is at stake are human beings made in the image of God and the world they leave behind for others to inhabit. Spiritual leadership has as its focus nothing less than the kingdom of God.”²¹⁰ McNeal cites four specific habits that shape the heart of a leader: “Look for God. Keep learning. Say yes to him [*sic*]. Stay grateful.”²¹¹ These habits not only help a spiritual leader to grow, they help the people he or she serves to grow, as well, and that impact may be felt for generations to come.²¹²

Similar leadership habits were noted by Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky in their book, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. A leader’s ability to inspire others, they write, depends upon practicing “two skills . . . listening from the heart and speaking from the heart.”²¹³ Leaders who listen from the heart do not simply parrot back what people tell them; they seek to understand the often subtle unspoken emotional messages people send when they are grappling with an idea or problem. Allowing time for silence and then speaking from the heart, relating what the leader understands from

²¹⁰ Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 187.

²¹¹ (McNeal 2011, 186)

²¹² (McNeal 2011, 192)

²¹³ Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 264.

listening to others so actively and compassionately, helps the leader's message to be clearly communicated.²¹⁴

Our hearts hold us back from making adaptive changes, assert Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky. This means that leaders must be willing to display emotion, not shy away from it, when speaking from the heart in order to help people understand that it is not only permissible but necessary to engage with one's emotions when moving toward change.²¹⁵ Leaders are encouraged to "speak musically," tuning in to how one's own voice sounds and practicing speaking calmly and confidently, which will encourage others to listen to your message.²¹⁶ To help communicate that message effectively, the leader should "make each word count," considering what shades of meaning words and phrases may have for the listeners.²¹⁷

Pastor, spiritual director, and author Gil Stafford suggests that leaders are also wisdom teachers, shaping a vision of the future for a group of people from what has been learned and passed down by those who have gone before us:

The leader's vision will reflect wisdom and shine with God's promises, inspiring us. The vision will provide us with a possibility of a better way of life, encouraging us. And the vision will create an enthusiasm among the people about the work to be done. As a people we are inspired by the promise of the vision, encouraged by the hope, enthused by the expectation created by vision, and moved to work in fulfilling the vision. The leader who is a wisdom guide will see a vision that liberates the congregation to become the people God is calling them to be.²¹⁸

²¹⁴ (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 264-270)

²¹⁵ (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 270-271)

²¹⁶ (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 271-273)

²¹⁷ (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2009, 273)

²¹⁸ Gil W. Stafford, *When Leadership and Spiritual Direction Meet: Stories and Reflections for Congregational Life*, Kindle electronic edition. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014), Location 2702.

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Stafford goes on to say, “A wisdom story creates a vessel for transformation within the storyteller, the listener, and the community.”²¹⁹ By relating a story to something the listeners are experiencing, the leader invites the listeners to make their own connections, seeking the words of wisdom available for them to apply to their own lives. Stafford notes that “a wisdom story can be a biblical tale, an ancient myth, a parable, or a personal experience. After telling a story, I am sometimes asked if it was a ‘true story.’ Good wisdom stories contain truth though maybe not fact.”²²⁰

Given this emphasis on wisdom and spiritual leadership, it was interesting to encounter a similar principle emphasized by pastoral counselor and systems theory author Ronald Richardson. He links the Biblical notion of wisdom with the systems theory concept of differentiation:

Differentiation is equivalent to the biblical concept of wisdom, which is a quality independent of a person’s intelligence quotient and educational degrees. Wisdom has to do with people’s ability to effectively use what they know. Genuinely wise people tend to be better differentiated people; they have a more solid sense of self. Our image of the wise person as ‘calm, cool, and collected,’ even in the midst of a tumultuous situation, speaks to the fact that wisdom requires a lower level of chronic anxiety and a greater ability to think clearly in anxious situations.²²¹

Richardson explains that differentiation helps us to know how to relate to others authentically and respectfully, permitting us to speak our truth and allows others to speak theirs without feeling threatened and then becoming anxious and reactive. It also allows leaders to calmly point toward a vision of the future and invite people to join in making that vision reality without becoming emotionally fused with others. Learning from one another’s differences—seeing the beauty in the differences, one could say—allows for

²¹⁹ (Stafford 2014, Location 2872)

²²⁰ (Stafford 2014, Location 2873)

²²¹ Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 85.

emotional and spiritual growth among all of the members of the group, including the leader.²²²

Applying the Learning

The first two habits noted by McNeal—looking for God and continuing to learn—were included in the act of ministry. Participants were encouraged to look for God each week by remaining alert for signs of the saint’s spiritual gift being expressed in themselves, in their congregation, and in the world around them. Each week, we learned about a new saint, we prayed using material written by some of the saints or written about them, and we learned more about Celtic Christianity and its contributions to the way we practice our faith today.

Adaptive leadership techniques were used, as well. I literally spoke musically, offering material to help participants to explore the saints’ spiritual gifts through story, poetry, and song. We focused on one particular spiritual gift each week, in an effort not to overwhelm participants with too much information and yet introduce emotional and spiritual content for everyone to consider. We kept a short time of silence at the end of each evening, so that participants could reflect on the material covered and what was touching their heart as they prepared to head back out into the world.

The materials used to offer information about the saints provided a great deal of wisdom to absorb, reflect upon, and incorporate into the lives of both the individual participants and their congregations. As noted by Gil Stafford, the stories about the saints held a great deal of truth, even though some of the incidents highlighted may not have happened in reality. On a *spiritual* level, the stories told great truths about what it means to journey with God. From a systems theory perspective, the wisdom of the saints

²²² (Richardson 1996, 86-87)

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invited the participants to share their own wisdom about their spiritual journeys and to stand in their own truth about which learnings each week they could apply to their lives, and to the life of their congregation. Through this work, we found that engaging with the baptismal promises raised questions for the participants.

Brené Brown speaks about “minding the gap.” And perhaps a gap in our understanding of baptismal spirituality contributes to our fears of not being able to follow through with our baptismal promises. If we feel we do not understand the Good News of God in Christ, how can we proclaim it to others? If we do not love ourselves, how we can love our neighbor? If we feel we do not have justice and peace in our lives or that we are not treated with dignity, how can we approach others with justice and peace and respect their dignity?

It does, indeed, require courage to risk being vulnerable in order to reach out to others and share those aspects of God’s love, expressed in our lives. It requires trusting God to protect us and continuing to love us, even when we fail; it requires trusting ourselves enough to take a first step. And it requires trusting that others will be open to what we have to offer, when we show up as who we are and speak the love that God has placed in our hearts for our fellow human beings.

Given the neurological and emotional responses underlying communal singing, such an experience—theoretically—could help increase trust among participants. By creating a communal experience of singing about saints, their relationships with God, with other human beings, and with other creatures, I hoped to tap into these subconscious regions of participants’ brains in order to help them rehearse how to live our baptismal promises. Highlighting a different spiritual gift each week, singing about how that saint

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lived out that gift, and reflecting, through song, on other aspects of that saint's life, I hoped to set the stage for everyone involved in the program to begin to imagine how their lives could change in order to live more fully into our baptismal promises—by trusting God and trusting themselves enough to meet others where they are, a hallmark of Celtic Christian traditions.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS

For someone seeking to attend a church, it is easy enough to find one and to learn when its services are held. It is even easy enough to get oneself into a pew at the appointed time. But can attending church services help someone to learn more about him- or herself; to learn how to connect with God; to learn of God's love? Can the services help someone to grow spiritually and accept the mandate of the Great Commandment as given to us by Jesus in Mark 12:29-31 (NRSV): to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, *and* to love one's neighbor as oneself? If someone finds an Episcopal Church, can attending services and joining in the life of the community help him or her to live into the final three promises of the Baptismal Covenant: proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ; seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself; and strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?²²³

When someone becomes an active member of a church community, it is easy to fall into routines and habits—even in carrying out ministries and service projects—that do not require much soul-searching or reflection on *where* God is in the activity or *why* one is doing something. Spiritual growth may stagnate for the individual, not helping him or her to awaken to the concept of wholeness of being, of which James Fowler wrote. Such stagnation or a sense of being “stuck” prevents someone from exploring the possibility that our lives unfold as a never-ending pilgrimage with, in, and through God. The idea of experiencing transformation, even if supported by someone's church community, may either not be on the person's radar or may be experienced as a fear of

²²³ (BCP 1979, 305)

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change at any level. This experience of spiritual stagnation may lead people not only out of the church, but further away from God. And yet, as Nicola Slee identified, many women experience times of feeling alienated from God and others during their spiritual journeys. This may be experienced as feelings of stagnation, disconnection, and impasse, among others.²²⁴

While some in the church community experience such feelings, others may remain engaged with the church community, continuing to support ministries and activities in which participation has declined significantly. This makes such events burdensome, rather than life-giving, to those who serve in them and those who are targeted benefit from them. As fewer people attempt to carry out a greater number of activities, the entire church community begins to take on an air of desperation and exhaustion. The leaders begin to hear (or may even lead) the recurring chorus, “We need more people! We need young families! We need more money!” Alas, those are not spiritual responses to the problem.

One thing to consider is that a gap may exist between the expectations that an ordained leader of a community has for the members of the community and what the members themselves want. As a priest, I believe an important part of my role is to help awaken the hearts of the people whom I serve so that they *want* to know that they are on a journey with God that will help them to live more whole-hearted lives, feeling more connected with God, their fellow human beings, creation, and themselves.

As a priest, I am also aware that not everyone sitting in a pew for a worship service *wants* to have his or her heart awakened. Some people are quite content to attend church—whatever that means in the context of their particular faith community—and not

²²⁴ (Slee 2004, 81-107)

become more involved with the church community or God or exploring any personal challenges.

James Fowler's categories offer insight at this point. Is it necessary to try to move *all* of humanity forward to universalizing faith? Or could it be more helpful to think of humanity's faith development plotted on a bell curve, accepting that some will continue moving ever forward toward the wholeness anticipated in "Universalizing Faith," while others will remain in the "Mythic-Literal Faith" path? Indeed, using Nicola Slee's findings, can something as simple (and complex) as offering opportunities for people to engage in conversations about their faith journeys provide enough impetus to help them to grow spiritually?

A Jolt of Energy

Having experienced spiritual stagnation in a church of which I was a member as a layperson, and having observed the withdrawal of some members and the feverish activity of other members in the churches in which I have served as both layperson and priest, I wanted to develop and offer a program that would help people in the pews to reflect on how their spiritual gifts intersect with our Baptismal Covenant—especially the final three promises we are asked to make when we renew those vows. I also hoped they would learn some new approaches for deepening their relationship with God.

The idea of pilgrimage as a literal path to a spiritual transformation runs through a number of world religions. While everyone cannot undertake a physical pilgrimage to a distant holy site, taking a "pilgrimage in place" is something anyone can do, thanks to our senses, our creativity, and our current technology. Being steeped in the traditions of Celtic music, folklore, and Christianity, I turned to what helps me to personally deepen

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my relationship with God in order to offer that to others in this project. My hope was that the program would offer a jolt of spiritual energy to the participants—especially those who committed to complete the journaling exercise and who consented to be interviewed.

Offering the program in the context of a Lenten adult education series dovetailed perfectly with collaborative efforts that other local Episcopal priests and I had been exploring for several years. I designed the program to fit the established Lenten series format we used of holding one session per week for five weeks, beginning with a simple dinner of soup and bread, followed by the presentation and group exercises.

Using various techniques to assess what people were learning and integrating into their lives provided a lot of data through which to sift. The weekly one-word responses provided a snapshot that could indicate general trends, while the questionnaires, journals, and interviews provided more in-depth information about how some participants were processing the material presented, their interactions with others in the sessions, and how they were incorporating material into their everyday lives.

The rate of participation in each of these assessment activities appeared to reflect the idea that not everyone was comfortable moving toward a universalizing stage of faith. Some people are content as they are and others feel restless, knowing they are moving toward *something* and wondering how to reach that point or how to respond to the call they hear from God. Some people were not keen on wrestling with our Baptismal vows; others thoughtfully considered them and looked at their daily lives and how they lived out those vows. Summaries of the data collected may be found in Appendix C.

Practical Data Analysis

The interviews provided the most in-depth reflection and assessment material for the study. The responses given in the interviews indicate that the program did, indeed, help respondents to examine their spiritual growth from several different viewpoints.

Learning about the saints and *their* spiritual gifts allowed participants to draw parallels with their own lives. The participants thus demonstrated both the conversational and personalized faithing strategies outlined by Slee.²²⁵ Such reflection helped them examine what they offer to others as they strive to follow Jesus by living into their baptismal vows—with God’s help.

Yet even the one-word answers people wrote each week to summarize the most important thing they would take home and think about provided insight into how engaged the participants were in the program. These responses reflected the level of engagement people were experiencing or were willing to *admit to* experiencing each week.

One response from the first week keeps me humble and continually reflecting on how to connect with people in my work as a priest; that response was “Soup.” As tempting as it would be to think that perhaps this was a metaphor for feeding someone spiritually, I do not think that is the case. For that person, the soup that night was the most memorable and nourishing thing about the program.

As the weeks unfolded, those one-word responses tended to group around themes that reflected the material presented each night. The responses also indicated that the participants engaged with the material and were attempting to integrate it into their knowledge base and their viewpoint on what it means to be a follower of Christ. The

²²⁵ (Slee 2004, 62-65, 70-74)

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responses grew more thoughtful as the weeks progressed; no more “soup” answers appeared.

The presentation on the fifth and final week of the program featured two stories. One spoke about a legend concerning the re-interment of the bones of Patrick, Columba, and Brigid in Ireland; the other story introduced St. Ita, who had been one of St. Brendan’s teachers. The group discussion questions for the evening were: How can we bring what we have learned back to our parishes? Are there things in our parishes that need to be exhumed, blessed, and re-interred in order for our parishes to move forward? Especially in collaborative efforts?

The one-word responses from that final week indicated that at least four of the participants were more deeply engaged personally with the material than others. The questions seemed to have awakened spiritual questions or yearnings within those four participants, as they wrote “question;” “ponder;” “enlightening;” and “thought-provoking.” The rest of the one-word responses for that week fell into two themes: participants either listed qualities they believed their *parish* needed to thrive in the future, or they listed qualities exhibited by the saints discussed that the participants would like to cultivate in *themselves*.

The series of questionnaires that were administered—pre-program; one week after the conclusion of the program; and four weeks after the conclusion of the program—yielded some interesting insights, as noted in Chapter Two. Participation in completing the questionnaires declined between the pre-program and post-program rounds. While attendance at the weekly sessions and providing the one-word response each week was

fairly constant, sustaining interest in responding via the questionnaires, journals, and interviews flagged as time progressed.

Engaging with stories about saints was a new experience for a number of participants, who had been members of faith traditions that did not emphasize saints. Some had listed “St. Francis” as their favorite saint before the program began, for example, because they felt they did not know enough about any other saint, but they knew about St. Francis from services featuring a blessing of the animals. The most surprising finding from these responses was learning that St. Brendan was the saint that four of the nine respondents were thinking about the *most* four weeks after the program ended, although none had named him as a favorite in the earlier questionnaires.

The respondents stated they were thinking about St. Brendan because he was willing to give up everything he knew and set off on a dangerous journey into the unknown. Over the weeks between hearing the presentation about Brendan and responding to the final questionnaire, the participants made an internal association between their lives and the story of Brendan’s. The respondents stated they were thinking about St. Brendan because he was willing to give up everything he knew and set off on a dangerous journey into the unknown. One person linked that with her own current journey as she prepared to sell her house and move to another state. Considering Nicola Slee’s work, the participants felt drawn into relationship with Brendan and personalized his story. They then drew on metaphors to describe the parallels between their lives and Brendan’s.²²⁶ They found themselves resonating with qualities of his personality or his story as time passed that had not been apparent to them immediately after the program ended. This conclusion could be borne out in the areas where

²²⁶ (Slee 2004, 65-74)

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participants perceived changes in themselves, which they associated with their participation in the program. These perceived changes were noted in the interviews conducted with the seven respondents who agreed to be interviewed

As all seven of these respondents were women, the insights from Nicola Slee's work were valuable in reviewing their responses. In the women she interviewed, Slee found "the women's spirituality was profoundly relational in nature, rooted in a strong sense of connection to others, to the wider world and to God as the source of relational power."²²⁷ I discovered the same thing as the women used examples from their relationships with their families, friends, and workplace to explain points they wanted to make. They referred to God or to Jesus and their prayer practices, indicating an ongoing relationship with God that sustained them. A number of the women mentioned feeling connected to the nature through pets or taking walks. Using a semi-structured interview format provided the women with both the space and the opportunity to speak about their spiritual reflections as they felt moved to do so, again affirming Slee's findings that spiritual leaders "need to create settings and practices which reflect and endorse women's relational and conversational ways of knowing."²²⁸

Exploring the stories of the Celtic saints allowed participants to wrestle with the differences between the saints' experiences as Christians and the participants' own lived experience of faith. The truth and beauty that arose from exploring those differences allowed at least some of the participants to make new cognitive and spiritual connections between the Baptismal Covenant and how they lived their faith in the world. This was evidenced by their answers to the questionnaires, the themes revealed in their journal

²²⁷ (Slee 2004, 173)

²²⁸ (Slee 2004, 173)

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entries, and their interview responses. As they dwelt with the material about the saints, they formed relationships with the saints that allowed them to notice similarities between their own lives and the saints. The relationship also encouraged them to acknowledge and claim their own spiritual strengths, aided by the varying techniques used to help the women engage with the material about the saints.

The use of music, poetry, visual art, and offering participants the opportunity to journal in whatever manner fed them spiritually. One interviewee said, “Music is always moving for me, and artwork, too.” Said another:

Music is my thing. The songs were so in the Irish folk song mode, and the music was right in the mode, and I loved it. [You] told stories in a memorable way with the songs. And the prayers and poetry—lyrical, spiritual; it touches me; it hits on the ‘this is not a cut-and-dried thing.’ You know it in your heart, that it is visceral, and can’t limit your own need to understand; you were not intended to fully understand. That’s where faith and trust come in. I was impressed with the courage of these saints.

This provided another area of agreement with Slee’s research, where she noted that “women in the past codified and transmitted their experience through poetry, hymnody, craft forms and popular piety, including much that is now anonymous.”²²⁹ Such forms were not considered intellectual enough to be valid ways of teaching theology as it became an academic discipline enshrined in universities, theological schools, and the hierarchical Church, where women were not given leadership roles for many, many centuries. Hidden but still vibrant, women’s spirituality was nurtured in small groups where women could tell stories as they gathered together, doing “women’s work.”

While the visual art, music, stories, and poetry fed the women who participated in this act of ministry, the question remains as to whether such techniques would help men

²²⁹ (Slee 2004, 176)

to explore their spirituality. Given the drop-out rate of the male participants between completing the first questionnaire (one week prior to the beginning of the program) and the second questionnaire (one week after the program ended), my tentative hypothesis would be that a different format for gathering data from men might be more successful. The men participated in the weekly “one-word” exercise, so perhaps a similar weekly question that could be answered very briefly would work well.

It might also prove fruitful to develop a study that would involve only female participants in order to focus on issues of women’s power and spirituality. Drawing on spiritual role models whose writings survive—for example, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila, Angela of Foligno, and Thérèse of Lisieux—a similar program to help women explore their own voices within the structure of today’s Church could provide further insights into how women live and express their spirituality in ways that may not be viewed as normative within existing institutional structures and literature.

Looking Forward

As presented, the program and the follow-up exercises were designed to help engage participants’ imaginations and enhance their spiritual growth. For at least one-quarter of the regular participants, those goals appear to have been met.

The overall *general* participation in the program was excellent, as measured by attendance and involvement in small-group discussions and writing the “one word” response each week. The program continued the experience of collaborative work between two of the three parishes involved (the third parish had minimal participation), and was thus counted as another collaborative success by the lay and ordained leaders of those two parishes.

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When it came to the level of commitment required in order to participate fully in the study—completing the questionnaires, journaling, and being interviewed—participation declined significantly. Everyone who wished to attend the sessions was welcome, however, which is probably why overall attendance remained stable even as study participation declined.

In addition, very few respondents committed to undertaking a *new* “act of ministry,” either in their own lives or in the life of the parish. Most respondents cited the ministries in which they were *already* involved and stated they planned to continue in those ministries. Any wider involvement in the community or collaboratively was not viewed by the participants as a priority at the end of the study period.

The content and format of the program were designed to be “portable”—able to be used by other churches or small groups interested in learning more about Celtic Christianity and how journeying with some of its hero-saints may help others to grow spiritually. The stories and poetry used are well-documented and available for others to explore further, should they desire. Some of the songs used were traditional hymns and songs associated with the saints; others were written by the author for this program, but would be made available for others to use if requested.

If presenting the program again as an educational and spiritual experience, I would advise continuing the “one word” exercise. This not only encourages the participants to think about the presentation and what they learned or were challenged by that evening, it also provides immediate feedback to the presenter. I would suggest offering the journaling exercise as an option for those who would like to journal or who have heard about it and want to explore it as a spiritual exercise.

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I would also suggest forming an optional small group, which would meet at a different time, for participants who would like to continue to meet and talk about their experiences while participating in the program and their ongoing spiritual journey afterward. Ideally, the group would be facilitated by a lay or ordained person with training in group leadership and/or spiritual direction.

God loves us and is always seeking us. God is always inviting us to awaken to that truth and participate more fully in our lives so that we can be the people God calls us to be. *Any* program that a church would opt to offer to its members that could lead them into this awareness would be invaluable. Any program or spiritual practice that would help participants talk regularly to God throughout the day would be a smashing success. This particular program—“Living Into Our Baptism: A Pilgrimage with Celtic Saints”—is only one such path. Given its particular Celtic flavor, it would probably be accepted more readily by some congregations over others, perhaps in areas where the descendants of Irish, Scottish, or Scots-Irish immigrants live.

The program could also be used as a way to connect with people who do not attend church but who are interested in all things Celtic. For people who consider themselves to be culturally Celtic and on the fringes of Christianity, learning more about the Christian traditions associated with these saints could open a door for their spiritual journeys, as well. Notifying local Celtic associations about the program would at least be good publicity for the church hosting it, even if no one from the outside groups attended.

One of the distinguishing features of the saints discussed in this program was their willingness to meet others where they were—physically as well as spiritually—in order to be companions on the journey, leading others ever closer to God. I believe that is what

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church leaders are called to do. We could learn from Brendan, Brigid, Columba, and Patrick about how to bring the reality of God's love, through Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, into the churches we serve. That love is transformative and spreads beyond the boundaries of the Church. It can change the world.

CONCLUSION

As a priest, I believe one of my most important obligations is to help people connect with God and with one another. I believe that the promises we make at baptism, which are called to mind whenever we renew our Baptismal Covenant, provide the blueprint for living a life immersed in God's love, through Jesus Christ. Conversations with parishioners and observations about participation in the ministries in the Churches in which I served led me to believe that people were unsure how to live out those baptismal promises in their daily lives. I designed a project to help raise participants' awareness of their own spiritual gifts while considering what our baptism calls us to live out in the world.

I hypothesized that, as an outcome of this intervention, participants would be able to express a new understanding of how the Baptismal Covenant relates to their own lived spirituality. I also predicted that participants would be able to name how they could engage one spiritual gift by taking one action in order to more effectively connect with the wider community and carry out one of the promises made in the Baptismal Covenant.

My thesis stated:

The Book of Common Prayer invites Episcopalians to regularly renew and live in to their Baptismal Covenant, yet offers no practical suggestions as to how they may accomplish this.

An adult education program that engages participants' imaginations through encounters with four Celtic saints via story, song, and visual art, and which provides opportunities for individual and communal reflection, will allow each participant to engage with the Baptismal Covenant and lead him/her to identify a concrete act of

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ministry to be undertaken in order to live out one of the final three vows of the Baptismal Covenant (proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ; seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself; and striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being).²³⁰

Participants will demonstrate an increased awareness of their baptismal identity and identify how to live this out in a way that is potentially transformative both for themselves and for their communities.

Reflection on Findings

The data from the study support the thesis as true. The nine participants who completed all of the questionnaires (seven of whom also participated in the interviews) did, indeed, engage with the Baptismal Covenant and sought to apply it to their daily lives.

Participants were able to identify spiritual gifts that they possess and use in their ministries; for some, it was the first time they had ever considered the possibility that *they* might possess spiritual gifts which could be offered through their service to others and the Church. This was an important learning for those women who participated in all aspects of the program and its evaluation.

Engaging with the program also helped the participants to reflect on how they lived their faith in their daily lives—the “lived spirituality” mentioned in the hypothesis. Again, some had not previously made a connection with the Baptismal Covenant and how they interact with other people in various settings. They realized their beliefs and behaviors were congruent as they moved through their days, and that was uplifting for those who made that connection. They realized they interacted with people outside of the Church community just as they did within the Church.

²³⁰ (BCP 1979, 305)

Conclusion

When it came to agreeing to “identify a concrete act of ministry to be undertaken in order to live out one of the final three vows of the Baptismal Covenant,” however, little data support the thesis. Some participants left blank the questions associated with this objective or said they did not understand it; others cited ministries in which they or their faith communities were already engaged. Only about one-third of the respondents indicated “new” acts of ministry they were contemplating as individuals or by covenanting with other members of their faith community to carry out.

Overall, the participants demonstrated an increased awareness of their baptismal identity. The majority of participants who answered the questionnaires, journaled, and were interviewed also identified ways in which they could live out their baptismal identity. *How* transformative that may be for them and for their communities was not answered by this study. It would be interesting to follow up with these same respondents after one year had passed, in order to assess their responses after that passage of time.

Personal Learnings

As much as one may hope that every single individual in the parish in which one serves as a priest would participate in Christian educational programs offered, that is not the reality. A certain percentage usually *will* turn out, however, and will attend the majority of the sessions. Some will even manage to attend *all* of the scheduled sessions. No matter what the content offered in the programs, it is difficult to assess what participants are actually taking away from the sessions and incorporating into their lives.

Understanding that people learn in a variety of ways, it is logical to include a variety of teaching techniques when planning educational programs in a parish. This project combined lecture, small-group discussion, music, visual art, worship, table

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fellowship, and the opportunity for self-reflection through journaling in order to engage participants' senses, intellect, and emotions. According to the feedback received, the participants welcomed the variety of techniques employed. Although various presentation methods were used in each session, the focus remained on communicating information about one particular spiritual gift that related to the Baptismal Covenant, as exemplified by a Celtic saint, each week.

Given the disparity between the number of people attending the program and the number of participants who followed through in participating until the end of the project, I learned that it is difficult to sustain interest and participation in a large group of people for a period of one to three months. The seven participants who held on until the interviews were completed followed through with questionnaires, journals, and interviews; they have my undying gratitude not only for their perseverance, but also for what they taught me about lived spirituality and how people think—and do *not* think—about that.

I also learned that the “one word” exercise each week was a helpful way for me to assess how well I was communicating with all of the participants present, not just those engaged in the study. It enabled me to have a sense of how everyone present was connecting their own lives with the material being highlighted about the saints' lives. The exercise also appeared easy to do for those present; no long-term commitment was necessary, only a brief period of reflection.

In reviewing the data collected—the words posted each week; the responses to the questionnaires; the journals; and the interviews—I found that I could group the participants' reflections about the program into five general levels or categories. These

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categories helped me to “take the temperature” of the participants, not in an attempt to label and classify them, but simply for me to gain some insight into how people were reflecting on their *own* spiritual journeys in relation to the material. I was able to relate four of the levels to James Fowler’s categories as defined in *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*.²³¹

The levels of spiritual reflection observed in the data could be rated on a scale of 0-4:

0: No reflection indicated (“Soup”)

1: Reflection based on past or current *personal* experience (I have done this; I now do this; “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so”; an insight related to mythic-literal faith, per Fowler)

2: Reflection based on *relating* personal experience to someone else’s experience (I do this and he does that, I either see a connection/similarity between us, or I see no connection; an insight related to individuative-reflective faith, per Fowler)

3: Reflection based on perceiving that there may be a *different way* of experiencing something (maybe he did that because he relates to God in a way other than me; an insight related to conjunctive faith, per Fowler)

4: Reflection based on perceiving the *Spirit at work* and opening oneself up to join it (I feel the Spirit moving this way and I’m going to do that, too; an insight related to universalizing faith, with human development moving toward wholeness, per Fowler)

I also found that level 4 reflections corresponded to how spiritual learning can be transformative, as explained by Jack Miller in “Learning from a Spiritual Perspective.” Miller states that spiritual learning “. . . is transformative in that it allows us to see the world anew. We begin to see the interconnectedness of life at every level of the cosmos.

²³¹ James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 43-44; 49-51; 51-54; 54-60.

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This leads to a natural compassion. . .”²³² Several of the participants were tuned in to this level of thinking, noting how they sometimes experienced feelings of deep connection with God and with others.

It was also that “natural compassion” arising from this work that I had hoped would lead participants toward identifying a concrete act of ministry to be undertaken, either in their own lives or in the life of their faith community. While so very few took that step, I find comfort in something else Miller stated:

[W]e can view ourselves as vessels attempting to assist others in awakening, yet we can never ultimately know the energies that are both within and surrounding us and what effects these energies will have on others. Teaching and learning from spiritual perspectives requires us to trust ourselves and the larger forces in the universe that we are connected to in deep and mysterious ways. Learning to trust ourselves, and these larger forces, allows us to teach in a way that does not succumb to the pressures of modern society.²³³

This act of ministry helped participants to set aside time in their pressured, busy lives for five weeks during Lent in order to sit with fellow pilgrims and focus on their *spiritual* lives by learning about four popular Celtic saints and the influence of Celtic Christianity on the Church. This pilgrimage in place helped participants to relate the saints’ spiritual gifts to their *own* spiritual gifts, examining promises made in the Baptismal Covenant and reflecting on how those were expressed in their own lived spirituality.

This act of ministry helped me to learn the importance of investing my *self* in my work as a priest. It can be easy to order a Christian education program on DVD that

²³² John P. Miller, "Learning from a Spiritual Perspective." In *Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative Learning*, edited by Edmund V. O'Sullivan, Amish Morrell and Mary Ann O'Connor, 95-102. New York: Palgrave, 2002), 100.

²³³ (Miller 2002, 101)

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requires little of the leader except making sure the electronics work correctly and perhaps facilitating the ensuing discussion when the program ends. If people do not like the program or say they have not learned from it, it is easy to attribute that to the program and not to the efforts of the leader.

It is a different story when one feels passionately about a topic and develops an educational series about it. One invests a great deal of thought, time, and effort on developing a series in the hope that the participants will grow interested in the topic, too. And one quickly learns that more energy and attention—one could also say presence and mindfulness—are required in order to effectively lead the sessions. One is more thoroughly invested in the presentation and the outcome—and yet, as Miller notes, we can *truly* never know how our efforts affect others' journeys. But—like Brendan, Brigid, Columba, and Patrick—we can trust that God will equip us for the journey, provide companions along the way, and lead us where we need to go. If we are, indeed, all journeying toward an eternal wholeness lived in God, it is good to have soul-friends with whom we can share our hopes, dreams, and struggles.

Future Direction

As noted above, it would be interesting to ask the nine participants who completed all of the questionnaires to complete one more, one year after the program has finished, in order to give them the opportunity to share what further reflections they have made about their spiritual lives and to describe any acts of ministry they have undertaken. However, I have accepted a call to another parish in a different state, which makes such follow-up difficult, at best.

Conclusion

Looking forward, I would like to use this program in my current parish, using the “one word” exercise each week and offering instruction about journaling for participants who may want to try that spiritual practice.

I would also plan to offer a small group that met at a different time where people could gather to reflect on what they were learning and experiencing as the weeks progressed, trying to center the conversation around the participants’ lived spirituality. How does reflecting on the saints’ spiritual gifts help them to define their own? How does wrestling with the Baptismal Covenant during the presentation each week help them to live the Covenant in their daily lives? Where are they encountering God each day? What unexpected companions have shown up to help them on their journey?

I would welcome the opportunity to work with someone else who may wish to replicate this study. Incorporating the “levels of reflection” scale into research about Christian spirituality would help test its validity across populations and determine what could be further developed in the measurement to make it more practical and applicable for multiple users.

Journeying On

Brendan, Brigid, Columba, and Patrick have been stalwart companions on my own spiritual journey throughout the entire project. I have learned from them about what it means to be a spiritual leader and a soul-friend. My hope is that I have helped others to reflect on their own spiritual journeys in this process.

APPENDIX A: FORMS

Information and Questionnaire Sent to Regional Episcopal Clergy

Dear Fellow Episcopal Clergypersons of Southern Maryland:

I am working toward my Doctor of Ministry degree at Virginia Theological Seminary in the Christian Spirituality track. I am preparing to do my project, aka an “Act of Ministry,” as a Lenten program, which I will then evaluate and write about in my thesis. I would appreciate your help in one aspect of background information for my project.

My motivating issue revolves around conversations I have had with parishioners who struggle with how to live out the final 3 baptismal promises (proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ; seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself; and striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 305). I consider those three promises to lie at the heart of what it means to be a follower of Christ, and I struggle with them, too. In those conversations with parishioners, we noted that the struggle was both an individual and a corporate one. My project aims to help engage the imaginations of participants in order to help them reflect on their own spiritual journeys and how to live into those promises, both as individuals and as part of a faith community.

I am wondering if you have had similar experiences or conversations. I would greatly appreciate it if you would please answer the following questions and return them to me by **November 30, 2015**, in order to help me assess how wide off the mark I may be. (If you are interested, I would be happy to send a summary of my project thesis proposal to you.)

Your reply to me would indicate your consent to participate in this project. While responses will remain confidential, they may be anonymously quoted in the thesis and other work that may result from this project. Please be sure not to click on “reply to all” when responding!

Thank you for reading this and considering my request. And for those who respond—thank you in advance!

In peace,

Debbie
The Rev. Debra Brewin-Wilson
Rector, St. Thomas’ Parish, Croom

Please respond to the following questions:

- 1. Has a member of your parish/congregation ever engaged in a conversation with you about one or more of the baptismal promises listed above?**

- 2. Have you ever preached about how to live out one or more of the baptismal promises?**

If so, is this something you do periodically?
- 3. What value, if any, do you perceive in helping parishioners to better relate the Baptismal Covenant to their daily lives?**

To their faith community?

- 4. Is there anything else you would like to add about this topic?**

Thank you again for your help with this project!

Pre-Program Information for Potential Participants

Information about the 2016 Lenten Program: Living Into Our Baptism: a Pilgrimage with Celtic Saints

The Rev. Debbie Brewin-Wilson of St. Thomas' Parish is working on her Doctor of Ministry degree at Virginia Theological Seminary, and this year's Lenten program will be her "act of ministry" about which she will write her thesis.

In this program, we will be exploring a spiritual gift (charism) from each of four saints from the Celtic tradition in order to look at those gifts in our own lives, in the lives of our faith communities, *and* how those gifts connect with promises Episcopalians are asked to make in the Baptismal Covenant.

While the program is open to everyone, Debbie needs to collect data in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. If you would be willing to complete 3 evaluation forms—one before the program begins, one sent one week after the program ends, and one sent four weeks after the program ends—please complete the attached form and return it to your Rector no later than January 30, 2016. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. If you choose to participate, you only have to answer those questions that you want to answer. If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact Debbie, using the information listed below.

A suggested exercise for each week as "homework" will be keeping a journal, which would involve noting things that make you think of the theme of that week. You could record your thoughts by writing, using photography or art, or jotting down titles or lines of music/songs/hymns that come to mind. If you would be willing to engage in that homework and share it with Debbie in order for her to look for themes emerging from your engagement with the class content, please indicate that on the attached form.

In addition, a small number of in-depth interviews concerning the program and participants' learnings will be conducted after the program ends. These interviews would be arranged at a mutually convenient time and location. If you would be willing to be interviewed, please indicate that on the attached form.

The information you share in the questionnaires, journal, and interview will remain confidential. Comments that you make may be anonymously quoted in the final written report and in other materials that result from the study.

Thank you for considering participating in this project!

The Rev. Debra Brewin-Wilson
Rector, St. Thomas' Parish
14300 St. Thomas Church Road
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772
e-mail: rector@stthomascroom.org or phone: 301-627-8469

**Permission to Participate in the Study of the 2016 Lenten Program:
Living Into Our Baptism: a Pilgrimage with Celtic Saints**

I, _____,
(Signature)

agree to participate in the study being conducted by the Rev. Debra Brewin-Wilson concerning “Living Into Our Baptism: a Pilgrimage with Celtic Saints” by answering the questionnaires that will be sent to me, either via the postal service or e-mail.

Name _____

Address _____

e-mail _____

Telephone _____

Preferred method of receiving questionnaires & information from researcher:

Via email

Via the US Postal Service

I agree to participate in the weekly journaling exercise on the theme of the week, allowing the researcher to review a copy of my journal weekly in order to look for themes arising from interacting with the content of the class.

I agree to participate in an in-depth interview following the completion of the program.

**Living Into Our Baptism: a Pilgrimage with Celtic Saints
Pre-program Questionnaire**

1. Do you have a favorite saint? Who is it? What qualities does he/she possess that you relate to?

2. What does “spiritual journey” mean to you?

3. How have you engaged with the idea of spiritual gifts in the past?

4. When we renew our Baptismal Covenant, there are three questions at the end to which we are asked to respond, “I will, with God’s help.” Those questions are listed below; please think about what actions *you* have personally taken in the past to carry out those promises and note them, in a sentence or two, below:

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

Appendix A: Forms

5. Here are the same questions; please reflect on how your *faith community* carries out those promises:

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

6. What best helps you relate to God: a story, music, or visual art? Or another medium?

Thank you for your participation!

**Living Into Our Baptism: a Pilgrimage with Celtic Saints
Questionnaire Sent One Week After Completion of the Program**

1. Please list the names of the four saints discussed in the program. Which was your favorite? What qualities does he/she possess that you relate to?

2. What connection/s can you make between your favorite saint and the four saints highlighted in the program?

3. How has your idea of spiritual gifts changed since participating in the program?

4. What does the phrase “spiritual journey” mean to you now?

5. Have you committed to undertake an act of ministry? If so, please note what the act is and which of the following questions from the Baptismal Covenant it relates to:
 Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

 Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

Appendix A: Forms

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

6. Have you covenanted with other members of your *faith community* to carry out an act related to one of these promises? If so, please note what the act is and which of the following questions from the Baptismal Covenant it relates to:

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

7. What aspect of the program on Celtic saints resonated with you the most: a story, music, or visual art? Or something else?
8. Is there anything you would like to add about how the program affected you and your faith journey?

Thank you for your participation!

**Living Into Our Baptism: a Pilgrimage with Celtic Saints
Questionnaire Sent Four Weeks After Completion of the Program**

1. Which of the saints in the program do you find yourself thinking about the most? What is it about the saint that affects you this way?

2. What connection/s are you making now between your favorite saint and the four saints highlighted in the program?

3. How has your idea of spiritual gifts changed over the past month as you reflect on the program?

4. How has your thinking changed about your spiritual journey in the past month?

5. Over the past month, have you committed to undertake an act of ministry? If so, please note what the act is and which of the following questions from the Baptismal Covenant it relates to:

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

Appendix A: Forms

6. Over the past month, have you covenanted with other members of your *faith community* to carry out an act related to one of these promises? If so, please note what the act is and which of the following questions from the Baptismal Covenant it relates to:

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

7. During the past month, what aspect of the program on Celtic saints continued to resonate with you: a story, music, or visual art? Or something else?
8. Is there anything you would like to add about how the program affected you and your faith journey thus far?

Thank you for your participation!
Information on Keeping a Spiritual Journal

What is a Spiritual Journal and What Relevance Does it Have for This Program?

A Spiritual Journal is a place to reflect on the emotions and insights we have about our lives, using those reflections to deepen our relationship with God. This isn't simply a list of what you did on a particular day—that's what diary entries are. (Here in the U.S., we tend to think of such daily entries as our calendar.) Journaling asks us to be honest with ourselves about our emotions, actions, and reactions in our lives. *Spiritual* journaling asks us to take that one step further and reflect on spiritual matters in relation to our emotions and insights.

For example, seeing a beautiful sunrise might make you feel grateful to God for Creation—that could be an entry in your spiritual journal. Or maybe you got some bad news about the health of a friend—the silent prayer you offered in that moment could be an entry in your journal.

There is no right way or wrong way to keep a journal. This is an instrument for you to enhance your spiritual journey; to enhance your relationship with God. To help you get started, for the duration of this Lenten program, you will be asked to reflect on the spiritual gift of the saint highlighted each week as your jumping-off point. How do you see this gift expressed in the world around you as you move through your day? How are you inspired to cultivate that gift in yourself or your faith community?

The *format* your journal takes is entirely up to you. Perhaps you'll write in a blank journal or on a legal pad or in a computer file. Perhaps you'll take photos on your phone as you go through your day and see an example of that spiritual gift in action. Perhaps you'll do pen or pencil sketches or make a collage from photos in magazines.

Agreeing to have the researcher (Debbie) review your journal may seem intimidating. This is a judgment-free zone! Researchers have found that when it comes to life areas that are difficult to measure quantitatively—such as spirituality—looking for concepts expressed in journal entries is an effective way to evaluate how people are incorporating those ideas into their everyday lives. That's what Debbie will be looking for—themes, ideas, and concepts that people are focusing on after learning about the various spiritual gifts highlighted in the program.

If you are willing to allow Debbie to review your journal each week, please bring or e-mail a *copy* to her. (If you are using photos, please put them into a document & send them to her; if you are doing sketches or other art projects, *either* please bring them in so Debbie may photograph them *or* take a photo of them & send them to her.) Your identity will be anonymous for the purposes of the study and any materials that result from the study. Debbie's e-mail: rector@stthomascroom.org

Thank you, and may God bless your journaling and your deepening spiritual journey!

Post-Program Interview Questions

Appendix A: Forms

Initials of interviewee:

Age:

Sex:

How long an Episcopalian?

How long a member of _____ Church?

1. Do you have spiritual practices that you follow? If so, what? How often?
2. What thoughts do you have about your spiritual gifts?
Did anything in the program influence your thinking about your spiritual gifts?
If so, what?
3. Has any particular saint's story, or a song, or a piece of art stayed with you over the past month?
If so, what? What do you think it is about that work that has affected you?
4. What did you find helpful/challenging about the experience?
Were some weeks easier than others?
To what do you attribute that?
5. Is there anything else about your spiritual journey that you would like to say?
How has this program helped or not helped your journey?
6. Have you been thinking about your baptism since the program ended?
If so, what thoughts have you had?
7. Is there any one of the baptismal promises you plan to think about more? Or perhaps take action on? If so, which one?
 - a. Will you proclaim by word & example the Good News of God in Christ?
 - b. Will you seek & serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
 - c. Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?
8. How do you think your faith community could help you to more faithfully live out your baptismal promises?
9. Are you planning to take or have you taken any concrete action of ministry in order to live out one of the final 3 vows of the Baptismal Covenant? (see above)
If so—what?
10. How could your faith community help you achieve this?
11. Where do you see Jesus in your faith community?
12. How do you think we could help others to see him in your faith community, too?
13. What has been THE most important take-away from the program for you?
14. What questions are you left with? What else do you want to explore?

Appendix B: Program Materials

APPENDIX B: PROGRAM MATERIALS

Materials for Week One:

Teaching Notes: Overview & St. Brendan the Navigator

Participants' Handout

Music

Artwork

Historical Timeline Handout

Overview to Living into our Baptism: a Pilgrimage with Celtic Saints

We are taught in our faith tradition that we are ALL saints of God—right? We have that very British song in our Hymnal, “I Sing a Song of the Saints of God” that tells us saints are folk like you and me.

But sometimes, people of faith come along who walk so closely with God and in such a way that their stories inspire the rest of us, somehow, to try to walk more closely with God, too. Maybe you have saints, ancient or modern, who influence your life: Mary; Peter; Martin Luther King, Jr.; Teresa of Calcutta. . .

We can learn a lot from the saints we admire. The fancy word for a biography about a saint is “hagiography.” That word literally means “holy writing”—so it is a written work about a holy subject or person.

Hagiographies tend to portray the saint in a very flattering light. These aren’t “tell all” biographies about famous people that we often find written in the modern era. Writers of hagiographies often borrowed from one another, using similar structures and sometimes even copying text. The ancient writers did not have today’s copyright laws—in fact, copying was considered a sincere form of flattery!

It’s important to understand that stories about saints, especially the most ancient of stories that we have, incorporate legend as well as fact. Sometimes it’s hard to separate the two. It’s best to approach these stories with the mindset that they will reveal aspects of a saint’s life that will explain why people believed that person was so holy or so special, he or she deserved to be remembered and held up as an example to the rest of us.

Where we might find a story unbelievable, we are asked to look *beyond* the surface telling of the story to the deeper emotion or quality of character revealed about the saint in that story.

In this year’s Lenten program, we’re going to be looking at the lives of four Celtic saints.

While you may hear people refer to “Celtic Christianity” as if it were a separate strand of Christianity, it really wasn’t. In those early centuries of the Church, ALL Christianity was local—each region followed local customs that were *not* necessarily part of the Roman Church way of doing things.

That being said, there were certain practices that developed in the Church in what we now know as England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland that scholars agree influenced one another *and* sometimes the wider church.

You can get into these on your own if you would like, but just to set this up briefly, these practices were:

- the calculation of the date of Easter;
- how monks cut their hair (Irish—not clear on how it looked, but ear to ear; Roman—leaving a fringe of hair all around);

Appendix B: Program Materials

- the development of personal confession to a priest and the use of books called “penitentials,” which prescribed practices someone could undertake in order to be reconciled with God; this was known as *green martyrdom*; AND
- a special kind of pilgrimage, which is known by its Latin name: *Peregrinatio* (PRONOUNCED per-e-green-Ā-tee-oh) *por Christo*, which means wandering for Christ. The Latin root of that word, *peregrini*, means “stranger” or “alien.” Becoming a pilgrim in this sense means to go on a journey expecting to be changed.²³⁴ One may be seen as a stranger by others when journeying to new places; and one may view oneself as a stranger, as you experience transformation in wandering for Christ.
 - This was sometimes undertaken as a penitential discipline by someone, usually a monk—leaving behind one’s home and traveling to new regions or even new countries for a period of time before returning home. This was known as *white martyrdom*.
 - Some monks made this wandering a permanent condition, traveling to another country to establish permanent monastic settlements. Some famous scholars of the early Middle Ages traveled to mainland Europe from Ireland and Scotland, helping to keep alive the flame of learning when it was threatened by political and religious happenings in that time.²³⁵

So, in these weeks of this course, we’ll be going on a pilgrimage together with four Celtic saints. Three of them are affectionately known as the “Holy Trinity” of Celtic Christianity, while the fourth was a subject of a medieval best seller.

Structure of the course:

In the first four sessions of the Lenten program this year, we are going to spend time with a saint from the Celtic tradition, exploring one spiritual gift that saint exhibited in his or her life. We will hear stories about the saint, sing a song or two about the saint, and hear parts of poems and letters either written by the saint or about the saint.

We will also be reflecting on how the particular spiritual gift of the saint intersects with our personal understanding of the final three promises that Episcopalians are asked to make when we renew our Baptismal Covenant:²³⁶

- Proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ;
- Seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself;
- Striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being.

²³⁴ Christine Valters Painter, *The Soul of a Pilgrim: Eight Practices for the Journey Within*, (Notre Dame: Sorin Books, 2015), 2-3.

²³⁵ Oliver Davies and Thomas O’Loughlin, “An Introduction to Celtic Spirituality” in *Celtic Spirituality: The Classics of Western Spirituality*, Bernard McGinn, ed., Oliver Davies and Thomas O’Loughlin, trans. (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1999), 19.

²³⁶ (BCP 1979, 305)

Appendix B: Program Materials

In the final session of the program, we will share our thoughts and learnings and talk about how to take what we have learned out into our wider community. We'll sing songs about the saints and re-visit stories that you would like to hear again about the saints.

I have asked for volunteers to agree to answer questionnaires and perhaps even agree to be interviewed in more depth after the program is finished. If you have *not* signed on for that and would like to, please let me know before we leave tonight.

And now, let's begin with our first saint. . .

Living into our Baptism: a Pilgrimage with Celtic Saints
Brendan: Exploring for Christ

Opening Prayer—1 minute

Gracious God: you called your servant Brendan to be an explorer, seeking you while building community with his brethren and giving glory to you by observing the wonders of creation. We give you thanks for his life and pray that we may learn from his example, being willing to explore ways in which to follow your call; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Reflections from Previous Week—5-10 minutes

Have those who would like to share their journaling observations.

Story about Saint with Highlighted Charism—5 to 7 minutes

Brendan of Clonfert was born around 484 in county Kerry, and died around 577. His feast day is May 16th. We don't know a lot about his actual life and ministry, but we're told he founded monasteries in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Brittany in France. [Some scholars believe that he is confused with other Saint Brendans.] While the voyages to found new religious communities were successful in the traditional sense, it is a fantastic voyage that Brendan supposedly made toward the end of his life that has earned him the title "The Navigator." While the fantastic voyage of Brendan is not always believed to be factual, it is respected as a medieval allegory for the spiritual journey.

The Voyage of Brendan is what is known as an "immram" in Irish: a story about a Christian hero's sea journey to the Otherworld. These stories resemble older mythological hero tales, with elements of saints' lives and the idea of "peregrinatio" (pronounced per-e-green-Ä-tee-oh; a self-imposed exile and wandering for God) tossed in.²³⁷ Today, scholars believe it *may* have been written as early as the late eighth century, but more likely it's from the tenth century.

The Voyage of Brendan was a medieval best-seller, in its own way. There were both Latin and Irish versions of the tale, and monks carried copies of it with them on their travels. It was translated into many different languages and influenced not only church life, because it provided a structure for monastic worship, but it influenced geography, as well: an island called "St. Brendan's Isle" appeared on charts of the Atlantic Ocean from at least the 1200's until the 18th century.

The island was supposed to lie west of the Canary Islands. Explorers who sought it in the 1700's found that it didn't exist, and so it was dropped from maps.²³⁸

The Voyage of Brendan is really a rip-roaring tale; it's just one adventurous thing happening after another. But it all begins when Brendan and his fellow monks are visited by a monk named Barrind, who was an O'Neill! We'll learn more about the O'Neills

²³⁷ Wikipedia: Immram n.d., accessed November 30, 2015, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immram>.

²³⁸ Oliver Davies and Thomas O'Loughlin, "The Sources: Introduction to the Translated Texts," in *Celtic Spirituality: The Classics of Western Spirituality*, Bernard McGinn, ed., Oliver Davies and Thomas O'Loughlin, trans. (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1999), 34.

Appendix B: Program Materials

when we talk about St. Columba, but for now—the O’Neills were a very powerful clan in Ireland, and they had different branches that sometimes fought against one another.²³⁹

Barrind tells Brendan that one of his fellow monks, named Mernóc, had sailed away and found an island called “The Delightful Island” and that a number of other monks had found their way to live with him. So Barrind set out to visit him, and found him. After visiting for a while, Mernóc asked Barrind to go visit another island with him.

They landed on the other island and found it a beautiful and delightful place, and although they walked around it for 15 days, they didn’t reach the end of it. They came to a river that flowed from east to west and decided to cross it, but a man suddenly appeared before them and said, “Well done, good brothers. For the Lord has revealed to you the land, which he will give to his saints. The river there marks the middle of the island. You may not go beyond this point. So return to the place from which you departed.”²⁴⁰

The man revealed to them that they had actually been on the island for one year and had taken neither food nor drink, nor had they fallen asleep or seen darkness because “Our Lord Jesus Christ is the light of this island.”²⁴¹

Mernóc and Barrind returned to The Delightful Island, where the monks rejoiced to see their abbot and Barrind safe and sound. After staying another two weeks there, Barrind received Mernóc’s blessing and headed for his home, stopping to see Brendan along the way.

Hearing Barrind’s tale, Brendan was seized with a desire to go find the Promised Land of the Saints for himself. He chose 14 brothers from his community, shut himself and them in a room, and told them of his determination to undertake this journey. He asked them, “How does this seem to you? What advice would you give?” They replied, “Abbot, your will is ours. Have we not left our parents behind? Have we not spurned our inheritance and given our bodies into your hands? So we are prepared to go along with you to death or life. Only one thing we ask for, the will of God.”²⁴²

Brendan and his companions then set out to receive the blessing of a holy father named Enda. Having been blessed, they “. . . set out for a distant part of his native region where his parents were living. But he did not wish to see them. He pitched his tent at the edge of a mountain stretching far out into the ocean, in a place called Brendan’s Seat. . . Saint Brendan and those with him got iron tools and constructed a light boat ribbed with wood and with a wooden frame . . . They covered it with ox-hides tanned with the bark of oak and smeared all the joints of the hides on the outside with fat. They carried into the boat hides for the makings of two other boats, supplies for forty days, fat for preparing hides to cover the boat and other things needed for human life. They also placed a mast in the

²³⁹ John J. O’Meara, trans. *The Voyage of Saint Brendan*. (Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Limited, 1991), 2.

²⁴⁰ (O’Meara 1991, 4)

²⁴¹ (O’Meara 1991, 5)

²⁴² (O’Meara 1991, 7)

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middle of the boat and a sail and the other requirements for steering a boat. Then Brendan ordered his brothers in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to enter the boat.”²⁴³

As Brendan was blessing the landing-place where they would launch the boat, “. . . three brothers from his own monastery came up, following after him.” They begged to join the journey and Brendan allowed it, although he prophesied that two of them would die horrible deaths while the third would come to a suitable place, prepared by God.”²⁴⁴—and all would come to pass as Brendan said.

Brendan and the men set sail and encountered all kinds of marvels in creation and met all kinds of men, from helpful ones who provided to food to frightening ones who heaved burning rocks at them. Here are a few of my favorite stories from Brendan’s Voyage:

During Holy Week, they landed on an island they called “The Island of Sheep” because in addition to having fresh water and fish, there were flocks of large sheep on the island—the sheep were huge, bigger than cows, and they were so numerous, the brothers couldn’t see the ground beneath the sheep. A man came out to meet them, bringing bread, and advised Brendan that they would stay there through Holy Saturday, but then they would celebrate Easter on another island they could see nearby. Then, they would go on to another island, called the Paradise of Birds, where they would remain until Pentecost. The man promised to bring them provisions there at that time.²⁴⁵

Brendan and the brothers set out as planned, arriving on the nearby island to celebrate Easter. The island was stony and no grass grew on it. There were a few pieces of driftwood, but no sand was visible. Brendan stayed in the boat praying—because he knew the nature of the island—while the brothers took turns praying and keeping vigil.

In the morning, they all sang Mass, and then some brothers lit a fire and put a kettle on to boil some of the raw meat they had brought with them from the Island of Sheep. As they built up the fire, the island began to move, like a wave. The brothers rushed for the boat, and Brendan hauled them in with him. They pushed away from the island and watched as it moved off, out to sea; they could still see the fire burning from two miles away.

Brendan asked: “‘Brothers, are you surprised at what this island has done?’ They said: ‘We are very surprised and indeed terror-stricken.’ He said to them: ‘My sons, do not be afraid. God revealed to me during the night in a vision the secret of this affair. Where we were was not an island, but a fish—the foremost of all that swim in the ocean. He is always trying to bring his tail to meet his head, but he cannot because of his length. His name is Jasconius.’”²⁴⁶

²⁴³ (O’Meara 1991, 8)

²⁴⁴ (O’Meara 1991, 9)

²⁴⁵ (O’Meara 1991, 15-17)

²⁴⁶ (O’Meara 1991, 18-19)

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Then they found the Paradise of Birds. They found a spring of fresh water, and a great tree grew near the spring, and in its branches roosted an enormous number of white birds. There were so many birds, the men could hardly see the branches and leaves.

Brendan was overcome by the sight and “he began to think and ponder within himself what it meant or what was the reason that such a great multitude of birds could be all collected together. He was so tormented about this that the tears poured out and flowed down upon his cheeks, and he implored God. . .” to reveal the meaning. At that, one of the birds flew down from the tree, her wings sounding like a hand-bell, and she sat on the side of the boat near Brendan. She explained that when Lucifer and his followers fell from heaven, she and her kind were caught up in those events, through no fault of their own. She continued, “But our God is just and true. In his great judgment he sent us here. We endure no sufferings. Here we can see God’s presence. But God has separated us from sharing the lot of the others who were faithful. We wander through various regions of the air and the firmament and earth, just like the other spirits that travel on their missions. But on holy days and Sundays we are given bodies such as you now see so that we may stay here and praise our creator. . .” She then told Brendan that he and the brothers would spend every Easter on Jasconius’ back, and after the seventh Easter, they would “. . . find what you cherish in your heart, that is, the Promised Land of the Saints.” At each of the canonical hours, the birds chanted the very songs the monks used to give praise to God. When the men prepared to leave at Pentecost, the bird flew down and spoke an oracle to Brendan about their voyage.²⁴⁷

After celebrating their second Easter and time through Pentecost on their journey, Brendan and the brothers sailed over the ocean for forty days, when a huge beast began to follow them. “He spouted foam from his nostrils and ploughed through the waves at a great speed, as if he were about to devour them. When the brothers saw this, they called upon the Lord, saying: ‘Deliver us, Lord, so that that beast does not devour us.’ Saint Brendan comforted them, saying: ‘Do not be afraid. You have little faith. God, who always defends us, will deliver us from the mouth of this beast and from other dangers.’” The beast drew closer and kicked up waves that threatened to swamp the boat; the brothers grew more fearful but Brendan prayed, “‘Lord, deliver your servants, as you delivered David from the hand of Goliath, the giant. Lord, deliver us, as you delivered Jonas from the belly of the whale.’” After praying this three times, ANOTHER giant beast approached from the west and attacked the first beast, spitting fire and chomping it into three parts before turning around and moving off to where it had come from. The brothers soon found another island, where part of the dead beast had washed ashore. Brendan said, “‘See what wished to devour you! You now shall devour it!’” They pitched a tent and stayed on that island for three months because a series of storms were happening at sea.²⁴⁸

On another occasion when they were on the ocean, Brendan was celebrating the feast of St. Peter the Apostle (June 29th), and the sea was as clear as glass so that the brothers could see a huge shoal of fish far below them, and they grew afraid. Brendan rebuked

²⁴⁷ (O'Meara 1991, 20-24)

²⁴⁸ (O'Meara 1991, 39-42)

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them for their fear, reminding them of Jasconius and how they celebrated Easter on his back. ““Is not our Lord Jesus Christ God of all fish, and can he not reduce all living things?”” asked Brendan. With that, he began to sing as loudly as he could. When the fish heard him singing, they came up from the bottom and began swimming around the boat at a wide distance; there were all kinds of fish grouped together, circling the boat until Brendan finished singing the Mass—then each kind of fish took off in its own direction, “as if they were taking flight.”²⁴⁹

During their journey, Brendan and the monks sailed near the Island of the Smiths, where the inhabitants came onshore and hurled burning-hot stones at them, which pelted, sizzling, into the water; and they sailed near a fiery mountain, where a demon flew out and captured one of the unfortunate latecomers; and they met Judas Iscariot, sitting on a rock—a bit of leniency granted to him every Lord’s Day, when he was freed from his usual torment.²⁵⁰

Small Group Reflection Time:--15 minutes

Brendan set out on a journey to find the Promised Land, or the Kingdom of Heaven, by *exploring for Christ*. He ventured into unknown territory, leading others into encounters with magical creatures and with men both holy and threatening. Thinking about what you have heard of Brendan’s gift for *exploring for Christ*, please reflect in your small group on the following questions:

- Do you believe you possess that spiritual gift? If so, how do you express it?
- If not, do you possess a spiritual gift related to that one? What is it? How do you express it?
- Does your church community express that spiritual gift? If so, how?
- Can you name another “spiritual hero” who displays such a spiritual gift?

Recall Attention to Main Group—5 minutes

Ask for people to share their reflections.

Sing a hymn/song about the Saint and the charism—5 minutes

Read another story or poem about the Saint and the charism—3 to 5 minutes

Finally, after seven years of journeying, Brendan, his men, and the man from the Island of the Sheep, whom they called their steward, celebrated Easter together one last time on the back of Jasconius, then journeyed on to the Island of the Birds. As they left there, the birds said, as if with one voice, ““May God, the salvation of all of us, prosper your journey.”” Brendan and all with them sailed first to the island of the steward, where they gathered provisions for forty days, then sailed to the east and found their way to the Promised Land of the Saints. It was shrouded in fog, but they proceeded carefully, under the guidance of the steward, and after about an hour, they landed onshore and “a mighty light shone all around them.”

²⁴⁹ (O’Meara 1991, 49-50)

²⁵⁰ (O’Meara 1991, 52-60)

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For forty days they explored the island, eating its fruit, drinking from its wells, until one day, they arrived at a “great river flowing through the middle of the island.” Brendan warned the brothers that they could not cross it and they had no idea how big the island actually was. At that moment, a youth appeared and embraced each of them and called them by name. Then he said to Brendan:

“There before you lies the land which you have sought for a long time. You could not find it immediately because God wanted to show you his varied secrets in the great ocean. Return, then, to the land of your birth, bringing with you some of the fruit of this land and as many precious stones as your boat can carry. The final day of your pilgrimage draws near so that you may sleep with your fathers. After the passage of many times this land will become known to your successors, when persecution of the Christians shall have come. The river that you see divides the island. Just as this land appears to you ripe with fruit, so shall it remain always without any shadow of night. For its light is Christ.” The brothers did as the youth instructed, and they sailed back to the Island of Delights, where they had first rested on their journey; after three days, they returned to their home.²⁵¹

Brendan and the brothers were received back at the monastery with great rejoicing. Brendan told them all the tale of their journey, then prepared them for his passing, which happened soon after, just as the youth had predicted in the Promised Land.²⁵²

An Excerpt from J.R.R. Tolkien’s poem, *The Death of St. Brendan*²⁵³

‘But men say, father that ere the end
you went where none have been.
I would here you tell me, father dear,
of the last land you have seen.’

‘In my mind the Star I still can find,
and the parting of the seas,
and the breath as sweet and keen as death
that was borne upon the breeze.
But where they bloom those flowers fair,
in what air or land they grow,
what words beyond the world I heard,
if you would seek to know,
in a boat then, brother, far afloat
you must labour in the sea,
and find for yourself things out of mind:
you will learn no more of me.’

²⁵¹ (O’Meara 1991, 67-69)

²⁵² (O’Meara 1991, 69-70)

²⁵³ J.R.R. Tolkien, from *The Notion Club Papers: History of Middle Earth, vol. 9, 1992 ed.*, “The Death of St. Brendan,” Englewood Christian Church, n.d., accessed November 30, 2015, <http://englewoodreview.org/poem-the-death-of-st-brendan-j-r-r-tolkien/>.

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In Ireland, over wood and mire,
in the tower tall and grey,
the knell of Cluain-ferta's bell
was tolling in green Galway.
Saint Brendan had come to his life's end
under a rainclad sky,
and journeyed whence no ship returns,
and his bones in Ireland lie.

SAINT BRENDAN'S VOYAGE²⁵⁴

(Material redacted)

The kind of boat Brendan and his men built is called a *curragh*, and they're still built in Ireland. They can be used with sails or special oars, and they were renowned for carrying people and goods safely over the often shallow and rocky waters of the islands off the coast of Ireland.

One of the theories in modern times is that *The Voyage of St. Brendan* actually documented a 7-year voyage that Brendan and his men made to North America and back home again. To test this theory, explorer Tim Severin and a crew sailed a curragh from Ireland to Newfoundland in 1976, stopping in the Hebrides and Iceland along the way and documenting what he thought were some actual locations for islands Brendan and his crew witnessed in their journey.²⁵⁵

Small Group Reflection Time:--15 minutes

- Reflect on the Saint's spiritual gift and consider the 3 promises from the Baptismal Covenant: to which of the three promises in the Covenant does that charism most closely adhere?
- How do they see that play out in the Saint's story?
- When have they been able to act on that promise in their own lives?
- In the life of their faith community?

Recall Attention to Main Group—5 minutes

Ask for people to share their reflections.

Silent Reflection Time (indicate art work front & center)—5 minutes

Ask people to silently reflect on the art work; the Saint's spiritual gift; to pray or meditate about that night's work in their own lives; and to write, on the post-it note provided, *one*

²⁵⁴ Jimmie Driftwood, "Saint Brendan's Voyage," 1960, n.d., accessed November 30, 2015, <http://www.bedlambards.com/Lyrics/Furious%20Fancies/Brendan.html>.

²⁵⁵ Wikipedia: Tim Severin, n.d., accessed November 30, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim_Severin.

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word to summarize the most important thing to them about that evening's experience, and place it on the board on the way out.

Introduce the Journaling Guidance Question for the Week—2 minutes

In the time until our next meeting, be alert for signs of *exploring for Christ* as you go throughout your day. Whenever you see something that makes you think of *exploring for Christ*, jot down a few words or sentences about it; or take a photo of it (smart phones are great for photojournaling!); or if you draw, make a sketch about it; or cut out a picture from a magazine or newspaper about it; or write down the title of a song/hymn or phrase from it that comes into your mind when you think about *exploring for Christ*.

Please bring your journal to next week's session; if you have photos, please copy them onto a piece of paper in order to show others at discussion time. If you are participating in the study, please bring your journal (or a copy of it) and give it to Debbie.

Final Prayer, Blessing, & Dismissal—5 minutes

Closing Prayer

We'll close tonight with Canticle 12, "A Song of Creation," known in Brendan's time as "The Song of the Three Children."²⁵⁶ It is found in the Apocrypha in the *Prayer of Azariah*. Brendan and the monks sang this when they landed on Jasconius for the second time to celebrate Easter. We will read it responsively, with the officiant reading and all responding at the asterisk: **"*Praise him and highly exalt him for ever."**

Invocation

Glorify the Lord, all you works of the Lord, *
In the firmament of his power, glorify the Lord, *

I The Cosmic Order

Glorify the Lord, you angels and all powers of the Lord, O heavens and all waters above the heavens. Sun and moon and stars of the sky, glorify the Lord, *
Glorify the Lord, every shower of rain and fall of dew, all winds and fire and heat.
Winter and Summer, glorify the Lord, *
Glorify the Lord, O chill and cold, drops of dew and flakes of snow.
Frost and cold, ice and sleet, glorify the Lord, *
Glorify the Lord, O nights and days, O shining light and enfolding dark.
Storm clouds and thunderbolts, glorify the Lord, *

II The Earth and its Creatures

Let the earth glorify the Lord,*
Glorify the Lord, O mountains and hills, and all that grows upon the earth,*
Glorify the Lord, O springs of water, seas, and streams, O whales and all that move in the waters.
All birds of the air, glorify the Lord,*
Glorify the Lord, O beasts of the wild, and all you flocks and herds. O men and women everywhere, glorify the Lord,*

²⁵⁶ (BCP 1979, 88)

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III The People of God

Let the people of God glorify the Lord,*
Glorify the Lord, O priests and servants of the Lord, *
Glorify the Lord, O spirits and souls of the righteous, *
You that are holy and humble of heart, glorify the Lord, *

Doxology

Let us glorify the Lord: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; *
In the firmament of his power, glorify the Lord, *

Sing the St. Brendan hymn as the closing.

Dismissal:

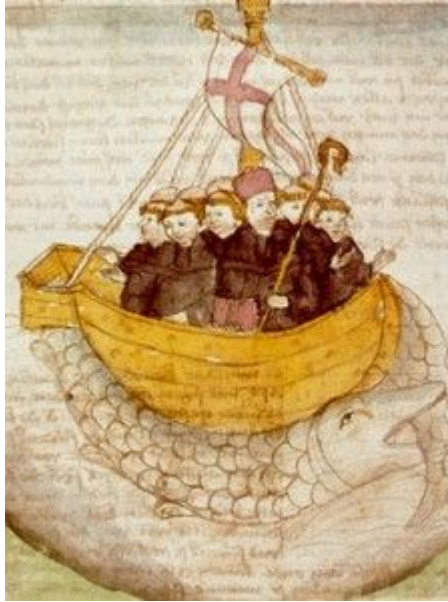
May the peace of Columba be yours as you journey,
The peace of Brigid be yours as you journey,
The peace of Mary be yours as you journey,
And may you return home safe-guarded.

Thanks be to God!²⁵⁷

Have them leave the summary word paper in the box at the exit

²⁵⁷ Adapted from Alexander Carmichael, “#366” in *Carmina Gadelica: Hymns and Incantations Collected in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland in the Last Century*, (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1992), 339.

Saint Brendan



Small Group Reflection Time #1

Brendan set out on a journey to find the Promised Land, or the Kingdom of Heaven, by *Exploring for Christ*. He ventured into unknown territory, leading others into encounters with magical creatures and with men both holy and threatening. While we may not voyage on the sea to live out our faith, we can explore in other ways. Thinking about what you have heard of Brendan's gift for *Exploring for Christ*, please reflect in your small group on the following questions:

- Do you believe you possess that spiritual gift? If so, how do you express it?
- If not, do you possess a spiritual gift related to that one? What is it? How do you express it?
- Does your church community express that spiritual gift? If so, how?
- Can you name another "spiritual hero" who displays such a gift?

Small Group Reflection Time #2

Reflect on the Saint's spiritual gift of *Exploring for Christ* and consider the 3 promises from the Baptismal Covenant (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 305):

- Proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ;
- Seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself;
- Striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being.

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- To which of the three promises in the Covenant does that charism most closely adhere?
- How do you see that play out in the Saint's story?
- When have you been able to act on that promise in your own life?
- In the life of your faith community?

Another Reflection on Brendan's Exploration: An Excerpt from J.R.R. Tolkien's poem, *The Death of St. Brendan*

'But men say, father that ere the end
you went where none have been.
I would here you tell me, father dear,
of the last land you have seen.'

'In my mind the Star I still can find,
and the parting of the seas,
and the breath as sweet and keen as death
that was borne upon the breeze.
But where they bloom those flowers fair,
in what air or land they grow,
what words beyond the world I heard,
if you would seek to know,
in a boat then, brother, far afloat
you must labour in the sea,
and find for yourself things out of mind:
you will learn no more of me.'

In Ireland, over wood and mire,
in the tower tall and grey,
the knell of Cluain-ferta's bell
was tolling in green Galway.
Saint Brendan had come to his life's end
under a rainclad sky,
and journeyed whence no ship returns,
and his bones in Ireland lie.

(from *The Notion Club Papers: History of Middle Earth*, vol. 9, 1992 edition), listed on:
<http://erb.kingdomnow.org/poem-the-death-of-st-brendan-j-r-r-tolkien/>, accessed
November 30, 2015.

A Note About St. Brendan's Boat

The boat Brendan and his men built is called a *curragh*, and they're still built in Ireland today. They can be used with sails or special oars, and they were renowned for carrying people and goods safely over the often shallow and rocky waters of the islands off the coast of Ireland.

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One of the theories in modern times is that *The Voyage of St. Brendan* actually documented a 7-year voyage that Brendan and his men made to North America and back home again, well before the Vikings or Columbus set sail for the New World. To test this theory, explorer Tim Severin and a crew sailed a curragh from Ireland to Newfoundland in 1976, stopping in the Hebrides and Iceland along the way and documenting what he thought were some actual locations for islands Brendan and his crew witnessed in their journey. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim_Severin)

One Word About Tonight

In this time of silence, please reflect on the highlighted spiritual gift; the art work; the music; and then write, on the post-it note provided, *one* word to summarize the most important thing you're taking away tonight from our session. Please post it on the board as you leave tonight.

Journaling Question for the Week: Exploring for Christ

In the time until our next meeting, be alert for signs of *Exploring for Christ* as you go throughout your day. Whenever you see something that makes you think of *Exploring for Christ*, jot down a few words or sentences about it; or take a photo of it (smart phones are great for photojournaling!); or if you draw, make a sketch about it; or cut out a picture from a magazine or newspaper about it; or write down the title of a song/hymn or phrase from it that comes into your mind when you think about *Exploring for Christ*.

Please bring your journal to next week's session; if you have photos, please copy them onto a piece of paper in order to show others at discussion time. If you are participating in the study, please bring your journal (or a copy of it) and give it to Debbie.



An Irish coin minted in 2011

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Closing Prayer

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In the firmament of his power, glorify the Lord, *

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Winter and Summer, glorify the Lord, *
Glorify the Lord, O chill and cold, drops of dew and flakes of snow.
Frost and cold, ice and sleet, glorify the Lord, *
Glorify the Lord, O nights and days, O shining light and enfolding dark.
Storm clouds and thunderbolts, glorify the Lord, *

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Let the earth glorify the Lord,*
Glorify the Lord, O mountains and hills, and all that grows upon the earth,*
Glorify the Lord, O springs of water, seas, and streams, O whales and all that move in the waters.
All birds of the air, glorify the Lord,*
Glorify the Lord, O beasts of the wild, and all you flocks and herds. O men and women everywhere, glorify the Lord,*

III The People of God

Let the people of God glorify the Lord,*
Glorify the Lord, O priests and servants of the Lord, *
Glorify the Lord, O spirits and souls of the righteous, *
You that are holy and humble of heart, glorify the Lord, *

Doxology

Let us glorify the Lord: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; *
In the firmament of his power, glorify the Lord, *



A St. Brendan Cross

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A Hymn to Saint Brendan

Material redacted

Saint Brendan

Debra Brewin-Wilson
Dm

1. When Bren - dan set out to fol - low God's prompt - ings, he
 2. And the bro - thers met men who shared of their boun - ty, and
 3. Ev - ry East - er, they spent on the back of a whale - ; they
 4. And at last they ar - rived at the land that they longed for, the

3 had no i - dea how the voy - age would be; but he
 taught them to live off the fruit of the land; and they
 watched shoals of fish gath - er as they sang mass, and they
 Isle of the Saints, for which Bren - dan set sail. Though they

5 trust - ed that God would pro - vide for and guard them; their
 met oth - er men, who threw stones and cur - ses; the
 saw man - y won - ders, and spoke with a wise bird, who
 longed there to lin - ger, God's call pulled them on - ward, back

7 boat was so small, up - on the great sea. O
 bro - thers stayed safe, un - der Bren - dan's com - mand.
 told Brend - an things that would all come to pass.
 to their home - land, where they told the tale.

10 hi-ro, O hu-ro, we sing of Saint Bren - dan, who followed God's call-ing a -
 cross the wide sea; and the stran-gers he met, and the

15 won-ders he witnessed, led him to proclaim, "We give God the glo-ry!"

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Saint Brendan the Navigator

Graphic redacted

**Saint Brendan the Navigator
By Brother Mickey O'Neill McGrath, OSFS**

Timeline for A Pilgrimage with Celtic Saints: Living into Our Baptism

First Century	Traders brought Christianity to the British Isles, but it remained a fringe or cult religion
Third-Fourth Centuries	Roman soldiers brought Christianity with them
A.D. 350	Patrick of Ireland born in modern-day Scotland or Wales
A.D. 383	Roman troops begin to withdraw from Britain
A.D. 410	Emperor Honorius tells all Roman territorial cities to see to their own defense; Rome unable to help
A.D. 452	Brigid of Kildare born
A.D. 461	Patrick of Ireland dies in Saul, Ireland (date disputed, but most scholars use this date)
A.D. 484	Brendan of Clonfert born, county Kerry, Ireland
A.D. 500	Roman troops, Roman rule completely gone from Britain
A.D. 521	Columba of Iona born in County Donegal, Ireland
A.D. 524	Brigid of Kildare dies
A.D. 577	Brendan of Clonfert dies
A.D. 597	Columba of Iona dies Bishop Augustine arrives in Kent, England from Rome to bring Christianity to the Britons. Is surprised to meet Christians already there!
A.D. 664	Synod of Whitby: Held at Hilda's double monastery in Northumbria by King Oswiu in order to determine whether to follow Roman Church practices or the "Ionan" practices, especially over date of Easter. Bishop Colmán was team Iona; Wilfrid represented Rome & won argument by saying Peter was the first Bishop of Rome & was the rock Christ said he would build the Church upon, and Peter held the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

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Materials for Week Two:

Teaching Notes: St. Brigid

Participants' Handout

Music

Artwork

**Living into our Baptism: a Pilgrimage with Celtic Saints
Brigid: Embodying Hospitality**

Opening Prayer—1 minute

Gracious God: You called your servant Brigid to be a leader from her youth, demonstrating how her love for you translated into providing for others from her family's bounty. As the Abbess of Kildare, she poured out her gifts of hospitality, healing, and practical wisdom to the benefit of all those around her. We give you thanks for her life and pray that we may learn from her example, striving to embody her gifts in our own lives, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Reflections from Previous Week—5-10 minutes

Have those who would like to share their journaling observations.

Story about Saint with Highlighted Charism—5 to 7 minutes

Brigid (IRISH PRONUNCIATION IS BREEDGE) is also known as Bríd, Bride, and Bridget. Some confusion about the Christian saint Brigid exists because there was a triple-goddess named Brigid in Irish mythology who was the goddess of poetry, healing, and smithcraft—as in blacksmithing—so she was also associated with fire. Some aspects of the mythological Brigid crept over onto the Christian saint, Brigid.

Saint Brigid lived in the mid 5th to early 6th centuries, probably born around 452, according to Irish annals, but three different dates are given for her death; she probably died around 524. Her feast day is February 1st, which is the first day of spring (Imbolc) in the ancient Irish calendar. [ASIDE: Feb. 2 is Candlemas—the presentation of the Lord in the Temple; 40 days after Xmas; Christ as the light of the world is associated with light/flame/candles; candles were blessed and processed on this feast day.]

Several stories about her life were written during the middle ages, but the stories and legends handed down by everyday people, which are still told today, have probably defined her more. Scholars continue to debate over whether or not Saint Brigid actually existed; but in the minds and hearts of the people of Ireland and Scotland, there is no doubt about her existence and her power.

As for facts---it is said that she founded a monastery in what is known as the town of Kildare, about 30 miles west of Dublin. Kildare comes from the Irish words “Cill Daire” or “Church of the Oak,” named because of Brigid's favorite oak tree. Kildare was actually what's known as a “double monastery” because women lived in one side of it, men the other.

Cogitosus, renowned as Brigid's first biographer, wrote in the 7th century that the monastery “has always been ruled over by the Archbishop of the Irish and by the abbess,

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whom all the abbesses of the Irish venerate, by a blessed line of succession and by perpetual rites.”²⁵⁸

Nuns of the monastery tended the sacred fire there, said to have been kindled by Brigid herself, and that tradition was still going on in the 12th century, according to a chronicler of the church, Gerald of Wales.²⁵⁹ The monastery was sacked later in that century and limped along for a few more centuries until the politics of the Reformation came to Ireland.

A couple of different stories about Brigid’s origins exist. One says that she was the daughter of Christian parents (Cogitosus); another says that she was the daughter of a slave-woman and her master, and that Brigid and her mother were sold to a druid after the master’s wife learned who Brigid’s father *really* was. But stories abound concerning her hospitality, even as a young girl:

One day, her mother sent Brigid out with the other girls of the household to churn butter. As Brigid was working at the chore, many poor folk came along to beg for some milk and butter for their own use. Touched by their need and wanting to obey the teachings of her faith, Brigid gave away the milk and butter that she had.

At the end of the day, each girl was to show the butter that she had produced. Brigid had nothing to show, since she had given it all away. Not wanting to displease her mother, her biographer tells us that she “turned to the Lord in prayer. The Lord immediately heard the voice and prayers of the virgin and, by the generosity of his divine power, he who is our help in adversity answered her faith in him and provided a plentiful amount of butter. Marvelously, no sooner was her prayer said than her share of work was seen to be done and even to exceed those of the other women who worked with her. Seeing such a great miracle with their own eyes, all praised the Lord who had done this and were filled with wonder that there should be such power of faith in the virgin’s heart.”²⁶⁰

Another tale of Brigid as a young girl tells how she asked to get sent back to her father, and the druid took her there. But her stepmother accused her of stealing items in the house and giving them to the poor; so her father took her off to sell her to the king of Leinster, which was the province in which they lived. Her father left Brigid in the cart to guard it and his jewel-encrusted sword, which he had left in the cart. While her father spoke with the king, a leper came begging to Brigid—and she handed over her father’s sword to the man.

When her father returned, he asked where his sword was. “She replied, ‘Christ has taken it.’ Having learned that, he said: ‘Why did you give the value of ten cows to a leper, my daughter? It was not my sword but belonged to the king.’ The girl replied: ‘Even if I had the power to give the whole of Leinster, I would give it to God.’” Her father left her

²⁵⁸ Cogitosus, “The Life of St. Brigit the Virgin., in *Celtic Spirituality*, ed. Bernard McGinn, trans. Oliver Davies and Thomas O’Loughlin, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 122-139.

²⁵⁹ (Davies and O’Loughlin, *The Sources: Introduction to the Translated Texts* 1999, 31)

²⁶⁰ (Cogitosus 1999, 123-124)

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with the king, but she miraculously appeared in the cart behind her father as he rode home. He returned her to the king, who said, “Truly. . . this girl can neither be sold or bought.” The king gifted her with another sword, and Brigid returned home with her father.²⁶¹

Brigid pledged herself to God and eventually traveled off to become a nun or to “take the veil,” as they say. At the ceremony where she was consecrated as a nun, Bishop Mel, ‘being intoxicated with the grace of God there, did not know what he was reciting from his book, for he consecrated Brigit with the orders of a bishop. ‘Only this virgin in the whole of Ireland will hold the episcopal ordination,’ said Mel. While she was being consecrated a fiery column ascended from her head.’²⁶²

So I guess Pope Francis could check into that if he wants to explore ordaining women, because it would seem that Brigid already jumped the queue.

Cogitosus tells us of another miracle brought about by her prayers:

“On another extraordinary occasion, some lepers asked this venerable Brigit for some beer, but she did not have beer to give them. Seeing water that had been prepared for baths, she blessed it in the strength of her faith and turned into the very best beer, which she generously dispensed to the thirsty. It was indeed he who turned water into wine in Cana of Galilee who turned water into wine here through the faith of this most blessed woman.”²⁶³

Brigid and her nuns brewed ale and baked bread as part of their hospitality. One Eastertide, Brigid was fretting because they only had one sack of malt, enough to brew ale only for their own needs, but there were 17 other churches in the area, and Brigid wanted to provide ale for all of them so that they could at least drink the ale, even if they didn’t have any food for Easter. Complicating matters was they had only one sack of malt, one barrel, and two tubs. But Brigid gave the orders to prepare the ale; the malt was mashed in one tub and placed to ferment in the other, and when it was ready, the ale was drawn off into the barrel, and the nuns took the full barrel off to one of the churches, which emptied it into their own container so the nuns could return with it to the monastery. “Eighteen barrellfulls had come from the one sack and enough for herself over Easter. And there was no lack of feasting in every single church from Easter Sunday to Low Sunday as a result of Brigit’s preparations,” according to the story.²⁶⁴

Another Tale of Brigid’s Hospitality

“These were the wishes of Brigit: ‘I would wish a great lake of ale for the King of Kings; I would wish the family of Heaven to be drinking it through life and time. I would wish the men of Heaven in my own house; I would wish vessels of peace to be giving to them. I would wish vessels full of alms to be giving away; I would wish ridges of mercy for peace-making. I would wish joy to be in their drinking; I would wish Jesus to be here

²⁶¹ (The Irish Life of Brigit 1999, 145)

²⁶² (The Irish Life of Brigit 1999, 144-145)

²⁶³ (Cogitosus 1999, 126)

²⁶⁴ (The Irish Life of Brigit 1999, 145)

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among them. I would wish the three Marys of great name; I would wish the people of Heaven from every side. I would wish to be a rent-payer to the Prince; the way if I was in trouble he would give me a good blessing.’ Whatever, now, Brigit would ask of the Lord, he would give it to her on the moment. And it is what her desire was, to satisfy the poor, to banish every hardship, and to save every sorrowful man.”²⁶⁵

Small Group Reflection Time:--15 minutes

Brigid seems to have had a gift for *embodying hospitality* from the time she was a young girl. Giving away her father’s valuables, giving away her family’s food, and praying for miraculous interventions to benefit others were simply how Brigid lived. Thinking about what you have heard of Brigid’s gift for *embodying hospitality*, please reflect in your small group on the following questions:

- Do you believe you possess that spiritual gift? If so, how do you express it?
- If not, do you possess a spiritual gift related to that one? What is it? How do you express it?
- Does your church community express that spiritual gift? If so, how?
- Can you name another “spiritual hero” who displays such a gift?

Recall Attention to Main Group—5 minutes

Ask for people to share their reflections.

Sing a hymn/song about the Saint and the charism—5 minutes

Read another story or poem about the Saint and the charism—3 to 5 minutes

One of Brigid’s nicknames is “Mary of the Gaels.” She is also known as the aid-woman to Mary and the foster-mother of Jesus; those titles come from one of my favorite stories about Brigid from the western isles of Scotland. The Celts have never let the chronological truth get in the way of telling a Greater Truth in story form, and this is a perfect example!

And so the story is told how Brigid was a serving-girl at an inn in Bethlehem. There was a great drought in the land, so the innkeeper had gone off with the water-barrel to fetch more water from afar, leaving Brigid with only a stoup (tankard) of water and a bannock cake (a flat bread made of barley or oatmeal—this is how we know this a Scottish story!). The innkeeper told Brigid NOT to give out that water or bannock to ANYONE, for it might be the only food they had; nor was she to give shelter to anyone until he returned, since he couldn’t feed anyone else.

As Brigid was doing her chores, a couple came to the door of the inn, seeking food and shelter. They had traveled far and were worn out. Brigid told them she couldn’t give them a room, but she broke off most of her bannock cake and poured her water into

²⁶⁵ Augusta Gregory, *The Blessed Trinity of Ireland: Stories of St. Brigit, St. Columcille and St. Patrick*, (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe Ltd., 1985), 14.

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another stoup for them to have. They ate and drank them while standing at the door of the inn. Then the couple thanked Brigid and turned to go on their way.

Brigid gazed after them, her heart heavy with sorrow that she couldn't give them shelter, because she could see that the beautiful woman was heavy with child. When she turned back to the table where her bannock cake and water had been, she found that the bannock was now whole again, and her stoup was full to the brim with water!

“When she recovered from her wonderment,” Brigid went outside to call after the man and woman, but she saw no sign of them. Then she noticed a bright light over the stable door, and she hurried inside—just in time to help the woman, who was Mary, and to receive the Christ child into her arms.

“When the child was born Bride put three drops of water from the spring of pure water on the tablet of His forehead, in name of God, in name of Jesus, in name of Spirit.”²⁶⁶)

This tradition was an important one when children were born in the western isles; the midwife would baptize the newborn baby, saying something like this:

“The little drop of the Father on thy little forehead, beloved one. The little drop of the Son on thy little forehead, beloved one. The little drop of the Spirit on thy little forehead, beloved one. To aid thee from the fays, To guard thee from the host; to aid thee from the gnome; to shield thee from the spectre; to keep thee for the Three, to shield thee, to surround thee; to save thee for the Three, to fill thee with the graces; the little drop of the Three to lave thee with the graces.”²⁶⁷

There are many poems and prayers and incantations that people of the western isles of Scotland would offer, invoking the names of Brigid and Columba and Mary and the archangel Michael to offer protection—for them, for their livestock, for their homes, and for travelers—like this little blessing:

“May Brigit and Mary and Michael
Shield you on sea and on land,
Each step and each path you travel.”²⁶⁸

The household fires would be built up every morning and banked every night, invoking Brigid's name. And of course, there is the ancient rune of hospitality, which is included in your handout and is said to be more than 1,500 years old:

I saw a stranger yestreen;
I put food in the eating place,
drink in the drinking place,
music in the listening place,
and in the name of the Triune

²⁶⁶ (Carmichael 1992, 580-581)

²⁶⁷ (Carmichael 1992, 191)

²⁶⁸ (Carmichael 1992, 254)

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he blessed myself and my house,
my cattle and my dear ones, and the lark said in her song
often, often, often,
goes the Christ in the stranger's guise,
often, often, often,
goes the Christ in the stranger's guise.

Small Group Reflection Time:--15 minutes

- Reflect on the Saint's spiritual gift and consider the 3 promises from the Baptismal Covenant: to which of the three promises in the Covenant does that charism most closely adhere?
- How do they see that play out in the Saint's story?
- When have they been able to act on that promise in their own lives?
- In the life of their faith community?

Recall Attention to Main Group—5 minutes

Ask for people to share their reflections.

Silent Reflection Time (indicate art work front & center)—5 minutes

Ask people to silently reflect on the art work; the Saint's spiritual gift; to pray or meditate about that night's work in their own lives; and to write, on the post-it note provided, *one* word to summarize the most important thing to them about that evening's experience, and place it on the board on the way out.

Introduce the Journaling Guidance Question for the Week—2 minutes

In the time until our next meeting, be alert for signs of *embodying hospitality* as you go throughout your day. Whenever you see something that makes you think of *embodying hospitality*, jot down a few words or sentences about it; or take a photo of it (smart phones are great for photojournaling!); or if you draw, make a sketch about it; or cut out a picture from a magazine or newspaper about it; or write down the title of a song/hymn or phrase from it that comes into your mind when you think about *embodying hospitality*.

Please bring your journal to next week's session; if you have photos, please copy them onto a piece of paper in order to show others at discussion time. If you are participating in the study, please bring your journal (or a copy of it) and give it to Debbie.

Final Prayer, Blessing, & Dismissal—5 minutes

Blessing of Brigid

Each day and each night
That I say the Descent of Brigit,
I shall not be slain,
I shall not be sworded,
I shall not be put in cell,
I shall not be hewn,

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I shall not be riven,
I shall not be anguished,
I shall not be wounded,
I shall not be ravaged,
I shall not be blinded,
I shall not be made naked,
I shall not be left bare,
Nor will Christ
Leave me forgotten.

Nor fire shall burn me,
Nor sun shall burn me,
Nor moon shall blanch me.

Nor water shall drown me,
Nor flood shall drown me,
Nor brine shall drown me.

Nor seed of fairy host shall lift me,
Nor seed of airy host shall lift me,
Nor earthly being destroy me.

I am under the shielding
 Of good Brigit each day;
I am under the shielding
 Of good Brigit each night.

I am under the keeping
 Of the Nurse of Mary,
Each early and late,
 Every dark, every light.

Brigit is my comrade-woman,
 Brigit is my maker of song,
Brigit is my helping-woman,
 My choicest of women, my guide.²⁶⁹

Sing the Hymn of Brigid as the closing.

Dismissal:

May the peace of Columba be yours as you journey,
The peace of Brigid be yours as you journey,
The peace of Mary be yours as you journey,
And may you return home safe-guarded.

Thanks be to God!²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ (Carmichael 1992, 238-239)

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(adapted from *Carmina Gadelica*, #366, p. 339)

Have them leave the summary word paper in the box at the exit

Note about the art on the handout: John Duncan, a Scottish artist, painted it in 1913; it depicts angels carrying Bride off from Ireland to go help with the birth of the Christ child.

²⁷⁰ Adapted from “#366,” Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, 1992, 339.

Saint Brigid



Small Group Reflection Time #1

Brigid seems to have had a gift for *embodying hospitality* from the time she was a young girl. Giving away her father's valuables, giving away her family's food, and praying for miraculous interventions to benefit others were simply how Brigid lived. Thinking about what you have heard of Brigid's gift for *embodying hospitality*, please reflect in your small group on the following questions:

- Do you believe you possess that spiritual gift? If so, how do you express it?
- If not, do you possess a spiritual gift related to that one? What is it? How do you express it?
- Does your church community express that spiritual gift? If so, how?
- Can you name another "spiritual hero" who displays such a gift?

Small Group Reflection Time #2

Reflect on the Saint's spiritual gift of *embodying hospitality* and consider the 3 promises from the Baptismal Covenant (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 305):

- Proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ;
 - Seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself;
 - Striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being.
-
- To which of the three promises in the Covenant does that charism most closely adhere?
 - How do you see that play out in the Saint's story?
 - When have you been able to act on that promise in your own life?
 - In the life of your faith community?

Another Tale of Brigid's Hospitality

“These were the wishes of Brigit: ‘I would wish a great lake of ale for the King of Kings; I would wish the family of Heaven to be drinking it through life and time. I would wish the men of Heaven in my own house; I would wish vessels of peace to be giving to them. I would wish vessels full of alms to be giving away; I would wish ridges of mercy for peace-making. I would wish joy to be in their drinking; I would wish Jesus to be here among them. I would wish the three Marys of great name; I would wish the people of Heaven from every side. I would wish to be a rent-payer to the Prince; the way if I was in trouble he would give me a good blessing.’ Whatever, now, Brigit would ask of the Lord, he would give it to her on the moment. And it is what her desire was, to satisfy the poor, to banish every hardship, and to save every sorrowful man.” (Lady Augusta Gregory, *The Blessed Trinity of Ireland*, 1985, p. 14)

A Tale of Brigid's Aid for Mary

It is said that Brigid stayed on as the foster-mother of the Christ child. When it came time to present him in the Temple for the ceremony of Mary's purification and the Christ child's naming, about 40 days after his birth, Brigid walked before Mary. Brigid held a lighted candle in each hand as they approached the Temple, and even though the winds were strong, the candles were not extinguished. This is one of the reasons why Candlemas Day is associated with both Brigid and Mary. (*Carmina Gadelica*, p. 583)

The Celtic Rune of Hospitality

This rune (poem) is said to be more than 1,500 years old:

I saw a stranger yestreen;
I put food in the eating place,
drink in the drinking place,
music in the listening place,
and in the name of the Triune
he blessed myself and my house,
my cattle and my dear ones, and the lark said in her song
often, often, often,
goes the Christ in the stranger's guise,
often, often, often,
goes the Christ in the stranger's guise.

The Story of St. Brigid's Cross

The St. Brigid's cross design may be an older, pre-Christian symbol, especially because it is said to keep evil, fire and hunger from the homes in which it is displayed. Different stories of how it came to be associated with Brigid exist, but the most popular tale seems to be that an elderly pagan chieftain lay delirious on his deathbed, and no one could do anything to help him, no matter what they tried. Some Christians in his household asked Brigid to come sit beside him in an effort to calm him. Brigid came, sat near his bed, and picked up some rushes from the floor and began weaving a cross, explaining the meaning of the cross to the man as he raved. He calmed down and began to ask her questions

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about her faith and the cross she was weaving. Her words and demeanor brought peace to the man's soul, and he was baptized just before dying. Since that day, on the eve of her Feast Day, people make a St. Brigid's Cross from rushes or straw and hang it inside their house, over the door. (http://www.blarney.com/st-brigid_s-cross/)



One Word About Tonight

In this time of silence, please reflect on the highlighted spiritual gift; the art work; the music; and then write, on the post-it note provided, *one* word to summarize the most important thing you're taking away tonight from our session. Please post it on the board as you leave tonight.

Journaling Question for the Week: Embodying Hospitality

In the time until our next meeting, be alert for signs of *embodying hospitality* as you go throughout your day. Whenever you see something that makes you think of *embodying hospitality*, jot down a few words or sentences about it; or take a photo of it (smart phones are great for photojournaling!); or if you draw, make a sketch about it; or cut out a picture from a magazine or newspaper about it; or write down the title of a song/hymn or phrase from it that comes into your mind when you think about *embodying hospitality*.

Please bring your journal to next week's session; if you have photos, please copy them onto a piece of paper in order to show others at discussion time. If you are participating in the study, please bring your journal (or a copy of it) and give it to Debbie.

Closing Prayer

We'll close tonight with a prayer used on the Isle of Uist in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland:

Blessing of Brigid

Each day and each night
That I say the Descent of Brigit,
I shall not be slain,
I shall not be sworded,
I shall not be put in cell,
I shall not be hewn,
I shall not be riven,
I shall not be anguished,
I shall not be wounded,
I shall not be ravaged,
I shall not be blinded,
I shall not be made naked,
I shall not be left bare,
Nor will Christ
Leave me forgotten.

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Nor fire shall burn me,
Nor sun shall burn me,
Nor moon shall blanch me.
Nor water shall drown me,
Nor flood shall drown me,
Nor brine shall drown me.

Nor seed of fairy host shall lift me,
Nor seed of airy host shall lift me,
Nor earthly being destroy me.

I am under the shielding
 Of good Brigit each day;
I am under the shielding
 Of good Brigit each night.
I am under the keeping
 Of the Nurse of Mary,
Each early and late,
 Every dark, every light.

Brigit is my comrade-woman,
 Brigit is my maker of song,
Brigit is my helping-woman,
 My choicest of women, my guide. (*Carmina Gadelica*, pp. 238-239)

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Hymn: I Praise Brigid

Material redacted

Saint Brigid

Debra Brewin-Wilson

C G C F F

1. From the time she was a young girl, Brig - id lift - ed up the
 2. Ho - ly Brig - id was an ab - bess to those gath - ered at Kil -
 3. Bish - op, king, peas - ant, or child , Brig - id loved them all the
 4. "If I had a lake of beer , I would sure - ly drain it

C C G C F F

7 poor, Giv - ing of her fam' - ly's boun - ty to all cry - ing at their
 dare. And man - y wear - y trav' - ler found a heart - y wel - come
 same. Giv - ing food and love and heal - ing, al - ways of - fered in Christ's
 dry. To serve the Ho - ly fam' - ly, and all who would pass

C F Am C F F

15 door. Though it some - times caused her troub - le, she re - mained stead - fast in
 there. And her rep - u - ta - tion grew for her hosp - it - al - i -
 name. Pa - tron saint of wom - en's Wis - dom; known as Mar - y of the
 by; for to teach a - bout God's love , you must give it all a -

G C C F G F C

23 love; taught by Christ, the Word and Wis - dom, true High King who rules a - bove.
 ty, serv - ing bread and meat and beer, made by her com - mun - it - y.
 Gaels; Giv - ing light, and voice, and cour - age mak - ing sure Christ's love pre - vails.
 way; trust - ing God pro - vides e - nough for all, each and ev' - ry day."

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Saint Brigid

Graphic Redacted

**Saint Brigid of a Hundred Thousand Welcomes
By Brother Mickey O'Neill McGrath, OSFS**

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Materials for Week Three:

Teaching Notes: St. Columba

Participants' Handout

Music

Artwork

Living into our Baptism: a Pilgrimage with Celtic Saints
Saint Columba: Building Community

Opening Prayer—1 minute

Gracious God: you called your servant Columba to be a poet, priest, pastor, prophet, and pilgrim. Through his lifelong example of prayer, work, and study, he demonstrated how to build effective Christian community for lay and ordained alike. We give you thanks for his life and pray that we may learn from his example and strive to build community in our own lives, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Reflections from Previous Week—5-10 minutes

Have those who would like to share their journaling observations.

Story about Saint with Highlighted Charism—5 to 7 minutes

Columba is the Latin translation of the Irish name Colum Cille, meaning “dove of the church.” What we know of Columba’s life comes from several sources: but the two most important, in my opinion, are a poem written about three years after his death; and his hagiography, *Life of St. Columba*, written by Adomnán of Iona between the years 688 and 692.²⁷¹

Columba was probably born around the year 521, somewhere in what we now call County Donegal in Ireland. Columba came from the northern Irish branch of a powerful family, the O’Neills, who produced warriors and kings. Different branches of the family sometimes battled with one another to gain more power.²⁷²

In Irish society at the time, boys were often sent to live in another family, where they would be raised as a son of that household, educated and taught the skills necessary to their station, whether that be as warriors, bards, lawyers, or priests (or druids, in earlier times). This practice was called “fostering” and it strengthened relationships between different families, so they would support one another in times of need.

Adomnán tells us that Columba was sent to foster with a priest named Cruithnechán. One night, the priest was heading back to the house after saying the evening office in the chapel, when he noticed the entire house was bathed in a bright light. Entering, he saw a ball of light hovering over Columba’s face as he slept. The priest recognized that this was the “grace of the Holy Ghost. . . poured from heaven upon his foster-son.”²⁷³

Later, when Columba had been ordained a deacon, he studied with Bishop Uinniau or Finnio, who once saw an angel walking beside Columba as he approached.²⁷⁴

²⁷¹ Ian Bradley, *Columba: Pilgrim and Penitent*, (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 1996), 13.

²⁷² Richard Sharpe, "Introduction," in Adomnán, *Life of St. Columba*, trans. Richard Sharpe, (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 9-10.

²⁷³ Adomnán, *Life of St. Columba*, trans. Richard Sharpe, (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 207.

²⁷⁴ (Adomnán 1995, 208)

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Other than brief glimpses like that into Columba's early life, we don't know much about his first 40 years. But something happened around the year 561 that forever changed Columba's life and the lives of many others who have followed his path down through the centuries.

In the year 561, the Northern and Southern O'Neills fought a great battle. The Northern O'Neills carried the day, and according to one of the Irish annals, the victory was due to prayerful intervention by Columba. Some historians suggest that perhaps Columba did more than pray: they believe he may have fought in the battle alongside his uncle and first cousin, even though he was a priest.²⁷⁵

A legend that is told about that battle involves an illegally copied psalter. It's said that St. Finnian had brought a beautiful book of the Psalms from Rome and placed it in the monastery in a town called Moville in northern Ireland, where Columba served as a monk. Allegedly, Columba took the book in order to copy it, but he did not have permission to do so. St. Finnian, upset at this breach of protocol, appealed to his local king—a member of the *Southern* O'Neills—who demanded that Columba not only return the original book, but the copy he had made, as well. Columba refused and his relatives, the *Northern* O'Neills, backed him up. This sparked the battle of Cúl Drebene.²⁷⁶

In the year 562, a synod was held in the territory of the Southern O'Neills, and Columba was excommunicated. While Adomnán defends him and says it was a "trivial offense," historians suggest that Columba felt such remorse about the bloodshed in which he had played a part, he undertook the Irish spiritual discipline known as peregrination (white martyrdom): a self-imposed exile and wandering for God.²⁷⁷ This discipline also encompassed the idea of penitence, another important feature of Christianity as it was practiced in Ireland at that time. Peregrination was viewed as a way to practice penitence by having the person release ties to family, friends, and home in order to place oneself at Christ's service and atone for the wrongs one had done.²⁷⁸

The story goes that Columba felt *such* remorse for sparking the conflict between the rival branches of his clan, he set sail, island hopping northward, and settled on Iona (Í) because it was the first island he reached where he could no longer see Ireland.

Columba had 12 companions with him, we are told, and the men formed a monastery on the island. They worked the land, they built huts for themselves and a chapel and other buildings to house their work—which included producing manuscripts. It is believed that the Book of Kells was actually produced in Iona and moved to Kells to keep it safe from raiding Vikings.

²⁷⁵ (Bradley 1996, 20)

²⁷⁶ (Bradley 1996, 21)

²⁷⁷ (Adomnán 1995, 207 and Sharpe 1995, 13-14)

²⁷⁸ (Bradley 1996, 18-19)

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Columba and his followers founded other monasteries, spreading their strand of Christianity throughout Ireland and the part of Scotland where the Irish had settled, known as Dál Riata. Columba attended religious and political councils, as well. He was an O'Neill, and that carried a lot of weight with both the Irish and the Picts who were native to northern Scotland. Columba was concerned with building up not only his local community, but the body of Christ, as well.

Scholars suggest that Columba founded at least 6 monasteries—four in Dál Riata and two in Ireland—in addition to the one at Iona, which remained his base of operations for the rest of his life. Tying together the religious and the political, he would place relatives in charge of those other monasteries. This was all in keeping with Irish society at the time. In a way, Columba could be viewed as the high king of the monasteries, with each one viewed as a kinship clan.²⁷⁹

Columba would follow periods of intense activity with time alone, sometimes retreating to another small island to spend time communing with God and studying. He also wrote poetry and songs. He was renowned for his voice, which was big and beautiful. Although when he was chanting the psalms in church, the brothers could hear his voice a half-mile or more away, his voice sounded no louder than any other to those gathered with him inside the building. His voice was so clear, even those a mile away could hear every word of the verses he chanted.²⁸⁰

We're told that Columba worked tirelessly, reading, praying, leading the men in worship, and providing spiritual counsel to peasants and kings alike. He was known for his wisdom, learning, and holiness.²⁸¹ Columba was a "soul friend" or "anam cara" to many. We call such a person a spiritual director. People who wanted his advice would travel to the island of Mull and holler across the sound toward the island, and monks would either holler back for them to come over if they had their own boat, or the monks would row over to pick them up. That spot is where the ferry crosses to this day.

Columba often had premonitions about visitors, and he would prophesy about their coming and what lay ahead for those people. Other stories are told of his marital counseling skills; his advice to kings; his encounter with the Loch Ness Monster; and even his command over the wind and the ocean, which made him a patron saint of sailors.

As Columba grew older, he stopped traveling and spent more time copying psalms and praying. He sometimes fretted over the well-being of his brethren. One summer, a group of monks were tending land on the opposite side of the island. The work was hard, and they often were late returning to the monastery. For several days in a row, when they reached a point that was halfway between the land and the monastery, they felt overwhelmed by sensations of a sweet fragrance, a fiery warmth, and overwhelming joy. Yet none of the monks spoke about this, feeling unsure of the experience.

²⁷⁹ (Bradley 1996, 42-43)

²⁸⁰ (Adomnán 1995, 141)

²⁸¹ Thomas Owen Clancy and Gilbert Márkus, *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 11.

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One day, their leader finally asked if they had experienced anything different in their walk back to the monastery. One monk spoke of the sensations, and the other monks chimed in their agreement. The leader explained that Columba worried about them, and since he could not physically come out to greet them, he met them in spirit in order to refresh them, knowing how hard they had worked and how tired they were at the end of the day.²⁸²

Religious communities usually follow what is called a “Rule”—meaning a ruler or a way to measure how to live in community with one another. Although there is no evidence from Columba’s time of a written rule, there is written evidence from the ninth century in a document called *The Rule of Columcille*. While it may not have originally been written by Columba himself, it is reasonable to assume that this reflects what Columba’s successors taught—and which he, himself, may have taught.

Reading, work, and prayer were the mainstays of the Rule. I have included part of the rule in your handout for today.²⁸³

Small Group Reflection Time—15 minutes

Having been raised in a monastery, and as a member of the powerful Northern O’Neills, Columba understood the importance of *community* in spreading and strengthening Christianity. Thinking about what you’ve heard of Columba’s life, please reflect in your small group on the following three questions:

- Do you believe you possess the spiritual gift of building community? If so, how do you express it?
- If not, do you possess a spiritual gift related to that one? What is it? How do you express it?
- Does your church community express the gift of building community? If so, how?
- Can you name another spiritual hero who displays such a gift?

Recall Attention to Main Group—5 minutes

Ask for people to share their reflections.

Sing a hymn/song about the Saint and the charism—5 minutes

Read another story or poem about the Saint and the charism—3 to 5 minutes

Two poems survive that are believed to have been written by Columba, himself: *Altus Prosator* (*The High Creator*) and *Adiutor Laborantium* (*O helper of workers*). Both were

²⁸² (Adomnán 1995, 139-141)

²⁸³ (Bradley 1996, 72) and *Saint Columcille Rule*, n.d., accessed November 30, 2015, <https://orthodoxwesternrite.wordpress.com/e-life-giving-spring-hermitage/>.

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written in Latin and his first poem indicates that the early Latin translation of the Bible, known as the Vulgate, was in use in Ireland and Scotland at that time.²⁸⁴

Altus Prosator is known as an alphabetical or “abecedarian” poem because the first verse begins with “A,” the second “B,” the third “C,” etc. Columba incorporated foreign words into the poem and even invented a few, apparently, which medieval monks later adopted in their own works.²⁸⁵

In the poem, Columba uses his knowledge of the scriptures and his own considerable poetic nature to tell the story of God’s relationship with humanity, from creation through to the second coming of Christ. It’s rich in imagery and it’s well worth reading the entire poem; for tonight, though, here are two sample verses—the two concluding verses:

By the singing of hymns eagerly ringing out,
by thousands of angels rejoicing in holy dances,
and by the four living creatures, full of eyes,
with the twenty-four joyful elders
casting their crowns under the feet of the Lamb of God,
the Trinity is praised in eternal three-fold exchanges.

The raging anger of fire will devour the adversaries
who will not believe that Christ came from God the Father.
But we shall surely fly off to meet him straight away,
and thus we shall be with him in several ranks of dignities
according to the eternal merits of our rewards,
to abide in glory from age to age.²⁸⁶

His second poem, *Adiutor Laborantium*, is translated:

O helper of workers,
ruler of all the good,
guard on the ramparts
and defender of the faithful,
who lift up the lowly
and crush the proud,
ruler of the faithful,
enemy of the impenitent,
judge of all judges,
who punish those who err,
pure life of the living,
light and Father of lights
shining now with great light,
denying to none of the hopeful

²⁸⁴ (Clancy and Márkus 1995, 40)

²⁸⁵ (Clancy and Márkus 1995, 40-41)

²⁸⁶ Columba, “Altus Prosator,” in Clancy and Márkus, eds., *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 53.

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your strength and help,
I beg that me, a little man,
trembling and most wretched,
rowing through the infinite storm
of this age,
Christ may draw after Him to the lofty
Most beautiful haven of life
. . . an unending
holy hymn forever.
From the envy of enemies you lead me
into the joy of paradise.
Through you, Christ Jesus,
who live and reign. . .²⁸⁷

On the day before he died on June 9, 597, Columba blessed the barn that contained two large heaps of grain, which would help feed the brothers. Columba then told his servant, Diarmait, that he would soon die, and how that would happen. Columba headed back to the monastery, and stopped to rest. As he sat there, the white horse that carried the milk pails from the dairy to the monastery walked up to him, put its head against Columba's chest, and began to cry, pouring out tears and weeping aloud, like a person.

Diarmait hurried up and tried to lead the horse away, but Columba said, "Let him be. . . according to his will the Creator has clearly revealed to this brute and reasonless animal that his master is going away." Then he blessed the horse, and it turned away, heading off to its work.²⁸⁸

Columba walked on to the top of a nearby hill and blessed the monastery and the island. Then Columba returned to his work, writing out a copy of the psalms. At psalm 34, verse 10: "They that seek the Lord shall not want for anything that is good," he stopped and said that his work must stop there, and Baithéne, his successor, had to take over.²⁸⁹

Columba then went to church to attend vespers, returning to his bed, saying to the brothers who gathered 'round him, "I commend to you, my little children, these my last words: Love one another unfeignedly. Peace. If you keep this course according to the example of the holy fathers, God, who strengthens the good, will help you, and I dwelling with him shall intercede for you. He will supply not only enough for the needs of this present life, but also the eternal good things that are prepared as a reward for those who keep the Lord's commandments."²⁹⁰

When the bell rang out for the midnight office, Columba ran ahead into the church and knelt alone in prayer; then he slumped over at the altar. The brothers gathered around,

²⁸⁷ (Columba, *Adiutor Laborantium* 1995, 73)

²⁸⁸ (Adomnán 1995, 226-227)

²⁸⁹ (Adomnán 1995, 228)

²⁹⁰ (Adomnán 1995, 228-229)

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and one helped Columba to raise his hand to bless the brothers one final time; with that, Columba died.²⁹¹

It didn't take long after Columba's death for the bards and poets to begin composing works about him. One of the most famous is *Amra Choluimb Chille* (*The Elegy of Colum Cille*), probably written within a generation of Columba's death by the Irish poet, Dallán Forgaill—a nickname which means “The Blind One or the son of the Witness or the Testimony.” He may, indeed, have been blind—many bards and poets were, smallpox being a common cause. [His *real* name was Eochu mac Colla meic Eircc meic Feradaig.]²⁹²

Mixing Irish poetic techniques, church history, and tidbits about Columba's life, it's a unique work. The poem itself was held in reverence throughout the middle ages, carefully copied into other collections. It was said that anyone who recited the poem every day, even though they might not fully understand it, would receive the kingdom of heaven, prosperity on earth, and save his soul past pain—all thanks to Columba.²⁹³ (Clancy & Márkus, p. 96)

Here is an excerpt from this poem (*Amra*):

II By the grace of God Colum rose to exalted companionship;
Awaiting bright signs, he kept watch while he lived.
His lifetime was short,
scant portions filled him.
He was learning's pillar in every stronghold,
he was foremost at the book of complex Law.
The northern land shone,
the western people blazed,
he lit up the east
with chaste clerics.
Good the legacy of God's angel
when he glorified him.²⁹⁴

VIII Great Áed pledged it for all people:
a solid song when the hero went to heaven.
Not worthless, not slight, not contention
not a hero unvigorous towards Conall's covenant.
His blessing turned them, the mouths of the fierce ones
who lived on the Tay, to the will of the King.
From the dark journeys of man
he sat down with God.
In place of pomp, in place of splendor, he bestowed,

²⁹¹ (Adomnán 1995, 229)

²⁹² (Clancy and Márkus 1995, 97-98)

²⁹³ (Clancy and Márkus 1995, 96)

²⁹⁴ (Forgaill 1995, 107)

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the pure descendant of Conall ruled in his monastery.
A fair sage at his death,
and master of a community,
he spoke with an angel;
he studied Greek grammar.
A freeman outwith the tribe, thus I declare,
the son of Fedelmid, he fought the tribe, he knew his end.
He did not suffer for the world:
he was constant to the memory of the cross.
What he conceived keeping vigil,
by action he ascertained.
A splendid birth was born of Art's offspring
--they have not Níall's strength—
one who commits no wrong from which he dies.²⁹⁵

[Áed was an O'Neill king]

Small Group Reflection Time:--15 minutes

- Reflect on the Saint's spiritual gift of building community and consider the 3 promises from the Baptismal Covenant: to which of the three promises in the Covenant does that charism most closely adhere?
- How do you see that play out in the Saint's story?
- When have you been able to act on that promise in your own life?
- In the life of your faith community?

Recall Attention to Main Group—5 minutes

Ask for people to share their reflections.

Silent Reflection Time (indicate art work front & center)—5 minutes

Ask people to silently reflect on the art work; the Saint's spiritual gift; to pray or meditate about that night's work in their own lives; and to write, on the sheet of paper provided, *one* word to summarize the most important thing to them about that evening's experience.

Introduce the Journaling Guidance Question for the Week—2 minutes

In the time until our next meeting, be alert for signs of *building community* as you go throughout your day. Whenever you see something that makes you think of *building community*, jot down a few words or sentences about it; or take a photo of it (smart phones are great for photojournaling!); or if you draw, make a sketch about it; or cut out a picture from a magazine or newspaper about it; or write down the title of a song/hymn or phrase from it that comes into your mind when you think about *building community*. Please bring your journal to next week's session; if you are participating in the study, please bring your journal (or a copy of it) & give it to Debbie.

²⁹⁵ (Forgaill 1995, 113)

Final Prayer, Blessing, & Dismissal—5 minutes

The following prayer tonight has been attributed to Adomnán himself. In some manuscripts, it was copied directly after the *Amra*, and it was labeled a hymn, prayer, or “Cathbarr”—meaning battle helmet, suggesting that it might have been considered a prayer of protection, like *St. Patrick’s Breastplate*—a form of the armor of God St. Paul urged readers to put on.²⁹⁶

May Colum Cille
commend me to God
when I go—may I not go soon—
(after great good fortune,
it is mine, my prophecy)
to the place of the angel host
(the name of Níall’s famous descendant,
not small its protection)
to the archangels of God in Sion,
in the strongholds of God the Father,
among the ranks of the twenty-four fair justified elders
who praise the heaven of the mysterious, splendid King;
lamentation has not reached them, does not touch them—
it is mine by right, my Christ,
of my powerful sins.²⁹⁷

SING THE “BLESS TO ME, O GOD” BLESSING.

Dismissal:

May the peace of Columba be yours as you journey,
The peace of Brigid be yours as you journey,
The peace of Mary be yours as you journey,
And may you return home safe-guarded.
Thanks be to God!²⁹⁸

Have them leave the summary word post-it note on the board at the exit

²⁹⁶ (Clancy and Márkus 1995, 164)

²⁹⁷ Adomnán, “Amra Choluimb Chille,” in *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, Clancy and Márkus, trans. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 171.

²⁹⁸ Adapted from Alexander Carmichael, “#366” in *Carmina Gadelica: Hymns and Incantations Collected in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland in the Last Century*, (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1992), 339.

Saint Columba (Columcille)



Small Group Reflection Time #1

Having been raised in a monastery, and as a member of the powerful Northern O’Neills, Columba understood the importance of *community* in spreading and strengthening Christianity. Thinking about what you’ve heard of Columba’s life, please reflect in your small group on the following three questions:

- Do you believe you possess the spiritual gift of building community? If so, how do you express it?
- If not, do you possess a spiritual gift related to that one? What is it? How do you express it?
- Does your church community express the gift of building community? If so, how?
- Can you name another “spiritual hero” who displays such a gift?

Small Group Reflection Time #2

Reflect on the Saint’s spiritual gift of *building community* and consider the 3 promises from the Baptismal Covenant (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 305):

- Proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ;
 - Seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself;
 - Striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being.
-
- To which of the three promises in the Covenant does that charism most closely adhere?
 - How do you see that play out in the Saint’s story?
 - When have you been able to act on that promise in your own life?
 - In the life of your faith community?

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Two Selections from *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, Clancy & Márkus, Edinburgh University Press, 1995; the first, on p. 53; the second, p. 113:

An excerpt from *Altus Prosator* by Columba:

By the singing of hymns eagerly ringing out,
by thousands of angels rejoicing in holy dances,
and by the four living creatures, full of eyes,
with the twenty-four joyful elders
casting their crowns under the feet of the Lamb of God,
the Trinity is praised in eternal three-fold exchanges.

The raging anger of fire will devour the adversaries
who will not believe that Christ came from God the Father.
But we shall surely fly off to meet him straight away,
and thus we shall be with him in several ranks of dignities
according to the eternal merits of our rewards,
to abide in glory from age to age.

An excerpt from *Amra Choluimb Chille (The Elegy of Colum Cille)* by Dallán Forgaill; verse VIII:

Great Áed [an O'Neill king] pledged it for all people:
a solid song when the hero went to heaven.
Not worthless, not slight, not contention
not a hero unvigorous towards Conall's covenant.
His blessing turned them, the mouths of the fierce ones
who lived on the Tay, to the will of the King.

From the dark journeys of man
he sat down with God.
In place of pomp, in place of splendor, he bestowed,
the pure descendant of Conall ruled in his monastery.
A fair sage at his death,
and master of a community,
he spoke with an angel;
he studied Greek grammar.
A freeman outwith the tribe, thus I declare,
the son of Fedelmid, he fought the tribe, he knew his end.
He did not suffer for the world:
he was constant to the memory of the cross.
What he conceived keeping vigil,
by action he ascertained.
A splendid birth was born of Art's offspring
--they have not Níall's strength—
one who commits no wrong from which he dies.

The Rule of Columcille

- There are three divisions in the day: prayer, work and reading. The work is to be divided into three parts: your own work, the work of the place as regards its real wants; secondly your share of your sister or brother's work; lastly, to help your neighbours by instruction or writing or sewing garments, or whatever they are in want of for, as the Lord says, "You shall not appear before me empty."
- Everything in its proper order for no-one is crowned except he who has striven lawfully.
- Give alms before all things.
- Do not eat until you are hungry.
- Do not sleep until you are tired.
- Do not speak except on business.
- If you have extra food or clothes give it to your sisters or brothers in need or to the poor.
- Love God with all your heart and all your strength and your neighbour as yourself.
- Abide in the promises of God throughout all times.

(<https://orthodoxwesternrite.wordpress.com/e-life-giving-spring-hermitage/>)

The final sections of the Rule, from another source:

- Thy measure of prayer shall be until thy tears come.
- Or thy measure of work of labour till thy tears come.
- Or thy measure of they work of labour, or of thy genuflexions, until thy sweat often fomes if thy tears are not free.

(*A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities: Kal-Zoe*, edited by Sir William Smith, Samuel Cheetham; available on www.books.google.com)

One Word About Tonight

In this time of silence, please reflect on the highlighted spiritual gift; the art work; the music; and then write, on the post-it note provided, *one* word to summarize the most important thing you're taking away tonight from our session. Please post it on the board as you leave tonight.

Journaling Question for the Week: Building Community

In the time until our next meeting, be alert for signs of *building community* as you go throughout your day. Whenever you see something that makes you think of *building community*, jot down a few words or sentences about it; or take a photo of it (smart phones are great for photojournaling!); or if you draw, make a sketch about it; or cut out a

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picture from a magazine or newspaper about it; or write down the title of a song/hymn or phrase from it that comes into your mind when you think about *building community*.

Please bring your journal to next week's session; if you have photos, please copy them onto a piece of paper in order to show others at discussion time. If you are participating in the study, please bring your journal (or a copy of it) and give it to Debbie.

Closing Prayer: Excerpts from *Fo Réir Choluimb (Bound to Colum)*

We'll close tonight with verses written by the monk & poet Beccán mac Luigdech in the seventh century:

Bound to Colum, while I speak,
May the bright one guard me in the seven heavens;
When I go to the road of fear,
I'm not lordless: I have strength. . .

Though it was known near and far
Who Colum was, he was unique.
His name glistened like the sun;
He was a light before all. . .

Godly love—a post its strength—
He took to, often travelling:
After his time, when all was done,
He was the Christian God loved. . .

Holy Colum's blessing on me,
That me may be my daily trail;
The High-King's blessing be on me,
That I be spared perils and pain. . .

Colum Cille, while I live,
Will be my chant, till the grave's tryst;
In every risk I'll call him,
When I'll praise him with my full strength. . .

(*Fo Réir Choluimb*, from *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, Clancy & Márkus, Edinburgh University Press, 1995; pp. 136-143)

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Hymn: O God, Thou Art the Father

Material redacted

Saint Columba

Debra Brewin-Wilson

1. He left his home be - hind To take the mar - tyr's way; in
 2. Co - lum - ba loved to sing; his voice, clear as a bell, a -
 3. Heal - ing the bro - ken soul through pen - ance, prayer, and song; re -
 4. And e - ven as he died, Co - lum - ba spoke of love; and

3 seek - ing, he would find where his true mis - sion lay. To
 cross the isle would ring, guid - ing the bro - thers well. Pro -
 stor - ing love the goal so all knew they be - longed. Co -
 peace that would a - bide, thanks to the Church - 's dove. Co -

5 build com - mun - i - ty through read - ing, work, and prayer; a
 phet, pas - tor, and priest, he fol - lowed Je - sus' Way; the
 lum - ba's work brought light through new com - mu - ni - ties, where
 lum - ba's leg - a - cy holds hope for us to - day; we

7 soul - friend he would be to man - y pil - grims there.
 great - est to the least would seek him out to pray.
 God's Word burned so bright, down through the cen - tur - ies.
 build com - mun - it - y as we sing, work, and pray.

Chords: Gm, Eb, Cm, F, Gm, Eb, Cm, F, Gm

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A Prayer at Rising

Words: *Carmina Gadelica*, #226
 Music: © 2014 Debbie Brewin-Wilson

Am Am Dm C

Harp

Bless to me, O God, each thing my eye sees

7 Am Am F G

Bless to me, O God, each sound my ear hears.

11 Am Am Dm C

Bless to me, O God, each scent in my nos - trils,

15 Am Am F G

Bless to me, O God, each taste up - on my lips. Each

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2 A Prayer at Rising

19 Am C G/D Em/B
note of my song; each ray guid - ing me; each

23 Am C G Dm
thing I pur - sue; each lure tempt - ing me the

27 Am Am G Am
zeal that seeks my soul; the Three that seek my heart; the

31 Dm C G G G
zeal that seeks my soul; the Three that

36 G Am Am Am Am
seek my heart.

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "A Prayer at Rising". It consists of five systems of music, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The lyrics are written below the treble staff. Chord symbols are placed above the treble staff. The lyrics are: "note of my song; each ray guid - ing me; each thing I pur - sue; each lure tempt - ing me the zeal that seeks my soul; the Three that seek my heart; the zeal that seeks my soul; the Three that seek my heart." The chord symbols are: Am, C, G/D, Em/B, Am, C, G, Dm, Am, Am, G, Am, Am, Dm, C, G, G, G, G, Am, Am, Am, Am, Am.

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Saint Columcille (Columba)

Graphic Redacted

**Saint Columcille
By Brother Mickey O'Neill McGrath, OSFS**

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Materials for Week Four:

Teaching Notes: St. Patrick

Participants' Handout

Music

Artwork

Living into our Baptism: a Pilgrimage with Celtic Saints
Saint Patrick: Seeking Justice

Opening Prayer—1 minute

Gracious God: you called your servant Patrick to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the people of Ireland, speaking your truth to power and spreading the ideals of your love and justice throughout the land. We give you thanks for his life and pray that we may learn from his example, seeking and striving for justice in all situations, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Reflections from Previous Week—5-10 minutes

Have those who would like to share their journaling observations.

Story about Saint with Highlighted Charism—5 to 7 minutes

Patrick may be the most celebrated Irish saint in America. Certainly, Irish citizens who move here or visit around St. Patrick's Day are always surprised at the fervor with which March 17th is celebrated.

Patrick, because of his renown, is one of those saints who has had a LOT of tales and prayers and legends built up around him—like driving the snakes out of Ireland and using a shamrock to explain the Trinity. [Scientists tell us that snakes never lived in Ireland; and no evidence exists of the shamrock tale until the 1700's.] I'm sure you can tell some of them, too! Several books about Patrick's life have been written, from the Middle Ages onward.

Tonight, we're going to try to get at some of the truth of Patrick's life and mission by looking at his *own* words.

Two pieces of writing survive that historians believe were written by Patrick, himself: *The Confession* and *The Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus*.

The Confession is Patrick's declaration of his faith. In it, he tells his life story, especially focusing on his mission work in Ireland. When he wrote this work, he seems to have had two audiences in mind: the monks and priests in Ireland who looked to him as their Bishop and leader; and the people of Britain, who were his native brothers and sisters.²⁹⁹

Patrick was born in Britain around the year 350. Although he gives the name of his hometown, no record of it exists. Scholars speculate that it was in Wales or the area where Scotland and England meet—wherever it was, it wasn't far from the Irish Sea.

Britain at that time was part of the Roman Empire, BUT Rome itself had increasingly come under attack by Germanic tribes, so during Patrick's lifetime, Rome began pulling

²⁹⁹ Newport J.D. White, *St. Patrick: His Writings and Life*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1920), 29.

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troops back from far-flung places---such as Britain. (And as an aside---by the early 5th century, the Romans had pulled out of Britain; Roman rule never extended into what we know as Scotland, and they never made it to Ireland.)

But the Roman influence was still strong in Patrick's youth. He tells us that his father, Calpornius, was a deacon and the son of a priest, Potitus. It wasn't unusual, at this point in church history, for priests to be married and to have families. [As an aside---the Catholic Church did not forbid priests from marrying until the Council of Nicea, in 325, but the practice of forbidding marriage was not universally applied. It took until 1139 when it was formalized at another council of the Church.³⁰⁰

Despite being the son of a deacon and the grandson of a priest, Patrick says he basically paid no attention to God. He says THAT is why he was taken captive in a raid when he 16, and sold into slavery in Ireland. It was there, tending the flocks of his master, that he began to pray. He found that the more he prayed, the more "the love of God and the fear of him grew" in him, and his faith increased. Says Patrick: ". . . come hail, rain, or snow---I was up before dawn to pray, and I sensed nothing of evil nor any other spiritual laziness in me."³⁰¹

One night, after Patrick had been serving as a slave in Ireland for about 6 years, he heard a voice as he prayed, telling him that he would soon return to his homeland. Not long after that, in another time of prayer, the voice told him to leave and travel to a town, miles away, where a ship awaited him. He ran away, boarded the ship, and ended up having further travels and adventures.

His faith in God remained strong, and his prayer even provided him and his fellow travelers with a herd of pigs at one point, when they were on the brink of starvation. God continued to provide for them until they reached a settlement. But Patrick was again taken captive, but the voice in prayer assured him that it would only be for two months. This did, indeed, come to pass. And after a few more years of travels, which he doesn't detail, he finally arrived back home with his parents.³⁰²

While at home, Patrick had a dream that a man named Victoricus, who appeared to be Irish, came before Patrick, carrying many letters for him. He handed one to Patrick, who opened it and began to read what was written there, in Irish. As he did so, he heard other voices, crying to him, "O, holy boy, we beg you to come again and walk among us." He felt broken-hearted and woke up. He had similar dreams for a while, but did not act on them.³⁰³

³⁰⁰ Helen L.Owen, *When Did the Catholic Church Decide Priests Should Be Celibate?* October 2001, accessed November 30, 2015, <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/696>.

³⁰¹ Patrick, "Patrick's Declaration of the Great Works of God" in *Celtic Spirituality*, ed. Bernard McGinn, trans. Oliver Davies and Thomas O'Loughlin, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 69-71.

³⁰² (Patrick, Patrick's Declaration of the Great Works of God 1999, 71-73)

³⁰³ (Patrick, Patrick's Declaration of the Great Works of God 1999, 73)

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After a few years of living at home, Patrick decided to go to Rome, but he ended up spending a long time—some say, a couple of decades—in Gaul, studying with Bishop Germanus. But the dream of Victorinus returned and kept returning to Patrick. Upon learning that the Pope’s missionary to Ireland had left in frustration and died on his return journey, Patrick asked to be sent in his place. He was ordained a priest and bishop and sent off to Ireland with several companions.³⁰⁴

It is said that two druids warned the high king of Patrick’s coming, prophesying:
“One with shaven head will come here with his curled-headed stick
He will sing foul things from his home with perforated head
From his table in the front part of his house, his whole family will reply to him,
“Let it be! Let it be!”³⁰⁵

One of the first things Patrick did upon settling in Ireland was to return to the man who had been his master in his days of slavery, in order to pay his price to purchase his freedom. But the man heard that Patrick was coming, and feared either retribution or a forced conversion to Christianity. Rather than face Patrick, the man gathered all his possessions up into his home and set fire to them—and to himself.

Patrick arrived, saw the fire, and stood there, speechless, simply weeping for several hours. Finally, he said, “I do not know, God knows.” Then he prayed, made the sign of the cross, and headed off on his way.³⁰⁶

Patrick decided that the best place to celebrate his first Easter in Ireland would be on the plain near the home of the high king at Tara. The high king at that time was a member of the southern O’Neills—remember them from Columba’s family?

At the same time as Easter, the high king was calling for a big celebration, where the people and the druids would gather. There was a law that said that anyone would be put to death who lit a fire BEFORE the fire was lit in the house of the king at Tara.

Maybe you can see where this is going. . .

Patrick lit that first fire of Easter, out on the plain, and it was a BIGGIE. The king and all of his entourage came out to confront Patrick, and it was quite a spectacle. They began a war of words, a tradition of the bards of Ireland, only in this case, it was paganism versus Christianity. Patrick won the duel that night, then showed up the next day at the king’s feast and performed more signs and wonders, demonstrating that God is indeed, supreme. The king confessed his belief in the Lord God, and Patrick began his travels, preaching and baptizing and spreading the Gospel.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ Muirchú, "The Life of Patrick by Muirchú," in *Celtic Spirituality*, ed. Bernard McGinn, trans. Oliver Davies and Thomas O’Loughlin, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 94-95.

³⁰⁵ (Muirchú 1999, 96)

³⁰⁶ (Muirchú 1999, 97-98)

³⁰⁷ (Muirchú 1999, 102-105)

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The second piece of writing from Patrick that we have is *The Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus*. Patrick was working in Ireland, but still had ties with Britain. At the time of this particular story, the Roman troops were gone from Britain. That left a power vacuum that many tribal leaders attempted to fill. One of the ways they raised money was by taking captives and ransoming them OR by selling them as slaves. This was going on throughout Britain and Europe.³⁰⁸

Patrick knew all about this practice, having been a victim of it, himself. Word came to Patrick that a British king, Coroticus, and his men had taken a number of newly baptized Christians captive and had killed some of them. Patrick sent several priests to plead for the release of the baptized prisoners and the return of what they had stolen. The king and his soldiers “treated the whole matter as a big joke,” Patrick says.³⁰⁹

And so he wrote another letter and asked that it be delivered to some of Coroticus’ soldiers, who were known to be Christians, in the hopes that it would be made public and perhaps even read to Coroticus.³¹⁰

Patrick wrote:

“So now I do not know whom to grieve for more: those who were killed, those captured, or those whom the Devil has deeply ensared in his trap. . . So I earnestly entreat [all] ‘you holy and humble of heart.’ It is not lawful to seek favor from men such as these nor ‘to eat food’ or drink ‘with them;’ nor to accept their alms until they make satisfaction to God with painful penance and the shedding of tears, and free the baptized ‘servants of God’ and the handmaids of Christ—for whom he was crucified and died.”³¹¹

He went on:

“. . . What am I to do, O Lord? Behold around me are your sheep torn to pieces and afflicted by those robbers under the command of the bad-minded Coroticus. Far from the love of God is the man who hands over Christians into the hands of the Irish and the Picts. ‘Fierce wolves’ have devoured the flock of the Lord which with the greatest love and care was truly increasing beautifully in Ireland. Indeed, I could not count how many of the sons and daughters of the rulers of the Irish had become monks and virgins of Christ. On account of this, ‘do not be pleased with the wrong done by the unjust, knowing that even unto depths of hell it shall not please the wicked.’”³¹²

Patrick explains how the Roman Christians in Gaul send holy men to the leaders in order to ransom baptized captives. He seems to be telling Coroticus that he’s throwing away money, as well as angering God, by murdering baptized Christians.³¹³

Finally, Patrick writes:

³⁰⁸ (Davies and O’Loughlin, *The Sources: Introduction to the Translated Texts* 1999, 30)

³⁰⁹ (Patrick, “The Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus,” in *Celtic Spirituality*, ed. Bernard McGinn, trans. Oliver Davies and Thomas O’Loughlin (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 84.

³¹⁰ (White 1920, 52)

³¹¹ (Patrick, *The Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus* 1999, 84-85)

³¹² (Patrick, *The Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus* 1999, 86-87)

³¹³ (Patrick, *The Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus* 1999, 87)

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“I earnestly request that any servant of God who is capable of bringing these tidings to public notice should do so: Let such a messenger neither hide nor detract from them but read them aloud so that every people and Coroticus himself should hear them. If this happens then God may inspire them, and they might return to him. For though it be very late, it may be they will repent of their impious actions—being the murderers of the Lord’s brothers—and release the baptized captives they have taken. Thus they would have merit to live in God and be healed for this life and eternity.”³¹⁴

One of Patrick’s biographers tell us how Coroticus reacted to this letter: he sneered at it. When Patrick heard of Coroticus’ response, he prayed that Coroticus be cast out “of this present life and from the life to come.” Not long after that, “. . . Coroticus heard someone signing in accompaniment to music that he should move off his throne. And then all who were dearest to him burst out in one voice with this song. There and then, in the midst of them all, he miserably took on the form of a fox. At once he left that place and since that very and day he has never been seen.”³¹⁵

Small Group Reflection Time:--15 minutes

Having been captured and sold into slavery himself, Patrick had a unique understanding of what *seeking justice* could entail, in his day and age. Speaking out about Coroticus’ actions and asking others to make it public were ways he sought to bring about justice in one situation. Thinking about what you have heard of Patrick, please reflect in your small group on the following questions:

- Do you believe you possess that spiritual gift? If so, how do you express it?
- If not, do you possess a spiritual gift related to that one? What is it? How do you express it?
- Does your church community express that spiritual gift? If so, how?
- Can you name another spiritual hero who displays such a gift?

Recall Attention to Main Group—5 minutes

Ask for people to share their reflections.

Sing a hymn/song about the Saint and the charism—5 minutes

Read another story or poem about the Saint and the charism—3 to 5 minutes

The angel Victorinus returned and spoke with Patrick frequently, offering him guidance throughout his life—and just prior to his death. It is said that Patrick had offered several petitions for himself and Victorinus assured him that God would honor those prayers. One petition was this: “. . .that ‘on the Day of Judgment’ all the Irish shall be judged by” Patrick.³¹⁶ Patrick died in 461, probably at Saul, the site of his church.

³¹⁴ (Patrick, *The Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus* 1999, 89)

³¹⁵ (Muirchú 1999, 106)

³¹⁶ (Muirchú 1999, 114-115)

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A story is told of how Patrick valued the truth so much, he said that anyone who stood above the stone where he knelt to pray in his church would never be able to tell a lie. From that same source comes a poem from the oral tradition of Connacht, the westernmost province of Ireland:

“To St. Patrick

O Patrick in the Paradise
Of God on high,
Who lookest on the poor man
With a gracious eye.
See me come before thee
Who am weak and bare,
O help me into Paradise
To find thee there.”³¹⁷

(Hyde, *The Religious Songs of Connacht A Collection of Poems Stories Prayers Satires Ranns Charms Etc.*, volume 2, p. 229)

You probably know the hymn “St. Patrick’s Breastplate.” Known as a lorica, which is Latin for “body armor,” the text invokes God’s protection on the person reciting or singing it. Tradition says that anyone who recites it daily, meditating on God, will be protected from many dangers to body and soul, and it will guard that person’s soul after death. The text for that hymn dates back at *least* to the eleventh century but could be several centuries older. It’s also known as “The Deer’s Cry” because of the story associated with it:

King Loegaire did not want Patrick and his men to continue preaching the Gospel and baptizing people, so he set up an ambush to capture them. Patrick, realizing what was happening, sang this lorica. To the king’s men, Patrick and the others appeared to be deer; they walked right through the midst of the ambush and stayed safe.³¹⁸

Part of the Lorica reads:

“I rise today:
in power’s strength, invoking the Trinity,
believing in Threeness,
confessing the oneness,
of Creation’s Creator.

I rise today:

in the power of Christ’s birth and baptism,
in the power of his crucifixion and burial,
in the power of his rising and ascending,
in the power of his descending and judging. . .

³¹⁷ Douglas Hyde, *The Religious Songs of Connacht: A Collection of Poems, Stories, Prayers, Satires, Ranns, Charms, Etc.*, Vol. 2; A Reprint of the 1906 ed., (Delhi: Facsimile Publisher, 2015), 229.

³¹⁸ (White 1920, 63-64)

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I rise today:

with the power of God to pilot me,
God's strength to sustain me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look ahead for me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to protect me,
God's way before me,
God's shield to defend me,
God's host to deliver me:
 from snares of devils,
 from evil temptations,
 from nature's failings,
 from all who wish to harm me,
 far or near,
 alone and in a crowd."³¹⁹

Small Group Reflection Time:--15 minutes

- Reflect on the Saint's spiritual gift and consider the 3 promises from the Baptismal Covenant: to which of the three promises in the Covenant does that charism most closely adhere?
- How do they see that play out in the Saint's story?
- When have they been able to act on that promise in their own lives?
- In the life of their faith community?

Recall Attention to Main Group—5 minutes

Ask for people to share their reflections.

Silent Reflection Time (indicate art work front & center)—5 minutes

Ask people to silently reflect on the art work; the Saint's spiritual gift; to pray or meditate about that night's work in their own lives; and to write, on the post-it note provided, *one* word to summarize the most important thing to them about that evening's experience, and place it on the board on the way out.

Introduce the Journaling Guidance Question for the Week—2 minutes

In the time until our next meeting, be alert for signs of *seeking justice* as you go throughout your day. Whenever you see something that makes you think of *seeking justice*, jot down a few words or sentences about it; or take a photo of it (smart phones are great for photojournaling!); or if you draw, make a sketch about it; or cut out a picture from a magazine or newspaper about it; or write down the title of a song/hymn or phrase from it that comes into your mind when you think about *seeking justice*.

³¹⁹ "Patrick's Breastplate," in *Celtic Spirituality: The Classics of Western Spirituality*, Bernard McGinn, ed., Clancy and Márkus, trans. (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1999), 118-119.

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Please bring your journal to next week's session; if you have photos, please copy them onto a piece of paper in order to show others at discussion time. If you are participating in the study, please bring your journal (or a copy of it) and give it to Debbie.

Sing the *Lorica*.

Final Prayer, Blessing, & Dismissal—5 minutes

We'll close tonight with another form of a prayer of protection, known as a "caim" or "encompassing" or "encircling" prayer. With this kind of prayer, the one praying would stretch out his or her right hand, forefinger extended, and turn in a sunwise or clockwise circle while reciting the prayer. I invite you to stand, if you are able, and spread out a little bit so you don't bump into anyone, and let us say this prayer together—you'll find it on page 4 of your handout:

"The compassing of God and His right hand
Be upon my form and upon my frame;
The compassing of the High King and the grace of the Trinity
Be upon me abiding ever eternally,
 Be upon me abiding ever eternally.

May the compassing of the Three shield me in my means,
The compassing of the Three shield me this day,
The compassing of the Three shield me this night
From hate, from harm, from act, from ill,
From hate, from harm, from act, from ill."³²⁰

Dismissal

The compassing of the saints be upon you,
The compassing of the angels be upon you;
Oh, the compassing of all the saints
And of the nine angels be upon you.³²¹

Have them leave the summary word paper on the board at the exit

³²⁰ (Davies and Bowie, *Celtic Christian Spirituality: An Anthology of Medieval and Modern Sources* 1995, 132)

³²¹ (Carmichael 1992, 253)

Saint Patrick



Small Group Reflection Time #1

Having been captured and sold into slavery himself, Patrick had a unique understanding of what *seeking justice* could entail, in his day and age. Speaking out about Coroticus' actions and asking others to make it public were ways he sought to bring about justice in one situation. Thinking about what you have heard of Patrick, please reflect in your small group on the following questions:

- Do you believe you possess that spiritual gift? If so, how do you express it?
- If not, do you possess a spiritual gift related to that one? What is it? How do you express it?
- Does your church community express that spiritual gift? If so, how?
- Can you name another “spiritual hero” who displays such a gift?

Small Group Reflection Time #2

Reflect on the Saint's spiritual gift of *seeking justice* and consider the 3 promises from the Baptismal Covenant (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 305):

- Proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ;
 - Seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself;
 - Striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being.
-
- To which of the three promises in the Covenant does that charism most closely adhere?
 - How do you see that play out in the Saint's story?
 - When have you been able to act on that promise in your own life?
 - In the life of your faith community?

An Excerpt from St. Patrick's *Lorica*:

“I rise today:

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in power's strength, invoking the Trinity,
believing in Threeness,
confessing the oneness,
of Creation's Creator.

I rise today:

in the power of Christ's birth and baptism,
in the power of his crucifixion and burial,
in the power of his rising and ascending,
in the power of his descending and judging. . .

I rise today:

with the power of God to pilot me,
God's strength to sustain me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look ahead for me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to protect me,
God's way before me,
God's shield to defend me,
God's host to deliver me:
 from snares of devils,
 from evil temptations,
 from nature's failings,
 from all who wish to harm me,
 far or near,
 alone and in a crowd." (*Celtic Spirituality*, pp. 118-119)

An Excerpt from *The Sayings of Patrick (the Dicta)*

"The church of the Irish, which is indeed that of the Romans; if you would be Christians, then be as the Romans, and let that the song of praise be sung among yourselves at every hour of prayer: Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.

Every church which follows me, let it sing: Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Thanks be to God." (*Celtic Spirituality*, p. 90)

To St. Patrick

“O Patrick in the Paradise
Of God on high,
Who lookest on the poor man
With a gracious eye.
See me come before thee
Who am weak and bare,
O help me into Paradise
To find thee there.”

(Hyde, *The Religious Songs of Connacht A Collection of Poems Stories Prayers Satires Ranns Charms Etc.*, volume 2, p. 229)

One Word About Tonight

In this time of silence, please reflect on the highlighted spiritual gift; the art work; the music; and then write, on the post-it note provided, *one* word to summarize the most important thing you’re taking away tonight from our session. Please post it on the board as you leave tonight.

Journaling Question for the Week: Seeking Justice

In the time until our next meeting, be alert for signs of *seeking justice* as you go throughout your day. Whenever you see something that makes you think of *seeking justice*, jot down a few words or sentences about it; or take a photo of it (smart phones are great for photojournaling!); or if you draw, make a sketch about it; or cut out a picture from a magazine or newspaper about it; or write down the title of a song/hymn or phrase from it that comes into your mind when you think about *seeking justice*.

Please bring your journal to next week’s session; if you have photos, please copy them onto a piece of paper in order to show others at discussion time. If you are participating in the study, please bring your journal (or a copy of it) and give it to Debbie.

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Closing Prayer

We'll close tonight with another form of a prayer of protection, known as a "caim" or "encompassing" or "encircling" prayer. With this kind of prayer, the one praying stretches out his or her right hand, forefinger extended, and turns in a sunwise or clockwise circle while reciting the prayer.

I invite you to stand, if you are able, and spread out a little bit so you don't bump into anyone, and let us say this prayer together:

"The compassing of God and His right hand
Be upon my form and upon my frame;
The compassing of the High King and the grace of the Trinity
Be upon me abiding ever eternally,
 Be upon me abiding ever eternally.

May the compassing of the Three shield me in my means,
The compassing of the Three shield me this day,
The compassing of the Three shield me this night
From hate, from harm, from act, from ill,
 From hate, from harm, from act, from ill." (Davies & Bowie, *Celtic Christian Spirituality*, p. 132)

Graphic Redacted

St. Patrick's Breastplate

final 2 verses

Traditional Irish

Gm Dm B^b F F

I bind un - to my - self the name the strong name

F B^b F E^b B^b B^b E^b

7 of the Tri - ni - ty, by in - vo - ca - tion of the same, the

B^b Cm Gm Cm Gm B^b B^b

14 Three in One, and One in Three; of whom all na - ture

Cm G7 Cm E^b F B^b F

21 hath cre - a - tion, e - ter - nal Fa - ther, Spir - it, Word. Praise

E^b B^b B^b E^b B^b

27 to the Lord of my sal - va - tion: sal - va - tion


Cm Gm Cm Gm Cm Gm

32 is of Christ the Lord. A - men!

Saint Patrick


Debra Brewin-Wilson

Dm B \flat Dm F Gm Am




1. When Pat - rick was a young man, he was sold in - to slav - er - y;
 2. He was guid - ed by an an - gel, God's mess - en - ger who spoke, and
 3. Af - ter man - y years of trav - el, he re - turn - ed to Ir - e - land, No
 4. Pat - rick took a stand for just - ice, cal - ling on the Trin - it - y,

B \flat Dm F Am B \flat Dm




5 Cap - tured in his home - land, trans - port - ed a - cross the sea And he
 taught him how to shoul - der Christ's light - er, gent - ler yoke. Then one
 long - er as a cap - tive, but to teach at Christ's com - mand. And he
 Ran - som - ing the cap - tives, set - ting slaves and pris' - ners free. And his

F C Dm Am




9 learned to speak the lang - uage, and he learned his mas - ter's ways, and he
 day, the an - gel told him that de - liv - `rance was at hand, and he
 learned to love the peo - ple, as he taught them of Christ's light, Con -
 faith burned bright to man - y, and they gave up their old ways; so a

B \flat Dm F Am B \flat Dm



13 learned that God would keep him 'til the end - ing of his days.
 found his way to free - dom, walk - ing mi - les o - ver - land.
 vert - ing kings and dru - ids as they bowed down to God's might.
 fi - re lit at Eas - ter set all Ir - e - land a - blaze!

Refrain
 Dm C Am B \flat 9 Dm



17 Lord, have mer - cy; Christ, have mer - cy; thanks be to God!

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Saint Patrick

Graphic Redacted

Saint Patrick

By Brother Mickey O'Neill McGrath, OSFS

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Materials for Week Five:

Teaching Notes: Journeying Home

Participants' Handout

Music

Artwork

Living into our Baptism: a Pilgrimage with Celtic Saints
Week five: Journeying Home

Opening Prayer—1 minute

Gracious God: we have spent this time together during Lent to reflect on what Brendan, Brigid, Columba, and Patrick can teach us about using the gifts you have given to us; help us to use *our* gifts in your service to bring your Light and Love into the world; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Reflections from Previous Week—5-10 minutes

Have those who would like to share their journaling observations.

Story about Saint with Highlighted Charism—5 to 7 minutes

Brigid, Patrick, and Columba were critically important to the Irish Church. Many stories about their remains and miracles attributed to the saints can be found.

Different stories exist, as well, as to what happened to their mortal remains after their deaths.

One story dates from the twelfth century, when Anglo-Norman soldiers ventured to Ireland with the blessing of the King of England, and began to subdue the people. One ambitious Norman military leader, John DeCourcy, gained control over the town of Down (named for Dún—site of a fort) in northern Ireland. Today, that town is known as Downpatrick—it's about 21 miles south of Belfast.

In recompense for the damage and destruction his army had caused, DeCourcy followed the lead of other Norman landholders and established a monastery and built a church. And---as is sometimes said of the Anglo-Normans who conquered Ireland---they became more Irish than the Irish themselves. The church was called St. Patrick of Down.

DeCourcy heard that the remains of the three blessed saints—Brigid, Patrick, and Columba—were interred nearby. He wanted to establish Down as a place of pilgrimage, and he wanted the relics of all three saints buried in one place to help strengthen that position.

Bishop Malachy prayed that the burial sites would be revealed to him, and they were. Then, on June 9, 1196—the feast day of Columba—the relics were re-interred in one tomb, witnessed by 15 bishops and many clergy. A little rhyme reflects this:

“In Down, three saints do one grave fill:

Brigid, Patrick, and Columcille.”

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However, a century later, the Bishop of Armagh claimed the same thing. Scholars suggest this all can be attributed to a rivalry between the Irish and the Anglo-Normans as they struggled for control of the land and the hearts of the people.³²²

Small Group Reflection Time:--15 minutes

Over the past weeks, we have talked about gifts of *exploring for Christ; embodying hospitality; building community; and seeking justice*. Reflecting on the story you just heard and thinking about your own faith community, please discuss the following questions:

- What stories/ideas/objects from your faith community contribute to your identity as people of God?
- What stories/ideas/objects from your faith community need to be celebrated in order to embrace your spiritual gifts for the good of the community?
- What stories/ideas/objects from your faith community need to be “interred” and blessed in order for your community to respond to where God is calling you now, today?

Recall Attention to Main Group—5 minutes

Ask for people to share their reflections.

Sing the original song—5 minutes

Read another story or poem about the Saint and the charism—3 to 5 minutes

Saint Ita founded a monastery in Limerick and began a school for boys. She apparently had many students, because one of her nicknames was “The foster mother of the saints of Erin.” One of those students was Brendan of Clonfert, the very Brendan we heard about.

As an adult, Brendan visited Ita once and asked her “. . . what were the three works most pleasing to God, and the three works most displeasing” to God.

“Ita answered, “Three things that please God most are true faith in God with a pure heart, a simple life with a grateful spirit, and generosity inspired by charity. The three things that most displease God are a mouth that hates people, a heart harboring resentments, and confidence in wealth.”

Upon hearing this, Brendan and the others gathered there gave glory to God for Ita’s wisdom and teaching.³²³

Small Group Reflection Time:--20 minutes

Consider Ita’s teaching: “Three things that please God most are true faith in God with a pure heart, a simple life with a grateful spirit, and generosity inspired by charity. The

³²² J. Frederick Rankin, *Down Cathedral: The Church of St. Patrick of Down*, google books, electronic. (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1997), 34.

³²³ Edward C. Sellner, *Wisdom of the Celtic Saints*, (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1993), 149 and 154.

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three things that most displease God are a mouth that hates people, a heart harboring resentments, and confidence in wealth.”

Keep in mind the three baptismal promises we have focused on:

- Proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ;
- Seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself;
- Striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being.

In your small group, please discuss the following questions:

- Does Ita’s teaching correlate with any of the baptismal promises? If so, which one/s?
- Does Ita’s teaching offer any insights for you, personally?
- Does her teaching offer any insights for your faith community in regards to living out the baptismal promises?
- Here are the big final questions:
 - Given all that you have absorbed and thought about over the course of this program, what wisdom can you bring to your faith community about engaging more deeply with the baptismal promises?
 - Can you think of a project/ministry in which we could all work together to help bring the Good News of God in Christ to southern Prince George’s County?

Recall Attention to Main Group—5-10 minutes

Ask for people to share their reflections.

Silent Reflection Time (indicate art work front & center)—7 minutes

Place all of the artwork out and invite people to take a closer look, if they would like. Ask people to silently reflect on the art work; the Saint’s spiritual gift; to pray or meditate about that night’s work in their own lives; and to write, on the post-it note provided, *one* word to summarize the most important thing to them about that evening’s experience, and place it on the board on the way out.

Wrapping Up—2 minutes

For those of you who have agreed to answer the questionnaires or to be interviewed, you will be hearing from me after Easter!

For everyone else: I hope you will continue to think about the spiritual gifts we’ve discussed, and how they fit in with the Baptismal promises we have all made. Where can you see the intersection of these ideas with the life of your faith community?

Appendix B: Program Materials

I hope you'll continue the discussion with your parish leaders. Perhaps we can come up with a project that we can all join in with, together, to help bring the light and love of Christ into our wider community, here in Prince George's County.

Final Prayer, Blessing, & Dismissal—5 minutes

Let us adore the Lord,
Maker of marvelous works,
Bright heaven with its angels,
And on earth the white-waved sea.³²⁴ (*Celtic Spirituality*, p. 259)

Desires

May I speak each day according to thy justice,
Each day may I show thy chastening, O God;
May I speak each day according to thy wisdom,
Each day and night may I be at peace with thee.

Each day may I count the causes of thy mercy,
May I each day give heed to thy laws;
Each day may I compose to thee a song,
May I harp each day thy praise, O God.

May I each day give love to thee, Jesu,
Each night may I do the same;
Each day and night, dark and light,
May I laud thy goodness to me, O God.³²⁵

A Journey Prayer

The path I walk, Christ walks it. May the land in which I am be without sorrow.
May the Trinity protect me wherever I stay, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Bright angels walk with me—dear presence—in every dealing.
In every dealing I pray them that no one's poison may reach me.
The ninefold people of heaven of holy cloud, the tenth force of the stout earth.
Favourable company, they come with me, so that the Lord may not be angry with me.
May I arrive at every place, may I return home; may the way in which I spend be a way without loss.
May every path before me be smooth, man, woman and child welcome me.
A truly good journey! Well does the fair Lord show us a course, a path.³²⁶

Have them read this together:

May your holy angels, O Christ,

³²⁴ (McGinn, *Celtic Spirituality: The Classics of Western Spirituality* 1999, 259)

³²⁵ (Carmichael 1992, 48)

³²⁶ (Davies and Bowie, *Celtic Christian Spirituality: An Anthology of Medieval and Modern Sources* 1995, 38)

Appendix B: Program Materials

Son of the living God,
Tend our sleep, our rest, our bright bed.
Let them reveal true visions to us in our sleep,
O High Prince of the universe,
O great and mysterious King.
May no demons, no evil, no injury or terrifying dreams
Disturb our rest, our prompt and swift repose.
May our waking, our work, and our living be holy;
Our sleep, our rest, without hindrance or harm.³²⁷ (*Celtic Spirituality*, p. 289)

Sing Columba's Prayer

Blessing & Dismissal

Officiant

May the blessing of Almighty God:
The Father who Creates,
The Son who Redeems, and
The Holy Spirit who Sanctifies,
Be with you always and
May the flame of God's love
Dwell in your hearts
As a jewel of gold is placed in a silver dish.³²⁸

All Amen. Thanks be to God!

Have them leave the summary word paper in the box at the exit

³²⁷ (McGinn, *Celtic Spirituality: The Classics of Western Spirituality* 1999, 289)

³²⁸ Adapted from "Noli Pater" in *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, Clancy and Márkus, eds., (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 85.

Final Week: Journeying Home



St. John the Evangelist, *Book of Mulling*, Irish, 8th century

Small Group Reflection Time #1

Over the past weeks, we have talked about gifts of *exploring for Christ; embodying hospitality; building community; and seeking justice.*

Reflecting on the story you just heard and thinking about your own faith community, please discuss the following questions:

- What stories/ideas/objects from your faith community contribute to your identity as people of God?
- What stories/ideas/objects from your faith community need to be celebrated in order to embrace your spiritual gifts for the good of the community?
- What stories/ideas/objects from your faith community need to be “interred” and blessed in order for your community to respond to where God is calling you now, today?

Sing a Song

Appendix B: Program Materials

Small Group Reflection Time #2

Consider Ita's teaching: "Three things that please God most are true faith in God with a pure heart, a simple life with a grateful spirit, and generosity inspired by charity. The three things that most displease God are a mouth that hates people, a heart harboring resentments, and confidence in wealth."

Keep in mind the three baptismal promises we have focused on:

- Proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ;
- Seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself;
- Striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being.

In your small group, please discuss the following questions:

- Does Ita's teaching correlate with any of the baptismal promises? If so, which one/s?
- Does Ita's teaching offer any insights for you, personally?
- Does her teaching offer any insights for your faith community in regards to living out the baptismal promises?
- Here are the big final questions:
 - Given all that you have absorbed and thought about over the course of this program, what wisdom can you bring to your faith community about engaging more deeply with the baptismal promises?
 - Can you think of a project/ministry in which we could all work together to help bring the Good News of God in Christ to southern Prince George's County?

One Word About Tonight

In this time of silence, please reflect on what we've discussed tonight; the songs we have sung; the stories we have heard; and then write, on the post-it note provided, *one* word to summarize the most important thing you're taking away tonight from our session. Please post it on the board as you leave tonight.

Appendix B: Program Materials

Wrapping Up

For those of you who have agreed to answer the questionnaires or to be interviewed, you will be hearing from Debbie after Easter!

For everyone else: Please continue to think about the spiritual gifts we've discussed, and how they fit in with the Baptismal promises we have all made. Where can you see the intersection of these ideas with the life of your faith community?

Please continue the discussion with your parish leaders. Perhaps we can come up with a project that we can all join in with, together, to help bring the light and love of Christ into our wider community, here in Prince George's County.

Final Prayer, Blessing, & Dismissal

Officiant

Let us adore the Lord,
Maker of marvelous works,
Bright heaven with its angels,
And on earth the white-waved sea. (*Celtic Spirituality*, p. 259)

Desires

May I speak each day according to thy justice,
Each day may I show thy chastening, O God;
May I speak each day according to thy wisdom,
Each day and night may I be at peace with thee.

Each day may I count the causes of thy mercy,
May I each day give heed to thy laws;
Each day may I compose to thee a song,
May I harp each day thy praise, O God.

May I each day give love to thee, Jesu,
Each night may I do the same;
Each day and night, dark and light,
May I laud thy goodness to me, O God. (*Carmina Gadelica*, 19, p. 48)

Appendix B: Program Materials

A Journey Prayer

The path I walk, Christ walks it. May the land in which I am be without sorrow.
May the Trinity protect me wherever I stay, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Bright angels walk with me—dear presence—in every dealing.
In every dealing I pray them that no one's poison may reach me.
The ninefold people of heaven of holy cloud, the tenth force of the stout earth.
Favourable company, they come with me, so that the Lord may not be angry with me.
May I arrive at every place, may I return home; may the way in which I spend be a way
without loss.
May every path before me be smooth, man, woman and child welcome me.
A truly good journey! Well does the fair Lord show us a course, a path. (*Celtic Christian
Spirituality*, p. 38)

May your holy angels, O Christ,
Son of the living God,
Tend our sleep, our rest, our bright bed.
Let them reveal true visions to us in our sleep,
O High Prince of the universe,
O great and mysterious King.
May no demons, no evil, no injury or terrifying dreams
Disturb our rest, our prompt and swift repose.
May our waking, our work, and our living be holy;
Our sleep, our rest, without hindrance or harm. (*Celtic Spirituality*, p. 289)

Sing a Song

Blessing & Dismissal

Officiant

May the blessing of Almighty God:
The Father who Creates,
The Son who Redeems, and
The Holy Spirit who Sanctifies,
Be with you always and
May the flame of God's love
Dwell in your hearts
As a jewel of gold is placed in a silver dish.
(adapted from *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, "Noli Pater," p. 85)
All Amen. Thanks be to God!

Appendix B: Program Materials

Journeying Home

Tune: The Hymn of Columcille, Trad. Scottish
Words: Debra Brewin-Wilson

The musical score is written in treble clef, key of D major (two sharps), and 3/4 time. It consists of three systems of music with lyrics and guitar chords. The first system has four measures with chords D, D, G, and D. The second system has six measures with chords G, Bm, Em, A7, D, and F#m/C. The third system has six measures with chords Bm, D, D, D7, A7, and D. The lyrics are arranged in four lines, with the first line starting at measure 1 and the last line ending at measure 18.

System 1:

Chords: D D G D

1. On this jour - ney through life, ex - plor - ing for Christ, we
 2. Bren - dan brave - ly set sail, not fear - ing he'd fail, and
 3. Col - um - ba built a life based on love, not strife, and
 4. Now we turn to - ward home, though far we may roam, we

System 2:

Chords: G Bm Em A7 D F#m/C

5 hon - or the saints of the past. As we learn of their ways; give
 met crea - tures won - drous and rare; Brig - id gave all a - way, trust -
 spread the Good News far and wide. Pat - rick set pris' - ners free, taught
 seek to give wel - come each day; build - ing com - mun - it - y, set -

System 3:

Chords: Bm D D D7 A7 D

11 thanks for their days, we seek ways to be Church that will last
 ing God each day, to re - lieve ev - ry bur - den and care.
 oth - ers to see how Christ's jus - tice and peace could a - bide.
 ting those bound, free, as the ways of the saints light our way.

Words © 2016 Debra Brewin-Wilson

Prayer of St. Columba

Music © 2014 Debbie Brewin-Wilson

Harp

3 Cm Ab Fm Bb Eb Eb Bb/D Cm Bb

Be, Lord Je-sus, a bright flame be-fore me, a guid-ing star a-bove me, a

6 Fm Eb Ab Bb Cm Bb Ab

smooth path be-low me; be, Lord Je-sus, a

8 Fm Bb/D Bb Eb Eb Bb/D Cm Bb Ab Bb Cm

kind-ly shep-herd be-hind me: to-day, to-night, and for-ev-er.

Appendix B: Program Materials

Celtic Saints & the Holy Trinity

Graphic Redacted

St. Brigid's Lake of Beer
By Brother Mickey O'Neill McGrath, OSFS

APPENDIX C: DATA

Pre-Program Questionnaire

Question 1: Favorite Saint & Qualities

Francis	Animals, Creation
Francis	Nature
Francis	Nature & unselfishness
Francis	Gave up wealth; organized followers
Brigid	Cared for less fortunate
	Joan of Arc Listened to God; men followed her into battle; persisted in belief in God despite persecution, death
Teresa of Avila	Sense of humor; taught sisters to read & write
No; not raised in tradition with saints (Methodist)	
No; not raised in saint tradition (Methodist)	
No; speak to departed family members (communion of saints)	
No	
No	
No	
n=13	

Question 2: Spiritual Journey Definition

Lifetime of relating to God & others: praying, singing, meditating, reading Scriptures

Continual growth & awareness of Christ, God, & the divine in the world around us

Live my daily life to reflect the lessons of Jesus; become more caring & loving

Journey; ways I relate to other people & try to help them

Life is a spiritual journey.

Lifelong quest to become God-centered.

Life of faith-based values & continuous opportunities for education & growth

Our lifelong relationship with God

Your path in your walk with Christ Jesus.

Growing closer to God: reflecting that in my life; work for love, justice, & peace

Desire to truly believe; hope that Christ's teaching would prevail

Involvement with church activities; weekly church service; participating in church & activities

When I am allowed to complete or fail even a small task.

n=13

Question 3: Spiritual Gifts

Listed Their Specific Gifts:

Children's religious instruction

Giving; listening; writing

Church activities: youth groups; choir; women's groups; taught Sunday School

EFM; Lenten studies; outreach programs

Little things: replacing light bulbs; cooking cornbread for dinners; helping in ministries

General ideas:

Through my interpretation of gifts: talents; family; friendships

Gifts from God: family; life; church

Participated in Life of the Spirit seminars

Through: prayer; self-examination; conversations; ministries in church

Topic at retreats in Catholic school where I worked

Other:

No

No

Don't Know

n=13

Question 4a: Baptismal Covenant/Individual/Proclaim Good News

Cited Specific Examples:

Attend church; volunteer at church; help others worship (altar guild; drive disabled parishioner); teach catechism; work with acolytes

Reading & discussing books with others

Treat everyone fairly; Outreach; teach Sunday school

Taught Bible School; taught Sunday School; presided over church groups

Sharing gifts; being helpful

Yes; talk with strangers

More General Examples:

Living by example

Live by example; talk about beliefs if asked

By example: children reared in loving family & loving church family

Lead by example: family in church

Other:

Yes

Not comfortable with this

Response left blank

n=13

Question 4b: Baptismal Covenant/Individual/Seek & Serve Christ

Cited Examples:

Greeting newcomers; serving at food bank; help homeless; show kindness to others

Try to be helpful & nice to those I dislike; be kinder to disrespectful people & those who've made unhelpful life decisions

Helping my neighbors & community

Helping homeless couple I met.

More General Examples:

Non-judgmental; look for the good & positive in each human being; willing to reach out to help others

Non-judgmental; good in everyone--look deeper in some; treat all as individuals worthy of God's love

Non-judgmental; kind

Treating everyone fairly, even if they don't believe as I do

Proclaim God's love to all persons, regardless of religion, sex, color, nationality; this is difficult; it takes courage.

Other:

I try

Yes

Will try

Hard! Worst clashes I've experienced were in church groups.

n=13

Question 4c: Baptismal Covenant/Individual/Justice, Peace, Dignity

Cited Examples:

I have worked to resolve conflict or to help individuals or groups of individuals [to resolve conflict]

As a teacher, I have emphasized respect for dignity of all nations

UMFB; Martha's Table; voting for people who work for justice, peace, dignity

Yes. I speak out when I see, hear, or experience injustice, unfair practices, etc.

Dignity, freedom, & worth of every individual & their right to self-expression is always in my thoughts & actions.

Low-key, private: prayer, offerings, personal interactions; NOT public demonstrations or social media

Yes, I will love all, but will not let any do harm

Lead morning prayer & prayers for peace every week

More General Examples:

All people are loved by God--we should, too; God expects us to be peacemakers & to actively do things to bring together people who can't get along

Being still & listening to other points of view; being willing to adjust or defend my views--hard to do!

Not to speak in stereotypical, negative terms about others

Other:

This is probably the most difficult

This was a consistent goal in a high school community [where I worked]

n=13

Question 5a: Baptismal Covenant/Faith Community/Proclaim Good News

Cited Examples:

Worship services; Christian education

Rev. Martha's teaching

CSS; UMFB; OLB; greet newcomers & welcome them; cook & eat!

UMFB

Make newcomers feel welcome & want to come back

Weekly services; community service: OLB; community garden; CSS; UMFB; VBS

Outreach programs; lead by example in the neighborhood

More General Examples:

All people are loved; the Episcopal Church has come a long way since segregation & sexism. This has cost members who prefer to discriminate

Together, we can be the Christian example not possible as individuals

Other:

Will try more

Yes. Worry about the church individual trying to be so politically correct, they are closed

Response left blank

Response left blank

n=13

Question 5b: Baptismal Covenant/Faith Community/Seek & Serve Christ

Cited Examples:

I believe St. T's: welcomes all persons regardless of race, sex, age, color, religious beliefs; parishioners reach out to community to express love for others; it is a friendly place to go to church.

Outreach

Weekly services; community service: OLB; community garden; CSS; UMFB; VBS

OLB; CSS; collaboration with other local parishes

UMFB; OLB

Open communion; friendly congregation

UMFB

Reaching out to all at services; UMFB; Christmas in April

More General Examples:

Here is why I belong to an organized religion. The love & working together to help others is even more fulfilling as a group

We treat members of our food bank community by treating them as we would want to be treated

Other:

Will try more

Yes. I will serve and love, but not be stupid. Protecting those that cannot or will not protect themselves

Response left blank

n=13

Question 5c: Baptismal Covenant/Faith Community/Justice, Peace, Dignity

Cited Examples:

Parishioners, priests, vestry members reaching out to "disgruntled" parishioners or unhappy persons; trying to resolve issues to make brighter, happier place to worship & socialize

Supporting Bishop Walker School; contributing to disaster relief in other countries

Weekly services; community service: OLB; community garden; CSS; UMFB; VBS

Supporting our bishops and the work of the Diocese in achieving social justice and dignity for all people

Episcopal family is inclusive: respect everyone; ordain women & openly gay persons; Anglican Communion still doesn't "get it"

Welcoming everyone

Church activities are open & welcoming to all people; spirit of cooperation

Helping people less fortunate than we are

Weekly service devoted to peace & justice

More General Examples:

I am always gratified to see while human faults exist in all of us, together we are better than one of us is alone

Other:

Will continue & explain to my family, grandsons, and friends

Yes. I accept justice/peace according to God's laws & enforcing justice/peace according to man's (person's) laws

Response left blank

n=13

Question 6: What best helps you relate to God

Story alone: 0

Music alone: 3

1 said particularly Gospel music

Visual Art alone: 1

Music & story: 2

1 said, especially inspirational stories of "average" people

Music & Art & Story & Other: 1

Animals; being out in nature

Music & Other: 3

My blessings journal, participation in revivals & activities in other churches

Centering prayer

Liturgical aspects of worship (signs, symbols, objects used in worship)

Other: 3

Reading

Nature

The feel of a helping hand when I stumble

n=13

END OF PRE-PROGRAM QUESTIONNAIRE

One Week Post-Program Questionnaire

Q. 1: List the names of the 4 saints discussed in the program.

Which was your favorite? What qualities does he/she possess that you relate to?

7 were able to name all 4

1 named 3

1 named 2 (had only been to 2 presentations)

Favorite saint:

Brendan: 0

Brigid: 3

Columba: 2

Patrick: 1

Ita (told story about her on week 5): 1

Qualities:

Brendan: not mentioned

Brigid: generosity
sharing meals
hospitality
I tend to be concerned that people feel included & comfortable

Columba: courage
community-building
organization
ability to lead
ability to leave all behind

Patrick: sold into slavery, got his freedom
quest for justice

Ita: Teaching about what God likes/doesn't like

No Quality mentioned: 1

n=9

Appendix C: Data

Q. 2: What connection/s can you make between your favorite saint and the 4 saints highlighted in the program?

Spread word of God to all types of people

Followed callings with courage & conviction

Trying to bring to life what they believed was right & sharing with public

Animals (St. Francis; creatures Brendan encountered)

Journeyed & encountered threatening experiences doing so

All were inspired by God to do what was not always easy

Justice: 2

Sacrifices made to spread God's word: 2

Love

Caring

Explore

n=9

Q. 3: How has your idea of spiritual gifts changed since participating in the program?

No change: 1, plus a comment from another person:

Still confused about this; think it is presumptuous of me to think I have "spiritual gifts"

Learnings: 3

You can get in a rut--comfortable, not changing. Don't be afraid to say, "Come join us"

When you feel a nudge to serve--step out in faith

Praise the Lord more openly; continue to do the will of God in my life & in my church

Changes Identified: 4

Knowing that whatever service you do has value (little things still important)

Able to understand that I have gifts, too; my perception of what I do well has changed

The notion of spiritual gifts has enlarged:

- exploration
- giving away
- building community
- seeking justice

The program broadened my idea of spiritual gifts

n=9

Q. 4: What does the phrase "spiritual journey" mean to you now?

Not Changed: 2

Like the term; gift of life is a journey

It's growth process; lifelong

Changes Perceived: 6

Journey may mean loss (of family, freedom); journey may mean hurt & suffering; doing good for others who may not believe

Always seek to do more; learning is ongoing

Seeking direction from God to lead us into the unknown

Living with awareness of seeking Christ in daily life; striving to grow and improve self & relationships; become more Christ-like

Could mean traveling physically; involved a great deal of faith

Learning more about God and how to be open to hearing his plan in/for my life.

No response: 1

n=9

Q. 5: Have you committed to undertake an act of ministry? If so, please note what the act is & which of the following questions from the Baptismal Covenant it relates to:

a. Proclaim by Word & Example the Good News of Christ:

Yes; yes, with God's help

Already:

- proclaim by example & pray for others.
- serve as Greeter, choir member, Women's Group, UMFB, Martha's Table
- Continue to serve as a Sunday School teacher

New:

- Encouraging newcomers to join worship & activities
- Volunteered for worship committee
- Becoming involved in hands-on service at church

Left Blank: 2

b. Seek & Serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

Yes: 2

Already:

- seek to love others; struggle with forgiveness

New:

- Becoming involved in hands-on service at church; serve as Food Bank co-chair with renewed vigor

Left Blank: 3

c. Will you strive for justice & peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

Already:

- Try to do this
- Try to support all people; there is "precious little justice in this world"
- Seek to find common ground & peaceful solutions

New:

- Work for CASA: organization that seeks justice for children
- Becoming involved in hands-on service at church
- Vote
- Treat everyone with kindness & respect

n=9

Q. 6: Have you covenanted with other members of your faith community to carry out an act related to one of these promises? If so, please note what the act is & which of the following questions from the Baptismal Covenant it relates to:

a. Proclaim by Word & Example the Good News of Christ:

New:

- Spoke with Altar Guild chair about inviting youth (12-18) to become members
- Welcoming
- Outreach programs

Already:

- Sunday School teacher

Yes: 1

Not really: 1

Don't understand question: 1

Left Blank: 2

b. Seek & Serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

New:

- Participate in activities with other faith communities
- Welcoming
- Signed up for Our Local Bounty

Already:

- Food Bank

Other Comments:

- Don't understand question: 1
- Community is important

Left Blank: 2

c. Will you strive for justice & peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

New:

- Welcoming; be nice to those in the community & surrounding world

Already:

- upcoming African Team Ministries

Other Comments: 3

- Yes
- Don't understand
- Hope justice & peace won't become things of the past

Left Blank: 3

n=9

Q. 7: What aspect of the program on Celtic saints resonated with you the most: a story, music, or visual art? Or something else?

Story alone: 0

Art alone: 0

Music alone: 2

- Music helped reinforce the story: 1

Other alone: 2

- St. Patrick's Lorica: taped it to my bathroom mirror
- Considering where I fit into the Baptismal Covenant

Stories AND Music: 2

- Especially songs Rev. Debbie wrote: 1

Stories AND Art AND Music: 2

Other Combination:

- Music AND Prayers AND Excerpts from literature

n=9

Q. 8: Is there anything you would like to add about how the program affected you and your faith journey?

Generally Personal: 2

- First time I attended Lenten program--very nice; enjoyed visiting the other churches
- Sorry I did not do a journal

New learnings, thoughts: 4

- To stay hopeful & positive amid despair; the program helped my grieving.
- This sort of study provides new focus; I like opportunity to reflect & review; the opportunity to learn new things (saints)
- Program opened my eyes to what the Saints we studied accomplished--sent me to the Internet to learn more!
- Thought-provoking & informative; learned about the Celtic contribution to Christianity

Left Blank: 3

n=9

END OF ONE WEEK POST-PROGRAM QUESTIONNAIRE

Four Weeks Post-Program Questionnaire

Q. 1: Which of the saints in the program do you find yourself thinking about the most? What is it about the saint that affects you this way?

Brendan: 4

Brigid: 3

Columba: 2

Patrick: 0

Qualities:

Brendan:

- Willingness to venture into unknown: 2
- Faith: 2
- Courage: 2
- Determination
- Journey
- Gave up everything
- I'm also doing something that requires faith & strength

Brigid:

- Generosity
- Concern for people
- Always giving of herself to others
- Many things I do run along the same lines as hers; satisfaction in doing things for other people

Columba:

- Praying until tears come
- Monastic life--worked & prayed together and had rules for living

n=9

Q. 2: What connection/s are you now making between your favorite saint and the 4 saints highlighted in the program?

Courage: 2

Faith; giving to others; traveling to learn & spread Gospel: 2

True to what they believed: 1

Like St. Francis, they used their wealth to care for & feed others & they established holy orders: 1

St. Francis is my favorite but I don't know enough about him to compare

Prayed & worshiped; offered their gifts, which were different

n=9

Q. 3: How has your idea of spiritual gifts changed over the past month as you reflect on the program?

No change: 2

- Still not clear on notion of "spiritual gifts": 1

Learnings: 4

- Gifts have many forms: 2
- Desire to help others is a gift & non-believers may also have this; God does not restrict love and mercy to believers only
- Hoping I can continue to give time & support to those not feeling so fortunate

Changes Identified: 2

- My ideas have grown and changed. I never really thought about "spiritual gifts" to any extent before
- Discovered calligraphy & artwork of the Book of Kells, and singing in Latin

n=9

Q. 4: How has your thinking changed about your spiritual journey in the last month?

Not Changed: 3

- Not changed; just reminded to stay willing to help where I can.
- I realized I have to be careful not to try to take on too much.

Changes Perceived: 6

- Saints help us since we see they had to overcome problems, as well; they live as Jesus taught and love their neighbors.
- I need to do more; and consider contributions of others which not be as noticeable.
- Feel that I have been challenged to be more proactive about my faith.
- By participating in the study, I was forced to focus on these ideas; "I will be more aware of taking a spiritual journey."
- "I have started having time for morning and evening prayer or reflection, which I haven't always been faithful in doing."
- "I could follow better rules for the day such as St. Columba's rules."

n=9

Q. 5: Over the past month, have you committed to undertake an act of ministry? If so, please note what the act is & which of the following questions from the Baptismal Covenant it relates to:

a. Proclaim by Word & Example the Good News of Christ:

Not Yet: 2

Already: 3

- All 3 cited ongoing ministries in which they participate & plan to continue

New: 3

- Still seeking; rejoined choir to make music essential part of worship
- I have more enthusiasm than I did pre-program
- Joined Liturgy Committee

Left Blank: 1

b. Seek & Serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

Yes: 2

Not yet: 1

Already: 3

- All 3 cited ongoing ministries in which they participate & plan to continue

New: 3

- Be more intentional about seeking & serving Christ & loving others
- I have more enthusiasm than I did pre-program
- Helping neighbor prepare to move

Left Blank: 0

c. Will you strive for justice & peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

Not yet: 1

Already: 3

- All 3 cited ongoing ministries in which they participate & plan to continue

New: 1

- I have more enthusiasm than I did pre-program

Left Blank: 2

Yes: 2

n=8

Q. 6: Over the past month, have you covenanted with other members of your faith community to carry out an act related to one of these promises? If so, please note what the act is & which of the following questions from the Baptismal Covenant it relates to:

a. Proclaim by Word & Example the Good News of Christ:

New: 1

- I invited someone to begin attending weekly Morning Prayer and they are!

Not Yet: 2

Left Blank: 3

Already: 3

- All three cited ongoing ministries in which they are involved

b. Seek & Serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

New: 1

- Women's group just met & voted to give monetary support to UMFB; UUMC after-school program; Walker school; save funds for Christmas in April project

Not Yet: 2

Left Blank: 4

Already: 2

- Both cited ongoing ministries in which they are involved

c. Will you strive for justice & peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

New: 1

- Welcoming
- I voted in the primary! Looked for peacemakers & persons willing to work with others

Not Yet: 2

Left Blank: 4

Already: 2

- Both cited ongoing ministries in which they are involved.

n=9

Q. 7: During the past month, what aspect of the program on Celtic saints continued to resonate with you: a story, music, or visual art? Or something else?

Story alone: 1

Art alone: 0

Music alone: 2

Other alone: 1

- St. Patrick & his mission; he was a slave; he spread God's word; he sought justice.

Stories AND Music: 1

Saints AND Music: 1

Music AND Art: 2

- One cited the art in the Book of Kells

Other Combination: 1

- Stories AND Art AND Music AND Poetry & Prayers

n=9

Q. 8: Is there anything you would like to add about how the program affected you and your faith journey thus far?

Generally Personal: 6

- "I want to do more for others but am limited by physical issues and time."
- "My hope is that we can grow our congregations by taking some of the lessons learned from these Celtic saints; it would be nice to have some fun activities involving all our neighboring churches."
- "Helpful to do Lenten study with others & appreciate their points of view; has helped me to focus on Baptismal Covenant as never before."
- "It was enlightening and encouraging."
- "I enjoyed the program."
- "I thought the saints were interesting. The music and singing was wonderful & there wasn't anything boring and of course--good soup and bread."

New learnings, thoughts: 2

- Learn from the saints' struggles; hope for a better future for humanity
- There are many paths toward faith

Left blank: 1

n=9

END OF FOUR WEEK POST-PROGRAM QUESTIONNAIRE

Journaling Week 1: Brendan/Exploring for Christ

N.M.

Pilgrimage: Appalachian Trail hike became spiritual quest
Spiritual gifts: Pray throughout day; Lord's Prayer
Friends: Who were St. Brendan's friends? They needed each other on their quest. I pray God will guide me
Music: Opera recital; what a gift of God hearing is; opera recital--music moved me to tears
Prayer: For patience; for guidance
Altar Guild: Quiet & peace of Collington Chapel

P.D.

Weather, nature: Sunrise; physical therapy
Taking things for granted: Relatives & friends will be healthy, live forever; tell stories to keep memories alive of loved ones
Journey: every day is a journey
Homeless couple: Invited to help out at fish fry
Family: New granddaughter
Church: Activities, ministries

S.V.

Spiritual gifts: Don't know what this is; struggle to define; does it mean willingness to sacrifice oneself as Jesus did?
Grief: Husband's death
St. Teresa of Avila: "Her spirituality is experiential"; book mentor gifted her with
Reflection: "Brendan's prayers were trying to come to grips with his experiences;" Brendan's life parallel to Jesus' life--boating experiences; meeting people friendly & hostile; Jesus feeling disciples' lack of faith
Spiritual life: Brendan's voyage as allegory or extended metaphor for spiritual life
Voyage: Compared to Columbus, who enslaved indigenous peoples; genocide
Women: What role did women have in Brendan's life?

Appendix C: Data

D.M.

Fearless: Brendan was fearless; how can I be fearless?
Worry; worry killed my mother (smoking to relieve stress);
Meditate; breathe; got over fear of hip surgery; get active life back;
how can I use my new fit life?
Listen
Chances
Changes

New Things: What is the next chapter; be open; be fearless; make a difference;
dedicate to what matters

J.E.

Spiritual journey: Searching for Christ; looking for Him, rather than venturing
out as His agent

Music: Masterworks; old hymns; folk songs

Opportunities to serve Christ: Caring for granddaughter; proofreading & discussing
son's work; praying for a friend whose sister is dying;
congratulating & sharing joy with daughter who landed small
role in a TV show; sharing love & joy with a little child

Friends

Family: Brendan loved Christ & his brothers & his flock

Love: "There is more love in my life now than I have ever
experienced. I am grateful beyond expression for God is love."

Annoyances: Why did I agree to journal? How do I connect Brendan &
Baptismal Covenant?
Friend's e-mail: "Thank God for all those daily annoyances.
They are there for a purpose."
Psalm 118:8: "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put
confidence in man."

Change: Leaps of faith; moved across country 1 year ago to MD from
CA. God knew I needed a change and prepared the way

Baptismal Covenant: Travel magazine piece about woman traveling to Indonesia,
getting sick, being cared for by a Muslim woman who noticed
she was absent from her daily walk past the woman's house

All of Creation is sacred: Therefore, we serve God in all we do

Travel: Learning my way around new place; friendly people offer
directions & helpful tips beforehand

n=5

END OF JOURNALING WEEK ONE SUMMARY

Journaling: Week 2: Brigid/Offering Hospitality

N.M.

Rainbow: Seen while waiting with husband for his procedure at hospital; friend was in same hospital; decided to wait until the next day to see her--friend died; rainbow her sign?

Brigid: Found her absolute faith & trust in God more remarkable than her hospitality; she looked for Jesus in those around her

Altar Guild: Peace; precision

Church services: Brought another couple to church who are checking out churches

Prayer: For friend whose dog died; for patience while working in store; for friend who died

Friends

P.D.

Food: My church loves to provide food for gatherings

Family: Son in nursing home--place makes visitors feel welcomed: coffee, juice, cookies, tables & chairs; programs offered to which all are invited; piano player visited with son--warm & welcoming gesture; grandson's wedding; makes dinner for daughter's family several times a week

Church: Made 1,000 bologna & cheese sandwiches for homeless in D.C.

Weather: Sunshine; "warm weather makes everyone talk with each other."

S.V.

Brigid: Hospitality; compassion; minister to poor & needy; "Friendly Persuasion"--wife tells Confederate soldiers where to find provisions; "Giant"--the treatment of Mexican-Americans

The Poor: Brigid would recognize our world is much like her own--how sad!

Refugees: Building walls instead of bridges

Friends: Generosity--like Brigid; greetings to a friend on her birthday (Leap Year Day!)

Orion's Belt: Prominent here & in France; memories of her husband

Grief: Feel it more intensely as seasons change; daffodils her husband planted are coming up

Widows: Elijah & the widow; Ruth & Naomi

Appendix C: Data

J.E.

Hospitality: Think of people who welcome others into their homes; Brigid expands that idea: do everything possible to meet the needs of others, whatever they are; do I have this gift? I am willing to pitch in

Church: This new church community embodies hospitality: welcomed me; has outreach program; food bank; Martha's Table; visiting the sick; offering helping hands when needed.

M.W.

Journaling is hard!

Brendan's Voyage: A leap of faith; we're taking a leap of faith: bought house in DE, planning move; signed final contract on house

Brigid: Reminder of the power of giving; in December, a man behind me at the 7-11 bought my coffee for me; I've paid that cup forward several times--it pleases me & it's a joy to see the other person's response

God's Economy: An exercise in church--tied to Brigid's spirit; God sustains those who give

Downsizing: Friend's story of her old friend who let children choose knick-knacks when they visited; small gifts send great messages; hard to part with family treasures; quoting Matthew 6:19-21 (treasures on earth); learned last year in cleaning out in-law's home--wasn't as difficult to give away (or sell cheaply) things that others are joyful to get.
Look forward to passing on things I no longer need (but still feel attached to) to others who will use & enjoy them

n=5

END OF JOURNALING WEEK TWO SUMMARY

Journaling Week 3: Columba/Building Community

N.M.

Columba: Fond of him; "a saint I can see as a human and not just as a sort of 'fairy tale' person"

Spiritual Gifts: I may have a gift for building community; able to see more than 1 point of view; feel what is central to group planning to do something; usually able to lead group to a position of compromise without anyone becoming angry or feeling left out; admit to sometimes avoiding using this skill because I don't want to become involved in a new task; St. Thomas' seems to be good at this.

Friends: New couple still visiting churches; no decision yet

Nature: A walk in the woods--always makes me feel closer to God; picnic lunch; "All is well with the world, and God is in His Heaven!"

P.D.

Church Fellowship: Good night of fellowship with neighboring churches; church community working together to bring neighboring community together

Family: Visited son; the nursing home community has become a family--elders look out for younger members; preparing meals for family--hospitality & eating well

Church ministries: Greeter today--Girl Scouts visiting--invited them to coffee hour but had altar duty & another meeting; hope others greeted them & spoke with them; I wanted to talk to them about their accomplishments

Hospitality: At grandson's school--meeting room with place cards to mark seating--made people feel welcome

Appendix C: Data

S.V.

- Columba: Monks felt warming feeling--like Pentecost & holy fire?; who were the women in Columba's life?; joy--in serving his monks and his community; break in relationship with father over church--that did heal; but like Columba, time of pain & separation from family; conflict with O'Neills
- Teresa of Avila: Columba's journeying reminds me of her--"the wandering saint"
- Building Christian Community: Forward Day by Day --importance of a good website; machines dominate our lives; enjoy reading; want to pass that enthusiasm to other parishioners as a Christian community, we need to learn about our faith through Scripture, writings of past & present times; concerned about building communities in a society that is falling apart; concerned to build communities across racial & cultural divides; have signed up for committees at church; need to partner with Muslim allies to solve issues in Middle East
- Tears: "Vigil to Dry Tears"--piece of music; Columba on his death bed, Psalm 34:10; Jesus responding to women's tears
- Grief: "In being moved to tears by grief, are we experiencing God's love?"; still dealing with grief; questioning everything

D.M.

- Redemption: Columba spent life building communities after war in his youth
- Visitors: Monks welcomed visitors to Iona; not always easy to be hospitable; Columba made sure his community practiced this
- Biblical texts: Monks copied them; important to share the story of our faith with our children--it will help; maintain our religious communities

M.B.

- Brigid: Kind-hearted; wanted to help everyone
- Prayers: Use "drive time" to ponder & pray; lead weekly morning prayer at church; friends ask me to pray for others in their lives
- Hospitality: Helping homeless couple; invited them to help at fish fry--"pay it forward," they said
- Homeless: Talked with 3 people at church about needs of homeless in our community; we realize there's a need, just not sure where to begin
- Simplifying: Thinking about which Christmas decorations to part with; "Brigid would probably share them with others!"
- Friends
- Church ministries: Leading morning prayer; greeter; outreach team leader
- Spiritual gifts of church: Outreach: Martha's Table (1,000 bologna & cheese sandwiches); African Team Ministries; fish fries make money used in other outreach--Christmas party for food bank children, Thanksgiving turkeys for food bank families; other programs.

n=5

END OF JOURNALING WEEK THREE SUMMARY

Journaling Week 4: Patrick/Seeking Justice

N.M.

Social justice: Collington--as its origins & then affiliation with Kendal Group, a Quaker organization; women in science; prejudice against women--watching "Places in the Heart"; prejudice against persons of color; not much has changed for women & persons of color; political climate in our country this year

P.D.

Seeking Justice: Went to lobby in Annapolis at the Senate with organization she belongs to; who is right and who is wrong?; a lot of bills go through Senate & House--lot of research done--"we have to assume that elected officials do right by the people."

S.V.

Grandmother: Patrick was her favorite saint; heard lots about him, but never seeking justice!

Justice: Poverty; human trafficking; exploitation of children; health care for women; justice as issue for entire society; shocked at number of homeless people seen in DC near the Shakespeare Theatre; gender equality--70 years, according to European Union; prejudice against women--rape case at the Naval Academy; refugee crisis in Europe; natural disasters--can be overwhelming

Church: Some justice things done right--Native Americans who built the Alamo & other missions in San Antonio have descendants who attend those churches today; sometimes can get paralyzed--Christian love not an excuse to do nothing

D.M.

Social justice: Was unsure of meaning, looked up definitions: everyone deserves equal economic, political, & social rights and opportunities; fair & just relation between the individual & society; challenging injustice & valuing diversity; THEREFORE, she came up with this list of what to do to support social justice:
"treat every person with dignity. Speak kindly to everyone.
Vote. Show up--volunteer—act.
Speak up
Is my money supporting my beliefs? Where I buy things, where I invest? (I need to think about and work on this one!)"

NOTE: In a conversation on March 12, 2016, D.M. told me that the songs have helped her to integrate the concepts from each week.

n=4

END OF JOURNALING WEEK FOUR SUMMARY

Interviews

Demographics of Interview Subjects

Age	Episcopalian	Member of Particular Parish
57	12 years	12 years
62	33 years	33 years
72	0 (Methodist)	8 years
73	18 years	11 years
74	35 years	2 years
75	75 years	15 years
77	36 years	1 year

n=7

Question 1: Do you have spiritual practices that you follow? If so, what? How often?

Prayer:	7	(intercessions; multiple times a day; talk to God all the time; communion with the saints)
Music:	2	(hymns; choirs; playing piano;
Centering Prayer:	1	
Hiking:	1	("life depends on how Nature is going; get into communion with whatever's out there)
Morning Prayer:	1	
Advent Wreath:	1	
Read devotionals:	2	

n=7, more than one answer given by several respondents

Question 2: What thoughts do you have about your spiritual gifts? Did anything in the program influence your thinking about your spiritual gifts? If so, what?

Respondent 1:

"Brigid. I never really thought of hospitality as a spiritual gift. I've always had a care for making sure someone feels comfortable. That's a caring for others. So I've been more appreciative of that."

"The bravery one--I'd *like* to have that, but I'm not there yet!"

Respondent 2:

"Yes! The artwork and the singing (songs, harp). The *Book of Kells* was fascinating."

"Calligraphy. I could relate to Columba--his rules; the artwork."

Respondent 3:

"I taught for 25 years in a Roman Catholic school; spiritual gifts were the focus of every event. In those retreats, you're often told your gifts by those around you. This [program] renewed my thinking [about spiritual gifts]."

Respondent 4:

"It started me thinking about what this is; trying to see what it means to have spiritual gifts."

"Everything saints do is a spiritual gift. From the saints' stories you told, you can see that the everyday can be holy."

Respondent 5:

"Yes, I do have some gifts: [I'm a] peacemaker--I can usually calm a situation where people are butting heads. I can stay calm; and I am a very good lay reader."

"[In the program, influenced by] Brendan--just going, not knowing what was out there; and Columba--he seemed more a real person, and his work rules [made an impression]."

Respondent 6:

"It reinforced for me that there are things I think I should do, but will back away. "

Helping a homeless couple.

Serving as outreach chair.

Her children made a book for her 75th birthday, with friends writing something about her: "the way other people see me is *not* how I see myself. . . I come across as a special person to a lot of people."

Respondent 7:

"[I no longer] think of them as cut and dried. I make myself available; open to how God wants to use me."

"Each of the saints had a gift; the stories are a reminder that things are timeless."

"A reminder to me to be aware and more present to the possibilities of something.

Consider things later."

n=7

Question 3: Has any particular saint's story, song, or art stayed with you over the past month? If so, what? What do you think it is about that work that has affected you?

Respondent 1:

"Brigid's story: hospitality and her bravery, her gumption."

"Columba, with his singing--that one resonated with me, as well."

Respondent 2:

"Rule of Columcille."

"Ita's comments: short and to the point. It's like the Great Commandment for Columcille's Rule."

Respondent 3:

"I related to Brendan; he was led very strangely, but he went with it."

"I had no association with any of the saints, as a Lutheran and a Methodist; so hearing about them opened up something new."

Respondent 4:

"Columba--the prayer relating work and tears; the part of the self-awareness he was talking about when you pray, your emotions are involved, too. Your emotions are part of your prayer life to God."

"I had never heard Patrick set in those terms [justice] before."

"I like the saints where you have real-life experiences."

Respondent 5:

"Music is always moving for me, and artwork, too."

Respondent 6:

"Brigid--because she wanted to help everybody; I like the way she did stuff, even though her family wasn't thrilled about it."

Respondent 7:

"Music is my thing. The songs were so in the Irish folk song mode, and the music was right in the mode, and I loved it."

"Told stories in a memorable way with the songs. And the prayers and poetry--lyrical, spiritual; it touches me; it hits on the 'this is not a cut-and-dried thing.' You know it in your heart, that it is visceral, and can't limit your own need to understand; you were not intended to fully understand. That's where faith and trust come in."

"I was impressed with the courage of these saints."

n=7

Question 4: If you journaled, what was that experience like for you? What did you find helpful/challenging? Were some weeks easier than others? To what do you attribute that?

Respondent 1:

"At first, I wasn't sure what to do. So I got a pencil and paper and it was kind of great! It reinforced the ideas, and I thought, I should do this after every Sunday sermon."

"It was hard to get started, but it was useful; free-thinking. . . It got easier as the weeks went on."

Respondent 2:

Did not journal.

Respondent 3:

"I journaled at the beginning; it was hard to sit down and do it, but not hard to *think* about it. . . Brigid was the easiest--hospitality and generosity. You encounter those pretty regularly."

Respondent 4:

"I try to journal occasionally; need to get back into it, I enjoyed doing that [the exercise]."
"It helped to think of something else--not just the stressful stuff. I tried to focus on the saint's quality."

Respondent 5:

"This was difficult. It was a spiritual journey in itself."

"The hardest [part] was staying on task, writing a bit each day, rather than waiting until the end of the week. It was easy to get caught up in minutiae."

Respondent 6:

"Seeing in writing the little things you do each day--looking back, it helps you see how *much* you do."

"I had never done anything like that before."

Respondent 7:

"I never quite knew what to say. I felt like I was trying to bend what was happening in my life into a format and couldn't see how to do it. . . I knew God was there every day; [there was] not a lack of connection."

n=7

Question 5: Is there anything else about your spiritual journey that you would like to say? How has this program helped or not helped your journey?

Respondent 1:

"The program made me think--to keep telling myself there's *more* to life--like Columba's story--I'm working on that, to get the fear to go away."

"57 is not the end! The last three years, my health has declined, but now it's improving; I can see the future ahead."

Respondent 2:

"Finding the *Book of Kells*; it connected my artwork, teacher's training, and the program."

"In a class with a bunch of other people ["Catechesis of the Good Shepherd" training], it's like being in a monastery. You make a book you'll use with the children; you're all working on that together in the training."

Respondent 3:

"Active prayer life."

"As I grew up. . . I realized the joy that can be part of worship."

Respondent 4:

"I'm still assessing where I am now. If anything, it has helped me to start rethinking things--what does it mean to follow Jesus in everyday life."

"The saints help when you talk about their experiences and their adversity."

"We have a lot of work to do, as Christians. And I think the Episcopal Church helps with that--at least it helps me [with its] emphasis on Reason. I see value in mystics, too--their humility; not looking for power or influence. That's what I like about Pope Francis, too."

Respondent 5:

"The thing I work on the hardest is forgiveness. I often refer to the Lord's Prayer and remind myself that I will be forgiven as I forgive others."

"I think it's a lifelong struggle. Prayer really helps with that."

"The Baptismal questions helped in trying to see the good in other people. I haven't really thought about all those questions before."

Respondent 6:

"The hymns you [the author] wrote--they're beautiful and make you think about things."

"You can look back over your life and see the changes made in your life."

[You look at the saints' lives and think] "I could certainly do something to help, somewhere along the line. Their perseverance; the pride in the things they did."

"I think I need to be doing something with few unknowns."

Appendix C: Data

Respondent 7:

"Times of slogging--and then a bright breakthrough."

"I can't imagine a time when God was *not* in my life."

[I learned that] "Jesus loves me in Sunday School, and that stuck with me and never left."

"Connections with church home and family and knowing God loved me--they have been constants."

"C.S. Lewis kept me going [in a difficult period of my life as a single mother]. He was a great guide."

"God's love is constant, but you get through it [a tough time]."

n=7

Question 6: Have you been thinking about your baptism since the program ended? If so, what thoughts have you had?

Respondent 1:

"Not really; when I see them [the baptismal covenant promises], I think about them."

Respondent 2:

"I don't think about my baptism much." [Respondent then spoke of symbolism of baptism, especially in the teaching of the "Catechesis of the Good Shepherd."]

Respondent 3:

"I have--because when you're baptized, you don't really have a part in it, so it's interesting to consider it. As a child, I thought that when you were baptized, you became legal."

Respondent 4:

"The questionnaires *made* us think about those things--and it's good to do that."

"I've been thinking about justice and dignity. Jesus commanded us to love God and love our neighbor as our self. Then you ask, 'Who is my neighbor?'--and the answer is, *everybody*."

[The respondent then spoke of how a recent decision by the Anglican Communion to restrict the Episcopal Church's participation in councils for three years] "flew in the face of our Baptismal Vows."

Respondent 5:

"No. [Except for] voting."

Respondent 6:

"I read the Baptismal Covenant in the *Book of Common Prayer*. As I was reading through it, I was thinking of what I do, checking stuff off. I felt comfortable that I would at least get a 'C.'"

Respondent 7:

"No, not really. . . As a reminder, connecting it with this study was a reminder."

"I attended a Confirmation at the Cathedral last year, and I was very conscious, with great intent, I paid attention to the vows."

"Things of beauty remind me of God. Liturgical churches--their aesthetics and music help my spirituality. I find them helpful, not pretentious; building to the glory of God. Tangible--helps me."

n=7

Question 7: Is there any one of the baptismal promises you *plan* to think about more? Or perhaps take action on? If so, which one?

Respondent 1:

"Believing them and *acting* on them is the hard part."

"c'--vote--you've got to vote!" [strive for justice, peace, respect dignity]

"I try to give a kind word to everyone; I try not to look past people."

Respondent 2:

"I have done c [when working]." [strive for justice, peace, respect dignity]

"I'm doing 'a' now--choir, altar guild." [proclaim by word & example the Good News of God in Christ]

"I'm doing 'b' now--helping a neighbor to move." [seek & serve Christ in all persons, loving neighbor]

Respondent 3:

"Seeking justice, loving neighbor, loving enemies--we're all God's creatures. Where do you come off, saying something's wrong?"

"I believe in diplomacy and building relationships."

Respondent 4:

"Today, I see more issues coming to the fore, and religion being used to treat people unjustly--and using Christ's name to treat people unjustly."

"And issues that have come up that I thought were settled--racism, sexism, women's health issues--I don't know *what* action can be done, but that most concerns me."

"I like the different things we've sponsored here for the community. . . [they] show other cultures, and the appreciation for other cultures is important."

Respondent 5:

"a' is the most difficult; [I do things] by example." [proclaim by word & example the Good News of God in Christ]

"Yes" to 'c.' [strive for justice, peace, respect dignity]

Respondent 6:

I think that peace is the most important thing. [Another parishioner] and I have been praying for peace every Saturday morning since 2001--where would the world be [if we hadn't been praying]? Or have our prayers done any good? There's no way to know."

Respondent 7:

"They're all intertwined; if you do the one, the others are part of that."

"[New] I serve on Altar Guild, the Women of Trinity, the Food Bank, and Martha's Table. Hands-on ministry is new."

n=7

Question 8: How do you think your faith community could help you to more faithfully live out your baptismal promises?

Respondent 1:

"As part of a church, the sermon, lessons, chances to help others help to reinforce these ideas with the community that is outward-seeking. Our tradition is, 'I'm right with God, so let me share God's love.' If you have faith, you've *got* to have the works. Because I have the faith, I want to do the works."

"We focus on the love."

Respondent 2:

"Some people live out the promises and some don't. Some come for fellowship, community. . . Core of people really dedicated and relate to what's in the sermon, or the Eucharist--but others don't help me keep the promises. Maybe *I* need to help *them* more."

"[I see] a lot of division between the Chapel and St. Thomas'. . . I'm not sure how you solve that problem, but it's definitely a problem. It holds us back."

"Helping people to be more open with each other."

"[At] the Wednesday night soup and supper, we reflect on things *together*. You almost always have to have opportunities for people to gather together, talk, and reflect."

Respondent 3:

"[There are] plenty of opportunities, and I have not been as involved as I would like to be."

Respondent 4:

"I think it already does. I think welcoming is something we need to work on."

"I think you have to be involved in your parish--that's where the reward comes, when you're doing things for other people."

"I like the idea of involving other churches, to have activities where we're together. . . I think we could do better."

Respondent 5:

"I believe in being involved in whatever the parish is doing, especially outreach. I like programs that reach out to other parishes and denominations."

Respondent 6:

I help with all the things we do! I'd like to find a way to involve more people [especially those under the age of 50].

Respondent 7:

"I find it a wonderfully alive and vibrant parish; warm and welcoming to all who come; they're not an all-white church; they're not wealthy. Rev. Martha is a fine woman and I love her directness."

n=7

Question 9: Are you planning to take or have you taken any concrete action of ministry in order to live out the final 3 vows of the Baptismal Covenant? If so--what?

Respondent 1:

"I haven't done more because of the class, but I appreciate the things I do in a new light. I feel more motivated."

"I feel more inspired with the little kids and if a difficult situation at work, I don't want people to think, 'yup, Christians are hypocrites.'"

"Justice and peace are hard to grasp."

Respondent 2:

"Starting a Youth Altar Guild."

"Do something with the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* materials."

Respondent 3:

"I've not been the person to start something, but I would join in efforts--food drives, toy drives."

"I'm feeling unsettled; would like to get settled." [in midst of planning move out of state]

Respondent 4:

"Probably not, but I'm thinking about it. I have signed up for community things--I think they're important and appreciated by the community."

"I invite neighbors to church. Just talking to people and trying to get involved in things. My life is still chaotic [after my husband's death], and I'm trying to pick up things again."

Respondent 5:

"I'm continuing my ministries of reading and serving in the Altar Guild."

Respondent 6:

"A new idea I've had--I've been wanting to light a candle for Morning Prayer, light with a prayer for peace."

Continuing with "spiritual growth the first and third Friday each month at noontime."

Respondent 7:

I'm in a new community--seeking a formal relationship and offer what I can--be available if someone's needed--a call that's not something part of a committee."

My ministry is to help [a family member] through life--she depends on me to be there for her--a few times a week. It takes a lot out of me."

"It's energy, now, more than time."

n=7

Question 10: How could your faith community help you achieve this?

Respondent 1:

"We do a lot. Can't really think of anything."

Respondent 2:

"[To help establish a] Youth Altar Guild, maybe with Trinity and St. Paul's--training the youth to do Altar Guild, rotate from one church to another. This gets back to talking about God and the Rule of Columcille."

Respondent 3:

"[There are already] opportunities to connect. [Another church with which I'm involved seasonally] has a thrift shop, does nursing home visits, helps a mission church in the area, and makes things for nursing home patients."

Respondent 4:

"It helps just to be a member and to let people know you're a member of the church--especially talking with people who don't go to church."

"Being here, you get that sense of community; the importance of people worshipping *as* a community."

"Centering prayer has helped me. . . You have to think of it as long-term. Like education, you never know what effect you're having. You just have to keep trying."

Respondent 5:

"Just keep on keeping on. The future of churches in the U.S. is undergoing a radical change--fewer people attending traditional' churches. I find real comfort in the Prayer Book. I can focus on what's there *because* I've heard it so many times. And I couldn't go back to being a Methodist."

Respondent 6:

"[At our parish's Annual Meeting, I] let them know about Morning Prayer--and a new person started coming."

Respondent 7:

"Warmth and friendships at church help me--they nourish me."

n=7

Question 11: Where do you see Jesus in your faith community?

Respondent 1:

"As a role model. . . If everybody lived as Jesus did, it would be a better world."

"The fact that questions and doubts are allowed really appeals to me."

"[When I look at] Jesus as Role Model vs. Personal Lord & Savior--I can just focus on the *loving* part."

Respondent 2:

"Lots of places--the cemetery; the school building with the kids; the church. I think you have to spend time in the building to really appreciate it--a spiritual presence that affects you."

Respondent 3:

"The basis of the teachings . . . Rev. Martha does a great job; she preaches that our lives should be as Jesus taught us."

". . . We're not supposed to be worriers; we're supposed to accept peace. That's definitely Jesus' message."

Respondent 4:

"How do you think of God--uninvolved, way above us? Or do you see God present in our lives? I think Jesus is present *everywhere*--the Holy Spirit side. Jesus is everywhere; Marcus Borg helped me with that. A lot of mystics think that, too. Jesus is not removed from our lives, even in the darkest times."

"Worship space is important--the traditional collective wisdom of practice."

Respondent 5:

"Pretty centrally. The Trinity is a difficult concept; it's mind-boggling when I think I'm praying to God, but it's Jesus, too."

"The reason we're Christians."

"I puzzle sometimes about heaven and what happens to you when you die. When I was younger, I thought, you go to heaven and become an angel. Lately, I've been introduced to the idea that we're sleeping until the Resurrection."

"I have active communication with the saints out there."

Respondent 6:

"I see him in some of the older people [in the parish]. . . One was a Tuskegee Airman [who talked about his experiences]. . . [another] was an older man who ran coffee hour. . . People in their 80's and 90's--I think that they reflect on their lives; they did a lot when they could with ministries; they did what Jesus asked them to do."

Respondent 7:

The people reflect the love. . . The willingness to help make the sandwiches [for outreach], sorting for the food bank, or sending cards or calling--responding to needs generously, lovingly, and caring. Caring for the sick, the hungry, and each other."

n=7

Question 12: How do you think we could help *others* to see him in your faith community, too?

Respondent 1:

"Focusing on the love and not judging; welcoming. There's so much Christian hate out there . . . So much of a message of Christian exclusion and hate that you have to overcome with people. You have to love unconditionally."

"It's nice to have a place where people care about you; an extended family without being exclusive. And to make visitors feel welcome, not walking into a country club."

Respondent 2:

"Where we reach out to the community--you have to be willing to talk about God at the [farmers'] market."

"To have someone train us how to invite people--then they might come."

Respondent 3:

"It's hard--traditional churches are struggling. I see other churches that are thriving, and they do it very differently from how I grew up, and what I have to offer is how I grew up. . . There are a lot of things that are 'right.' We're not flashy, but good worship. Not prosperity gospel."

"Let people know that Trinity is there, reaching out."

Respondent 4:

"By example--you can't force people to see the advantage of worshiping in community."

"I think it helps to have everything for the service in the bulletin."

"I try to talk to people as much as I can who don't go to church. I invite people to come to the events we have here."

Respondent 5:

"Be kind and non-judgmental (it's hard)--'the others' look and sound different and are scary--unknown. Reach out so people feel accepted."

Respondent 6:

"[The homeless couple I've been helping] are seeing Jesus--they're seeing something here. [The wife] asked to be baptized; she said, 'Everybody's friendly, and they work together so well.' Now they're helping and want to be baptized."

"Ask people who attend the fish fries if they would like to get involved in the fish fries."

"Have to get people to things you have, including church services--but we can't do events every month, or we'd all be dead."

Respondent 7:

"Love is there [at Trinity]--a comfortable warmth [the people] radiate. Being there and being open--don't know what else could be done."

"[Named several outreach offerings]; how could clients of Food Bank become members? Transportation problems."

n=7

Question 13: What has been THE most important take-away from the program for you?

Respondent 1:

"Hospitality with Brigid. That was, indeed, a gift--made me appreciate that it *is* a gift."
"The music--the words in the song [the author wrote] reinforced the messages at the time."

Respondent 2:

"The Rule of Columcille and Ita's teachings--if you followed them, your life would be more God-centered and less centered in things going on."
"I liked the artwork [by Mickey McGrath]. It helped me to make the connection with [a copy of] the *Book of Kells* I found in a thrift store."

Respondent 3:

"I enjoyed learning about the saints, but they put a different focus on your life for a time. To focus on Lent and re-focus your thinking. The big part is that you're going to dedicate time at that time of the year to rejuvenate."
"I enjoyed meeting and hearing other people; the questions they ask; you think harder to contribute a thought or a new idea."

Respondent 4:

"Looking at these four saints about whom I did not know much (except Patrick)--they all seemed to have adversity that they had to overcome. I liked the study of their tradition and if they had actually written something. It's good to go back and see how deep our roots are. We define ourselves in how we think about God."
"Studying the saints' lives helps you learn life is a journey; there's something to calling Christianity 'The Way.' Life *is* a kind of pilgrimage."

Respondent 5:

"Thinking about the Baptismal Covenant in a way I never have before."

Respondent 6:

"The opportunity to meet other people, hear new ideas that you don't hear when you're just with your same group all the time. It's good to meet people from different churches."

Respondent 7:

The reminder of the example of the saints and their various strengths and how they faced difficulties and kept going; we can stay the course, ourselves, wherever our journey takes us.'
"The fellowship; meeting other people who thought this would be a good use of their time. People at the table had a reluctance to get into a discussion--I found it frustrating. Sometimes people aren't comfortable speaking out."

n=7

**Question 14: What questions are you left with? What else do you want to explore?
Any last words?**

Respondent 1:

"Brené Brown--I'd like to explore the 'second chapter' things in my life that I need to make myself do."

Respondent 2:

"The poetry and prayers were interesting, and the artwork of Mickey McGrath."

Respondent 3:

"St. Francis--I liked him but didn't know about him, so I looked him up. Also Brother André."

"The music--the songs were singable and enjoyable."

"Learning something new every day is a criterion for being happy."

Respondent 4:

"How do you put what you're thinking into practice? Bishop Curry gives us a call to action. The saints we looked at saw an issue they felt needed to be dealt with, and they seemed to find a path toward that. How do we approach issues that come to us? These are issues that Jesus understood--poverty. If we don't keep that message out there, it will be lost."

Respondent 5:

"I will think about the Baptismal Covenant and be more intentional about things and see where that leads--life is an adventure!"

Respondent 6:

"I might pay more attention to the saints, now. There are some pretty interesting stories in their lives."

Respondent 7:

No questions.

"I enjoyed the program--it was new and delightfully different. It was a beautiful package, and very unusual."

n=7

END OF SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS

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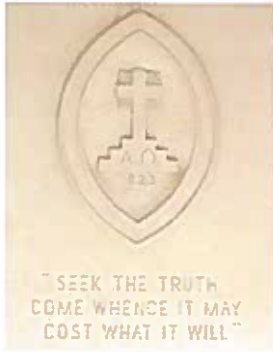
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