

DOCTORAL THESIS IN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

***FALLING IN LOVE WITH GOD  
PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH IMAGINATION***

*Deepening Relationship with God at  
St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Denver, Colorado*

A Qualitative Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study

Partial Fulfillment of Requirements or the  
Doctor of Ministry Program in Christian Spirituality  
The Virginia Theological Seminary  
Dr. Kathleen Hope Brown, Thesis Advisor

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by

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## **What does it mean—to fall in love with God?**

*Even like two little bank-dividing brooks,  
That wash the pebbles with their wanton streams,  
And having ranged and searched a thousand nooks,  
Meet both at length in silver-breasted Thames  
Where in a greater current they conjoin:  
So I my Best-Beloved's am, so he is mine.*

*Even so we met; and after long pursuit  
Even so we joined; we both became entire;  
No need for either to renew a suit,  
For I was flax and he was flames of fire;  
Our firm united souls did more than twine,  
So I my Best-Beloved's am, so he is mine.*

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*Nor time, nor place, nor chance, nor death can bow  
My least desires unto the least remove;  
He's firmly mine by oath, I his by vow;  
He's mine by faith, and I am his by love;  
He's mine by water, I am his wine;  
Thus I my Best-Beloved's am, thus he is mine.*

*He is my altar, I his holy place;  
I am his guest, and he my living food;  
I'm his by penitence, he mine by grace;  
I'm his by purchase, he is mine by blood  
He's my supporting elm, and I his vine;  
Thus I my Best-Beloved's am, thus he is mine.*

*He gives me wealth, I give him all my vows;  
I give him songs, he gives me length of days;  
With wreaths of grace he crowns my conquering brows;  
And I his temples with a crown of praise,  
Which he accepts as an everlasting sign,  
That I my Best-Beloved's am; that he is mine.*

*My Beloved is Mine and I am His* by 17th Century Anglican, Francis Quarles

1. Geoffrey Powell, Kenneth Stevenson, Rowan Williams, *Love's Redeeming Work, The Anglican Quest for Holiness* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2001), 162-163.



## **ABSTRACT**

*A Qualitative Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of St. Luke's Episcopal Church Parishioners falling in love with God, praying scripture with imagination* — Rev. Sandy Blake

The view from the chancel of St. Luke's Episcopal Church/Denver on Sunday reveals 70 - 90 year old gray heads vastly outnumbering the young. It is cause for the concern among Episcopal churches and other Christian denominations that white Christians in the United States are statistically in decline.<sup>1</sup> Folks who declare no religious affiliation at all are growing in number. Social Scientists call this phenomenon lagging generational replacement, changing racial demographics and cultural movement embracing diversity in America (diversity viewed by some as antithetical to Christianity). The Pew Research Center in 2014 reported five million fewer mainline Protestant adults than in 2007. And young adults (millennials raised in mainline traditions) are particularly unlikely to stay with mainline churches.<sup>2</sup> Episcopalians in the United States appear to be a remnant people in a post-Christian age.

In light of those inarguable trends, it was interesting that two young adults (in their late 20s and early 30s) that don't usually attend adult education programs at St. Luke's, were the first to volunteer for *Falling in love with God, praying scripture with imagination*, the subject of the Advent Retreat proposed to St. Luke's as this dissertation project. Volunteer narratives from the study indicated serious desire to go deeper in the faith, in spite of the frenzied life-styles of many volunteers.

After nineteen years of doing ministry in Colorado, (17 years in jails and prisons concurrently with 13 years in parish ministry), I wondered about the potential for deeper intimacy with the divine in both venues that tended to be generous in head-based religious programming and sparse in programming leading to depth in spirituality. I wondered if the future thriving of the Episcopal Church and other mainline denominations might be contingent upon deeper inner experiences of God by parishioners. It seemed that the process of praying scripture with imagination in conversation with the risen Christ as practiced in the *Spiritual Exercises* in Daily Life (19th Annotation Retreats) at Sacred Heart Jesuit Retreat House in Colorado might be an "intervention" in this study to encourage a deeper relationship with God. Fifteen parishioners at St. Luke's were willing to test Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* as a path to greater intimacy with the divine during an Advent Retreat in 2017.

Methodology for the act of ministry in this thesis project is hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative inquiry. This methodology is narrative driven, focusing on lived experiences of parishioners during the Advent Retreat. The project was *deepening relationship with God* engaging the process of *Spiritual Exercises praying scripture with imagination*, journaling dialogue with the risen Christ, sharing experiences born out of that spiritual practice, and giving feedback in written and spoken form. Volunteers came out of curiosity, out of friendship with the researcher/priest, and with desire to take their spirituality to a deeper level. In the end there was expressed hope that there be more experiential heart centered spirituality in faith formation programs of St. Luke's.

A bracketed presupposition of this dissertation project is Karl Rahner's belief (shared by the researcher/priest) that Christians in the future will be mystics in love with God or they will not exist at all. A practical presupposition is that research by this researcher/priest as a project leader from St. Luke's might reflect limited, even skewed, critical response from volunteers for the project.

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1) Robert P. Jones, (Public Religion Research Institute), *The End of White Christian America*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016), 53.

2) Michael Lipka, "Mainline Protestants make up shrinking number of U.S. adults," *Facttank, News in Numbers/Pew Research Center*, May 8, 2015, [pewresearch.org](http://pewresearch.org), accessed January, 2018.

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GREGORY ROBBINS, PhD, — is Department Chair, Department of Religious Studies at the University of Denver and Director of the Anglican Studies Program at the Iliff School of Theology. Dr. Robbins was a professor of mine at Iliff, who inspired me keep on learning by making study of the faith so compelling. I am grateful to Dr. Robbins for graciously agreeing to be a reader for this thesis project.

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***CHAPTER ONE, INTRODUCTION***

*WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?*

*THE ACT OF MINISTRY*

*THESIS STATEMENT*

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## **CHAPTER ONE, INTRODUCTION**

*Due to a scheduling conflict one afternoon at the county jail, my worship group was melded into Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship group as a compromise by the facility. We agreed that the Colson group do liturgy of the Word, And Christian Worship/St. Elizabeth's would do the Eucharist. Before I could say "Jack Robinson," Colson's group leaders began to hurriedly pass out short pencils and slips of paper to the roughly 18 male offenders in the contact room. They were instructed to check the box stating their intentions to take Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and hand them in to the leader before the service began in order to tally up how many had been saved that day. I don't remember hearing the Word. There were some "happy/clappy" songs. And as it turned out Eucharist was too abstract (maybe even irrelevant) worship for many of the fledgling believers in Colson's group. We offered a briefly instructed communion anyway. I prayed that the Spirit would bless our good intentions, and bless what may have been a mystified group of inmates subjected to our disjointed worship that day.*

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*In the parish where I was new Vicar at the time, the youth director had organized the teens (who were hard to organize because their time was so precious) into an ambitious melodramatic production about murder and mayhem in the Wild West. I wondered then and I wonder now how often faith formation in the parish and the jails gets beyond soliciting impressive tallies for the main office, head trips, distractions and entertainment (like a Wild West show) to deep soul work. I am curious, as well, how much interest there is in intimacy with God – how much interest there is in "falling in love with God."*

### **WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?**

In both of the vignettes above I regretted the squandering of precious time and opportunity to deepen the faith of busy teen parishioners and often troubled felons. Institutions of incarceration and the parish are both awash in faith-based programming. Considering the broad universal work of the Holy Spirit, I wondered about deeper faith formation in contexts in general – from the jail to the parish. Could folks in a variety of contexts get beyond talking *about* God to a deeper relationship with God? And what are our responsibilities as faith leaders around facilitating deeper intimate relationship with God? How do we do that? Would anyone show up?

This dissertation project grew out of my rich experience bringing worship services to jails and prisons in Colorado from 1999 to 2016 (12 different facilities in Colorado ranging from county jails to the Federal Prison in Englewood). In most cases we used the Eucharistic liturgy of the Episcopal

Church, but separated Liturgy of the Word into group homilizing of each reading — *lectio divina* style — hearing and sharing “*what the Spirit is saying to God’s people.*” Then the Eucharist emphasized the continuum of carrying Christ in our bodies into daily life in the correctional community, as it does for the parishioner incarnating Christ in the parish and the world beyond.

In the county jail, I was struck by the stories that came back to the worship group from offenders about how the texts and their commissioning send-off from the Eucharist was manifesting in their lives in the facility. “*You are the ministers here,*” I would say. Some were delighted to be empowered to have a purpose while they were locked up. They formed prayer groups, they held each other in misery and distress — brothers that were suicidal, mentally ill, brothers with severe learning disabilities, brothers in despair over broken relationships, despair and anger over the loss of their children, shame over their incarceration, shame over inability to provide for their children, struggle with addictions, and relationships, and anger over perceived injustice they had suffered that landed them in jail in the first place. In addition, they prayed for sick or troubled or sadistic officers in the institution. They were ministers to each other incarnating Christ in their lives. And these ministries were cause for celebration when we got together.

The joy of this rich experience made me wonder what would happen if we took the reading of scripture with imagination deeper into the lives of offenders with one-on-one spiritual direction for a period of time, to see if offenders that volunteered for the project would experience a deeper, more intimate relationship with God in the process. I wanted to hear how that affected their lives in the facility, and how that impacted the facility.

However, doing published academic research in correctional facilities was not to be. Though I was invited to be a chaplain on three occasions, I couldn’t get permission to do research in the Adams County Jail or the Denver Women’s Correctional Facility. Camp George West Facility wanted me to commit to a year’s contract as a chaplain, doing research on the side instead. I declined because I was concerned about the lack of staff and resources there, and didn’t feel safe venturing out to this facility alone night after night when the offenders returned from their day jobs.

I had been forewarned during my interviews with the Colorado Department of Corrections. A University of Denver professor and a University of Colorado professor, both personal friends, told me not to be surprised if these institutions would make it impossible to do published research in their facilities. Both professors had had similar experiences with their graduate students. ACLU records in Colorado revealed that correctional facilities were wary about liability. And I was aware of staffing challenges within all of these facilities to accommodate and supervise academic activity.

### *THE ACT OF MINISTRY*

*I have a superstition that has grown on me as a result of invisible hands coming all the time – namely, that if you follow your bliss you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living. When you can see that, you begin to meet people who are in your field of bliss, and they open doors to you. I say, follow your bliss and don't be afraid, and doors will open where you didn't know they were going to be.*—Joseph Campbell <sup>1</sup>

After a year of failed negotiations with the Colorado Department of Corrections, I asked the Rev. Dr. David Gortner, Dean of the DMin program at the Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS), if I could take the research aspect of the dissertation project from the intended jail venue into my parish at St. Luke's Episcopal Church/Denver. He encouraged me to do that. But the interim rector at St. Luke's was not open to my research there. When she was relieved of her position in late October, 2017, I was helped by the hidden hands of my friends at St. Luke's. I was asked to take her place for five weeks until another interim could be found. And St. Luke's parishioners were willing volunteers for research into *praying scripture with imagination*.

I was ready with a curriculum, and I asked the congregation during announcements at 7:45 and 10:15 services if they would be willing to volunteer to help with my DMin dissertation project in Christian Spirituality. Many graciously responded in the affirmative during coffee hour. The first to actually sign up for the project were two young adult women that didn't usually attend adult education classes at St. Luke's. And so, I preached five sermons for five Sundays both services each Sunday

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1) Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth, With Bill Moyers* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1988), 120.

(Appendix C) about deeper relationship with God, and launched a five-week Advent (prayer) Retreat meeting every Sunday, November 12 - December 17, 2017, from 9:00 to 10:00 a.m.. The project continued as participants engaged the exercises December 17 until December 24. Results were gathered and tallied January 1, 2018.

Twelve women and three men committed to the project. From six to fifteen parishioners participated during five Sunday Advent Retreat classes, practiced the *Spiritual Exercise* process, and contributed to dialogue in class. A 12-page booklet was provided to guide the process in class and with individual prayer during the week (Appendix B). See Appendix D for in-class exercises (also in the retreat booklet). Nine responded to before-and-after anonymous questions at the back of the booklet (Appendix B-11). Eleven responded with written and/or verbal narratives. None of the men wrote narratives. Only one man offered input in the class. One man was present but didn't offer narrative, verbal or written. One man dropped out (but convinced his wife to come to the class). Four volunteers dropped out of the class after the second session. Two volunteers joined later from the Tuesday Contemplative Prayer Class.

I asked for anonymous feedback (Appendix B-11) and signed written narratives with permission to publish (Appendix E) to be submitted by January 1, 2018. Appendixes G1-G4 are compilations of responses in chart form.

### *THESIS STATEMENT*

Thesis statement for the dissertation project is as follows: In biblically rich Christian education programming at St. Luke's Episcopal Church/Denver, my act of ministry is to encourage volunteers (who are ready) to go into deeper intimacy with God engaging the *Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life, (the Ignatian 19th Annual Retreat)* from Sacred Heart Jesuit Retreat House in Sedalia, Colorado. The tested hypothesis is that it would even be possible to *fall in love with God* during a five-week Advent Retreat in the parish, engaging group and individual settings, using narrative reports by volunteers about their relationship with God and service as criteria for evaluating the project.



The content of our process in this dissertation project varied from the original *Spiritual Exercises* of 16th Century Spanish priest and theologian, Ignatius of Loyola, who sought to reform the Roman Catholic Church by focusing on spirituality of the individual. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* intended to rid the individual soul of attachments with spiritual direction and praying scripture with imagination (putting oneself in Gospel stories in conversation with the risen Christ). *Spiritual Exercises* in its pure form selects specific scripture from the Gospels to that end. <sup>2</sup>

This dissertation project is based on Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life (19th Annotation Retreat) program as experienced by the researcher/priest at Sacred Heart Jesuit Retreat House. It uses instead the content of *Revised Common Lectionary* scriptural texts from the bible *as a whole* as presented in *The Upper Room, A Guide to Prayer* for journaling scripture, using the imagination in conversation with Jesus in the text. With Jesus, the Beloved, we are sitting together "on a park bench" (as Vince Hovley, my Jesuit friend from Sacred Heart, suggested). Gene Arthur, S. J., my spiritual director for the Daily Life Retreat at Sacred Heart, suggested *The Message Bible* over authorized Roman Catholic bibles in order to hear the texts anew.



Briefly, the steps to praying scripture with imagination as presented at Sacred Heart are journaling/annotating 1) The Grace (the heart's desire), 2) Reading the Text, 3) Insight (from the text), 4) Colloquy (conversation with the risen Christ using imagination with all aspects of the text), 5) Remaining in Prayer, 6) Insight (from the prayer), 7) Colloquy, 8) Closing Prayer. (See Appendix D, Chapter Three and Chapter Four for deeper conversation about this process.)

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2) St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, ed. Jouis J. Puhl, S.J. (Chicago: The Loyola Press, 1951), 124-261.

At this point it is worth mentioning that in addition to the prayer process of Ignatius of Loyola and the Jesuits at Sacred Heart, anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann, in her book *When God Talks Back, Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship With God*<sup>3</sup> expanded the researcher/priest's sense of possibility for deeper intimacy with God as a common practice of all manner of people, not just a self-selected few. Luhrmann reported on the dynamic spirituality of the worldwide neocharismatic evangelical Vineyard movement that was born in Beverly Hills, California in 1975 for bible study, song writing and music making. The experience of members of the Vineyard movement as reported by Luhrmann demonstrates how conversation with the risen Christ isn't just for serious Jesuits and (with a little luck) Episcopalians.

Data gathering processes with conclusions about testing the hypothesis of the Advent Retreat at St. Luke's, a five-week abbreviation of the seven-month Ignatian Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life program at Sacred Heart, is recorded and discussed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 of this dissertation.

## *CHAPTERS AND ORGANIZATION OF THIS THESIS*

**Chapter One** acknowledges the “problem” of busyness and head-based Christian programming in the parish and in institutions of incarceration, and wonders if what is lacking is experiential intimacy with the divine — *falling in love with God*. Deeper inner spiritual work like Ignatian praying scripture with imagination is offered as a potential intervention. The act of ministry in this project is the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercise* process of praying scripture with imagination in a parish during an Advent prayer retreat at St. Luke's Episcopal Church's Denver parish. The criteria for evaluating this project is the reported sense of God's presence in the prayer and evidence of manifesting relationship with Jesus in the lived experiences of participants.

**Chapter Two** discusses the methodology of qualitative hermeneutic phenomenology, including the author's personal hermeneutic phenomenology and the practical theology of priestly listening and hearing. Bracketing presuppositions of the researcher/priest is addressed in this chapter.

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3) T.M. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back, Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012).

**Chapter Three** explores sociology, psychology, anthropology and theology informing this project in order to “unpack” St. Luke’s experience of Christ consciousness in *praying scripture with imagination*. Psychological religious landscapes of Early 21st Century America, of St. Luke’s parish and of individual parishioners are explored by engaging developmental psychology, including psychological typology theories regarding parishioners and the parish. Chapter Three looks at grace, desire, myth, symbol, synchronicity, and the reconciliation of the conscious and the unconscious in prayer using the theories of psychologist Carl G. Jung. This is to (speculatively) inform consciousness and unconscious dynamics of the inner life of parishioners and the parish.

**Chapter Four** about theological reflection is the high-octane fuel—the driving passion—for the author’s ministry in the parish and in the jail looking toward the future. This is because it acknowledges where we seem to be as a species evolving into a potential future of Christ consciousness, noting the revelations of 21st Century science that enrich and confirm Christian faith, and proposes a believable sense of life of the spirit beyond our earthly journeys.

**Chapter Five** discusses the social setting for worship at St. Luke’s. It develops Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises* as the tool for research in this project. The project with its time lines, procedures, participation, informed consent and observation of volunteer behavior is described in a diary of the process from October 29, 2017 - December 24. Emergent design (unexpected variation from the original design) was revealed in the unplanned patterns of participation, dialogue in the group setting, and in written and verbal narratives outside the group. Seven meaning units emerge in this chapter. Matters of methodology are revisited, followed by bracketing of the research design.

**Chapter Six** is a synopsis of volunteer revelations in each of the seven meaning units (meaning clusters) by abbreviating significant narratives, drawing textual descriptions of what happened in each narrative, followed by speculative interpretive description by the researcher/priest of the narrative. Results of the anonymous feedback form are revealed, followed by a final composite description of the project with insight and conclusions.. This is a large and involved chapter that is a culmination of the dissertation project.

**Chapter Seven** revisits the thesis statement, offers reflections, learnings, recommendations and questions for the future at St. Luke's, the Episcopal church, and discusses the challenges that Christendom may face in the future. Its conclusions stay true to what is revealed in the written and verbal narratives of volunteers. This chapter brings together data, perspectives, methods, and disciplines in this study. Methodological considerations are revisited, leaving questions and suggestions for the wider Episcopal church and Christendom beyond. There are final remarks—an epilogue that looks to the future with hope—looks into the future “without being sad.”

### *VIGNETTES AND BRACKETING*

Vignettes (in italics) that head each chapter in this dissertation are drawn from the researcher/priest's ministries at St. Luke's, other Episcopal parishes, hospital, and prison chaplaincy. They are drawn from 20 years of the researcher/priest's lived experience of ministry in many venues in Colorado, including from 14 years in the parish ministry in four urban Colorado front range parishes. These little stories—some memories of times long ago—flesh out the dynamics of each chapter in the project. Though the dissertation project focuses on St. Luke's parish, these experiences in broader venues have informed the researcher/priest's ministry experience. Vignettes are from the psyche and memory of the researcher/priest, who admittedly brings her own presuppositions to the project influenced by ministries at St. Luke's and beyond. And as required by the discipline of qualitative hermeneutic phenomenology, bracketed presuppositions are included in the project, including presuppositions noted by other readers of the dissertation.

## ***CHAPTER TWO***

### ***Methodology: Practical Theology and Qualitative Hermeneutic Phenomenology***

#### ***PRACTICAL THEOLOGY***

Presence and listening in the parish and in the jail

#### ***QUALITATIVE RESEARCH***

What is the question? What is the intervention/the project design/the purpose?

What is the collected data/the response?

#### ***PHENOMENOLOGY***

Structures of experience and consciousness

The description of persons, places, and events

#### ***BRACKETING THE PHENOMENOLOGY***

Consciousness and objects of direct experience of the researcher/priest



## **CHAPTER 2, METHODOLOGY:** *Practical Theology and Qualitative Hermeneutic Phenomenology*

*Christian Worship/St. Elizabeth's gathered 10 men in a contact room of the county jail. Text for Liturgy of the Word that evening was Jeremiah 2:4-13. The Lord said in this text, "I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and good things...but my people have changed their glory for something that does not profit."*

*I asked how the Holy Spirit was speaking to God's people with this scripture in this place. It spoke to many about hunger in their experiences, both metaphorical and actual, as a common theme in scripture. And it spoke to lived experiences of abundance of food in Colorado provided by super markets and other donors to food pantries, and in super market and restaurant dumpsters. There was discussion about how very few adults actually go hungry in Colorado — at least in urban settings.*

*An articulate and well kept but enigmatic offender in his early 50s in the group told about the lesser abundance of food in rural settings and the dearth of stable job opportunities in Colorado mountain towns. He told about how he had been living for three years year around in a mine shaft near a remote mountain community.*

*I asked him what it was like for him to survive in a mine shaft all those years. He said it was possible to make a mine shaft into a home. But that he had been incarcerated repeatedly for shop lifting (mostly heating fuel). But as the text said, even the mountains were a plentiful land with fruits and good things to eat. He seemed to be a peace being in jail—even hoping he could be in the comfort of the jail for the upcoming winter. He said his life in the mine shaft as well as in the jail was mercifully free from striving to make money. He was content with what he had. God had never forsaken him. He could say with confidence "The Lord is my helper, I have not been afraid. What can anyone do to me?" He was grateful to the chaplain at the county jail the last time he was in the jail who gave him a Bible of his own, a prized possession and constant companion in and out of the mine shaft. He said, "The chaplain did not neglect to do good and to share what she had with me—that she is a living testament how such sacrifices are pleasing to God."*

*We sang "Let us break bread together on our knees." We prayed together. And we broke the bread of the Eucharist together before offenders were disbursed to be Christ's hands and heart for each other in the jail in the week ahead. Those offenders know they are the real ministers—servant leaders—at the county jail. My drive home in the night was warmed by the richness of time spent with this priesthood of believers — for holy sharing and holy listening and holy caring.*

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*During offertory of Sunday worship on a festival day in the parish a disheveled (maybe even mentally ill, but unarmed) woman brazenly marched up the side aisle of the sanctuary to the chancel. She had alerted the ushers, and then she told the acolytes seated near the chancel that she was desperate. She urgently needed money, and she wouldn't leave until she got some help. The priest was alarmed. These were anxious times. Was this woman dangerous? Was she one of the many unwelcome homeless drifters that routinely show up at the church for handouts? Was she a threat to the children and the frail elderly? Was she a terrorist?*

*s. blake, chapter 2, page 13*

*The priest was being true to his vocation as shepherd and protector of the flock. This is possibly why laity so often have a better shot of being doers of the Word—that they are more likely to be the “good Samaritans” of the story. They are freer to take risks.*

*As a visiting priest that day with the luxury of thinking beyond the safety of flock and the facility, I wondered if we were being tested. Could this woman be Jesus in disguise? Were we the uptight cautious Pharisees that Jesus so often chided in the Gospel stories?*

*I wondered what would happen if we had considered this to be a learning opportunity, if we had opened up some space in the liturgy and invited her to the microphone to tell her story. I wondered if we missed a blessing not hearing her story. Even beggars and con-artists have stories that need to be heard. Was she the messenger in Matthew’s Gospel to whom we failed to offer hospitality? What made her desperate enough to appear at a time and in a place where she knew she was not welcome? What if we had had the courage and the imagination to take advantage of the opportunity to hear her story? What if we had offered “this little one” a cup of cold water (Matthew 10:42, Luke 14: 1, 7-14, Hebrews 13:1-8)?*

*Well, the Senior Warden was nervously summoned by the priest from the chancel to remove the unwelcome intruder outside the sanctuary so we could worship God undisturbed. But as the intruder was being ushered out people quickly tucked money into her hands. The Senior Warden told us later that she left the church in a very nice car with \$80 in her pocket, a tribute to the good Samaritans in the pews who set aside judgment and just opened their hearts and their hands and GAVE to “this little one.”*

*Later, the fearful rector ordered staff members to call 911 immediately if the likes of this woman should show up again. “Here on out, protocol is to call 911.” (If Jesus should happen to show up in disguise, call 911). A year later a new rector granted staff safe space to engage the subject of ubiquitous homeless drifters in need that show up at the parish. She granted a safe space to engage scripture with imagination. There was serious discussion about our calling as Christians and the inevitable “guests” in our midst asking for our help. One staff member told how he was recently inspired by the welcoming of the destitute en masse in a respectable New York City church. He said there were no noticeable ill effects of their presence in that church. This spoke to him as an impressive witness to the Gospel in the city. Staff explored how the parish can imagine its calling to be a better witness to the Gospel in our city as well.*

## *PRACTICAL THEOLOGY*

### *Presence and listening in the parish and in the jail*

Educator theologian Richard Osmer wrote that our descriptive empirical tasks as leaders – as the priesthood of believers—in practical theology are: “...*a form of priestly listening, grounded in a spirituality of presence; attending to others in their particularity within the presence of God. This interpretive task is a form of wise judgment, grounded in a spirituality of sagely wisdom: guiding others in how to live within God’s royal rule. The normative task is a form of prophetic discernment, grounded in a spirituality of discernment; helping others to hear and heed God’s Word in the particular circumstances of their lives and world. The pragmatic task is a form of transforming leadership grounded in spirituality of servant leadership.*”<sup>1</sup>

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1. Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 28-29.



These vignettes illustrate the practical theology of presence and holy listening and hearing the stories of the “others” in our midst. It is the face-to-face “priestly listening” of all of us to the telling of stories—the stories (and conditions) of parishioners and felons—where we meet Jesus face to face. God help us to pray scripture in conversation with the risen Jesus with courage and imagination. Folks in the pews were mercifully present to the intruder, saw her desperation, and without questioning her motives moved to help her. Folks in the county jail were a listening presence as well.

God help us to be parish leaders so grounded in the spirituality of servant leadership that we can lead others to live and hear God’s Word in the circumstances of our lives at St. Luke’s and in the world. The practicality of servant leadership implies taking the risks of clarifying our mission together as the embodiment of God’s love. This is hard work. Sometimes the more radical the need for transformation, the greater the potential is for resistance. The first step in interpreting the texts of our (fearful and chaotic) contemporary lives is in taking the Word seriously—being present to and actually hearing the Word and by doing the Word.

Richard Osmer sees the discipline of practical theology as affecting interconnections, interdependent relationships and systems that are committed to human transformation, to the common good and public policy in the church and well beyond the church. “*The method of practical theology,*” Osmer wrote, “*includes descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic tasks [that] may be brought to bear on any issue worthy of consideration.*”<sup>2</sup>

The issue worthy of consideration in this dissertation project is the deepening of the inner journeys of parishioners via Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* (and similar prayer practices) in the parish and beyond. Osmer identified four tasks of practical theology by asking and answering four questions of the context: 1) **What** is going on (descriptive-empirical) in the parish? It is a ministry of holy listening—to each other, to scripture, to the Spirit of God. 2) **Why** is it going on (interpretive)? We postulate that there is a yearning for deeper relationship with each other and with God that brings folks to solitary and group prayer practices. 3) **What ought to be** going on (normative)? *Falling in love*

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2. Ibid., Osmer, *x*.

*with God/praying scripture with imagination* is the pragmatic task/the prayer exercise of this dissertation project. 4) **How might we respond** (pragmatic)? We respond by gathering together to *pray scripture with imagination*, using the process of the *Spiritual Exercises* as presented at Sacred Heart. We hear each other's stories, and let each other's stories point the way ahead. We respond by taking Christ's body into our bodies in celebrating the Eucharist as a church family. And we respond by incarnating Christ's body in our worlds beyond.

Educator Tim Sensing in *Qualitative Research* says about that, "*Although DMin projects are designed with one particular context (the local church) in mind, the wider field (the catholic church) should be kept in close proximity.*"<sup>3</sup> And so, we begin by taking prayer practice into our "inner rooms" in solitude and in conversation with God (Matthew 6:6), bringing into our consciousness the mind of Christ (revealed in scripture). Beyond our inner rooms we participate in an evolutionary transformational process for our species that affects our lived experiences together.

Data-driven (formal attending collected in the anonymous form) and narrative-driven (informal listening to God and to each other) responses to the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercise* program of Sacred Heart was the core process for the five-week Advent Retreat/dissertation project at St. Luke's. The Advent Retreat was the vehicle for priestly attending and listening. The project was presented to volunteers as research into spirituality at St. Luke's via group process with conversation about *falling in love with God/ praying scripture with imagination*. Listening was narrative-driven as each person prayed a suggested scripture using the template for the prayer in the guide booklet, (Appendix B). This was followed by discussion of the text and the process. The booklet listed daily texts for volunteers to continue praying on their own during the week, followed by group sharing the following Sunday about that experience. The researcher/priest took notes of group discussion to factor into her research.

By systematically engaging the Ignatian prayer practice, spirituality at St. Luke's was explored. Desire (or not) for experience of divine presence as well as obstacles, if they were present, to deeper spirituality at St. Luke's was listened for and noted.

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3. Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research, A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), xvii.

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

*What is the question? What is the intervention/the project design/the purpose?  
What is the collected data/the response?*

The first concern of qualitative research is to develop the research question—to be clear about purpose. The situation/opportunity/intervention that research focused on at St. Luke’s Episcopal Church/Denver was the possibility of adding spiritual depth to the program-rich environment of the parish and beyond. The researcher/priest wanted to take parishioners deeper into inner work at St. Luke’s by introducing Sacred Heart’s Ignatian *Spiritual Exercise* prayer practices into programs. The researcher/priest sought to present a deeper encounter with God by *praying scripture with imagination*. This was based on the supposition that encounter with God by praying scripture (using scripture as a parameter for imagination) can make the Lord more intimate and present in the prayer experience, and make life and ministry incarnational of the risen Jesus beyond.

Incarnation of God’s love and God’s thoughts in relationships in the lives of participants was an indicator of the effectiveness of the Ignatian spiritual practice and the potential for transformation on personal and institutional levels. The “why” of this qualitative Research is interest in getting to deeper *meaning* and experience of Christian spirituality over the Quantitative broader landscape of data collection and analysis. (Although, there is some quantitative information in Chapter 6 of this project as well.) This is called “action/reflection” model of inquiry, reflecting on the “real world” of the researcher as a ministry leader inviting parishioners in this ministry setting to *fall in love with God* by engaging deeper “inner work” in their lives.

The researcher/priest’s seventeen-year experience in jails and prisons concurrent with thirteen years of parish ministry suggested the potential of *praying scripture with imagination* for the project. Her ministry in institutions of incarceration made her curious about what might be possible in the parish using the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* process of Sacred Heart. To that end, fifteen parishioners volunteered to participate in a five-week Advent retreat at St. Luke’s. Was it possible that folks at St. Luke’s could experience greater intimacy with the divine—if the process would reveal hopes and desires parishioners have for their own spiritual lives and desires for the life of the parish?

*s. blake, chapter 2, page 17*

Parish volunteers were asked what brought them to join the Christian spirituality project. This was in the interest of knowing if what we learned together might be used by parish leadership at St. Luke's to bring greater depth in spirituality and deeper relationship with God and God's Word.

Beyond deeper spirituality for individuals, the festival Sunday vignette at the beginning of the chapter is illustrative of formal (clergy) leadership responsibilities, and the intent and the quest for deeper presence and hearing and doing Gods Word in formal church leadership.

The researcher/priest wanted to know what might appeal (or not) to folks who have given up on church. Is a church community lacking in experiential spiritual depth considered to be not worth the trouble? If "grounded theory" emerged from this study in St. Luke's context, it was that time is precious—often too precious for engaging in spiritual practice. This is much less so in the county jail, where excess time can weigh heavily on offenders. And the researcher/priest has a sense that truth telling may be more prevalent in the jail where offenders have nothing more to lose. Candor may be less safe in the parish, where politics can be an issue. Incarcerated folks also have more urgency for personal transformation. There is more for them to gain in an intimate relationship with the divine.

Narratives were gathered and shared during the Advent Retreat in the form of stories and experiences and epiphanies. Parishioners expressed their thoughts confidentially on an anonymous form. In addition they freely offered written and signed narratives (feedback) about their experiences of the retreat (Appendix F).

A salient question was how and if can this study could serve the church and ministries beyond. How could the findings of this dissertation project contribute to transformation at St. Luke's Episcopal Church? This was a desire that was indicated in the parish profile and survey referenced in Chapter 3. How can St. Luke's flourish and become more Christ-like for the sake of the world?

This study is quantitative as well, in that it began with the self-selection of volunteers from the St. Luke's community to be interviewed. Responses on the anonymous form were quantitatively measured and discussed in Chapter 6. See bar graphs in Appendix G. This dissertation project is

interested in testing the supposition that encounter with the risen Christ *praying scripture with imagination* can deepen relationship with the divine, and make life and ministry incarnational of the risen Christ in the church and in the world.

Synchronicity between praying scripture and life experiences outside prayer is one indicator of the effectiveness of this spiritual practice. Incarnation of God's love and God's thoughts in relationships in the lives of participants is another measure of the effectiveness of this spiritual practice and the potential for transformation on personal and institutional levels (see Chapter 6).

The principle of interpretation via written, verbal, and non-verbal communication (the hermeneutic) of this project was built on the initial communal activity of the Advent Retreat, beginning with description of the project by the researcher/priest to the parish. A booklet for the retreat demonstrated and guided the process of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola as taught at Sacred Heart.

A bracketed issue at this point might be the influence of relationships between members of the parish group. The connection of spiritual friends with spiritual friends who volunteered for this study could in itself be transformational. In addition to "the intervention" (the *Spiritual Exercise* process introduced by the researcher) "*the researcher [can become] a co-participant with the community in the process of gathering and interpreting data to enable new and transformational modes of action.*"<sup>4</sup>

The intervention of the researcher/priest in this project began by wondering about spirituality in the context of the parish—wondering if St. Luke's folks were open to the inner work of intimacy with God—open to *falling in love with God*. And so, this research at St. Luke's was undertaken with suspicion as well as expectation.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter is bracketed with the suspicion that generally speaking, the interest in attending St. Luke's may be more social than spiritual and that folks in the parish are too strapped for time to seriously engage in the experience of inner work. This research at St. Luke's was entered with the expectation that most of God's children seek intimacy with the Lord and relationship with each other,

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4. Ibid., Sensing, 63

5. Ibid., Sensing, xvi.

each in their own ways, and not necessarily in the ways of the researcher/priest or of the *Spiritual Exercise* process. See Chapter 3 for varieties of personality preferences in individuals and institutions.

## *P H E N O M E N O L O G Y* *Structures of experience and consciousness*

*The description of persons, places, and events has been the cornerstone of qualitative research ...it is the qualitative researcher'/priest's reason for being.* <sup>6</sup>

This ethnographic study has been my reason for being. It reveals my own shared experience over many years with parishioners at St. Luke's, jails/prisons, and Episcopal parishioners elsewhere, and their shared experiences with me. Venues are obviously different, but I witnessed a commonality in desire and consciousness between parishioners at St. Luke's that volunteered for the Advent Retreat, in other Episcopal churches, and with felons who showed up for Christian Worship/St. Elizabeth's at the county jail. This study is interested in the richness of similarity and difference in the disparate cultures, as well as customs, habits and commonality of spiritual experiences of participants in different venues. (See "Social Science that has informed this project" in Chapter 3).

This phenomenological research uses the interview method to get to the essence of lived experiences of parishioners of St. Luke's, in juxtaposition to vignettes gathered from other institutions over a seventeen-year period of time. In most cases the research is subjective and not completely quantifiable. Narrative in most cases is anecdotal about the experience of *praying scripture with imagination*, with the addition of journaling by some at St. Luke's of conversation with the risen Christ. This research could lead to advocacy for the future of Christian programs at St. Luke's and in other venues.

Outcomes of this study are measured and evaluated by the criteria of interpretative social science as described by Richard Osmer and Leslie Curry of Yale University. This means that the researcher uses an interpretive perspective of the testimonials narrated by parishioners' perspectives and the meanings they give to their consciousness and their lived experiences during and after of the project. It is based on the researcher's un-predetermined empathetic understanding of what was happening;

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6. Valerie J. Janesick, "The Choreography of Qualitative Research Design," *Handbook of Qualitative Research Second Edition*, Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds: (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.,) 2000.

analyzing and identifying the essence, the patterns, and the experiences of parishioners and of the researcher/priest as well. <sup>7</sup>

*Qualitative data analysis is an iterative process of individual and group level review and interpretation.* <sup>8</sup>

This dissertation project, centered around the Advent Retreat at St. Luke's/Denver, culminates in systematic collection, organization and interpretation of narrative material in conversation with volunteers who agreed to *pray scripture with imagination* for five weeks. We were testing a hypothesis that praying scripture with imagination may deepen inner journeys. At the same time we were seeking insight from the ground up with input from parishioners.

The researcher/priest was seeking greater depth of understanding and insight into the potential for human transformation and development in the parish that is difficult to measure quantitatively, calling for qualitative research. Though in a sense we were mixing qualitative and quantitative methodology, in testing the hypothesis that *falling in love with God/ praying scripture with imagination* would manifest in deeper spiritual work of volunteers. But we remained open to generating new hypotheses from what transpired. Though our sampling was purposeful in that opportunities to participate were within a Christian faith-based context, at the same time the sampling was random because volunteers for the study were self-selecting. But they were self-selecting around the purpose of enriching of their spiritual lives or the life of the St. Luke's community. The condensed time frame of the Advent Retreat without universal individual spiritual direction that was integral to the process at Sacred Heart limited the potential of the project. (In three cases spiritual direction was requested and provided to the St. Luke volunteer group.)

The method of data analysis involved grouping phrases from spoken and written narratives that represented the essence or key attributes of narrative information as a means of categorizing and organizing narratives into similar "chunks" or meaning units (Chapters 5 and 6). This grouping was deductive, drawn from the researcher's interpretation of, and expertise with, the topic in discussion. It was also drawn from suggested wrap-up questions the researcher/priest provided as a suggested focus of post-project narratives by volunteers (Appendix E). It became the focus of project volunteers.

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7. Ibid., Osmer, 76.

8. Leslie Curry, "Module 5," *Fundamentals of Qualitative Research Methods* (New Haven, CT: Yale University), June 23, 2015, YouTube.com video course accessed April 23, 2018.

Interplay between researcher and parishioner can be a major component in research conclusions. As well, bracketing included “drive analysis,” which in group participants may have participated out of similar interest that may have influenced each other’s narratives. This is all the more reason that this research was as process oriented as it was outcome oriented. The researcher/priest strove to be oriented to the inductive—to read narratives “from the new” (from the bottom up) without conclusion or assumption. At the same time, it was understood that reasoning would be inductive in which researcher/priest’s premises could be understood as supplying evidence for the conclusion.<sup>9</sup> She also speculated about hermeneutic as she analyzed volunteer verbatim in Chapter 6.

In summation, the project was inspired by the lived experience of the researcher in institutions of incarceration in Colorado and the desire to bring this dynamic to the life of the church. Fieldwork was about the roles of the minister in all of her venues that are in the process of rapid change, and are expressions of a complex maze of social interactions that are taking place during a complex period of history. (See Chapter 3). This “fieldwork” was about concern for St. Luke’s as an organization, and by extension American Christianity in general.

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 explore deeper inner experiences of individuals in Christian communities. And the intention of the project is that research at St. Luke’s may inform the development and thriving (transformation) of this and other Christian communities in the future. Beyond the parish, we are looking at all of these worlds theologically, sociologically and psychologically in regard to lived experiences of experiential Christian spirituality in general (see Chapter 3).

The researcher/priest presented a defensive bracket that points to her awareness of the large success of the ecumenical contemplative movement in Colorado influenced by Colorado Cistercian monk, Thomas Keating, and sponsored by the Rt. Rev. Robert O’Neill, Episcopal Bishop of Colorado, who is a contemplative himself. The wonderment is if contemplation and deeper mystical experience of the divine is of interest to parishes in Colorado. Strictly speaking, in the researcher’s experience, this deeper spirituality has not been understood or practiced in four parishes served by the researcher/priest over the last thirteen years as priest in the Episcopal Diocese of Colorado.

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9. Ibid., Leslie Curry, Module 5.



*BRACKETING THE PHENOMENOLOGY---*  
*consciousness and objects of direct experience of the researcher/priest*

It doesn't get any better than the Muppets explanation of phenomenology and phenomenon (which is referred to as "*phenomena*" in this song) when it comes to the life experiences of this researcher/priest. These are excerpts from their song: ***Phenomena***—*it's all around us. Phenomena*—*It's everywhere. Phenomena*—*our senses take it in. Constant ...continuously. Phenomena*—*As phenomena arises we try to make sense of it. Using language and abstract thoughts...* ***Phenomena***—*We think we understand it, but we don't. No we don't. Phenomena*—*Every single thought that you've ever had is just your brain trying to make sense out of chaos...the universe. Phenomena*—*It's just part of being alive. Phenomena*—*That's life. It just unknowable phenomenon. Phenomena*—*So if you're lost and can't make sense of phenomenon, of life, of your life. Phenomena*—*remember it's the only honest way to live—confused. Phenomena*—*Don't try to understand it, because you can't. Phenomena*—*It's random always arising....chaotic.*<sup>10</sup>

"The formative objects" of the direct experience of my family of origin was a Western Kansas town childhood (2000 population/3 movie theaters/5 churches) centered around church, school, music, journalism, and aviation. My parents started out as educators and morphed into agribusiness entrepreneurs, seeding President Eisenhower's prairie dust bowl and seeding the shoulders of President Eisenhower's brand spanking-new interstate super highway system. Daddy was creative, imaginative and inventive and mother made the business work. I was the oldest sibling with a younger brother and a sister. Our family business had airplanes and all of us were pilots except our little sister. We flew low and landed on grasslands, scouting for seed to harvest from North Dakota to south Texas. I soloed one of daddy's airplanes at the age of 15 (at the same time I got a farm permit to drive daddy's pickup truck). Flying during those years influenced my spiritual landscape. It made me conscious of nature's power, the spaciousness and the splendor of God's creation in all of its diversity as well as a cosmic sense of God as creator. At a practical level, flying gave me a global perspective about what was petty and what really mattered in my teen age world. Flying maybe left me with the propensity to go wide (seeing broad inclusive horizons) but less inclined to go deep!

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10. Muppets, "A song about Phenomenology and A practical experience of humanistic existentialism," *The Muppets Explain Phenomena*, [www.thisbelongstolionelrichie.co.uk](http://www.thisbelongstolionelrichie.co.uk), YouTube, accessed May 8, 2018.

Music and church (and sports) were the main events in our town. I competed state-wide on the piano. My alcoholic piano teacher was (still is) a favorite teacher. She cared about the poetry over the mechanics of music and she cared about me. Our white clapboard one-room Presbyterian church was started by Methodist/Missouri Synod rejects like the town doctor, the town banker and my dad. This church was very short on piety (except for Mrs. Smith), but we had the best music in town because we had the best musicians in town. In a pinch, mother and I would accompany hymns on the piano. As early as the first grade, mother encouraged me to try other religious traditions to see what made sense to me.

In 1961 I went to University of Colorado/Boulder to study psychology, philosophy, design, and piano. I was confirmed in the Episcopal church in Boulder. I met Peter Blake who was in law school working on a student newspaper at CU. Upon graduation we went to New York where I did graduate studies in design at Pratt Institute and Peter wrote for the *Wall Street Journal*. We were married in a radial chapel of the Cathedral of John the Divine. Then we moved briefly to Chicago where I did graduate work at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. My fine-arts background influences my sense of ministry when it comes to quality of content, creativity and imagination as evolutionary processes.

We were delighted to move back to Colorado, where we raised two sons, and had careers in Colorado media during the glory days of newspapers and local television. Peter was an investigative reporter/editor/political columnist for the *Rocky Mountain News*, and I worked for *Rocky Mountain Public TV* as art director and graphics manager for the five-station network. Working for Public TV for 22 years was a blessed career. We both felt close to the pulse of what was happening in Colorado and the larger world. We saw our work as a “calling”—Peter “defending democracy” with a passion for truth and I having a part in providing the highest quality content possible on American television. This explains my yearning for valid meaning and content in parish ministry as well. The creative joy possible in Public Television lingers as I tend to approach worship as a production designer, yearning for worship with spontaneity and imagination. Prison ministry for 17 years offered

more opportunity for spontaneity and imagination than parish ministry that can kill creativity with politics, and traditionalism. And I wonder if boredom drives the young away from mainline churches in America these days. It drives me away.

Folks in Public TV (myself included) were always going to school to stay current with technology and business administration. But at one point in 1999 I went to night school at the Iliff School of Theology/Denver instead to take a course on Jewish Mysticism. In 1998 I was also doing dialectical behavioral therapy with offenders in the Making Choices program at the Denver Women's Correctional Facility (DWCF). I was hooked both on Jewish Mysticism and prison work. (To date I have done prison ministry in 12 different correctional facilities; state, federal, and county jails in Colorado).

Major influences in my spiritual life at that time were two Roman Catholic nuns that I befriended doing dialectical behavioral therapy prison work at DWCF. Sister Mary Siefken and Sister Karen Guth encouraged me to become a priest. Thomas Keating of St. Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass/Aspen and Sister Bernadette Teasdale, introduced me to Centering Prayer, a practice that opened me to God's seduction. I surrendered to that. At the unlikely age of 56 found myself on the path to becoming an Episcopal priest. I was ordained in 2005. My mother said to me at the time, "You can't be a priest, you aren't even religious." It was a surprise to me too. It has been a compelling divine human relationship for me—a willing seduction. I fell in love with God, something I yearn to pass on to others—that they too might get carried away by God's magnificent overpowering force.

*O Lord, Thou hast seduced me, And I am seduced;  
Thou art stronger than I, And Thou hast prevailed....* Jeremiah 20:7. <sup>11</sup>

After ordination I continued doing prison ministry as I served as associate rector at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church/Aurora, on-call chaplain at Skyridge Medical Center/Lone Tree, on-call chaplain at St. Francis Center for the homeless, associate rector at St. Timothy's/Centennial, and vicar of St. Elizabeth's/Brighton. At age 72 I "aged out" of parish leadership and am currently on staff as an assisting priest at St. Luke's/Denver and doing supply preaching in Colorado parishes.

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11. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harperperennial Classics, 1962), 144. (I am taking creative license with Abraham J. Heschel's translation and with his intention about this text in *The Prophets*.)

Prison ministry has always been where the “juice” is for me. I was reminded, reading an old diary, that I felt called to it way back in the ‘70s when our boys were in grade school. And so, prison ministry (much of my process influenced by the Jesuits of Sacred Heart Jesuit Retreat House in Sedalia, Colorado) was inspiration for this dissertation project that I have taken to St. Luke’s Episcopal Church.

Peter, my preacher’s kid/newspaper editor/baseball player husband of 50 years, made ministry possible for me. Before he died, he stood at my office door watching the smoke pour out from my computer as I was writing a paper for VTS. He said to me, “Fifty years married to you; has been like I have been drug through the water hanging on for dear life to a thin rope at the back of a speed boat—trying to get upright in the water.”

As a new widow, I am trying to build up speed again, finishing up at VTS, leading two classes, (attending two others), assisting on staff at St. Luke’s and at the same time being primary 24/7 caregiver for my 99 year old mother, who has advanced dementia. That has turned out to be the psychological/spiritual/physical challenge of my lifetime. I eke out as much time as I can to stay connected to three precious grandchildren, all in high school in Texas. My hope after graduation is to take up prison ministry again, this time closer to home.

*Within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones;  
I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot...But the Lord is with me  
like a dread warrior;... Jeremiah 20:9, NRSV*

“Have your way with me”—my prayer of consent these days.

God having God’s way continues to be **phenomena**—full of surprise.

***CHAPTER THREE:***

*Social Science That Has Informed This Thesis Project*  
in the United States, at St. Luke's Episcopal Church/Denver,  
with a Vignette from the Adam's County Detention Facility

*CHRIST CONSCIOUSNESS PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH IMAGINATION*

*RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE OF EARLY 21st CENTURY AMERICA*

*RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE OF THE PARISH*

*DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY AND CHRIST CONSCIOUSNESS*  
*PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH IMAGINATION*

"The Gray Goo" and The Mechanics of Consciousness

Myth, Symbol and the Collective Unconscious

Reconciliation of Conscious and the Unconscious,

The Grace/the Desire, Gateway to the Unconscious

The Text – Praying Scripture With Imagination, Insight, Colloquy,

Remain/Be Still/Insight, Colloquy, Concluding Prayer

Synchronicity (the Uncanny)



### **CHAPTER THREE:**

#### *Social Science That Has Informed This Thesis Project* in the United States, at St. Luke's Episcopal Church/Denver, with a vignette from the Adam's County Detention Facility

*A young woman in the county jail begged me to baptize her in the rush of being returned to her cell at the end of a worship service. She hoped I could exorcise the demon of her drug addiction before she was to leave the jail the next day. I asked if she was Roman Catholic. She said she was. I asked her if she was baptized. She said that she was. I said, "then you are baptized once and for all—go see your priest when you leave tomorrow." She said, "I can't because I am not welcome there." I regret that I didn't manage to baptize her again that afternoon. As inappropriate as the timing and the urgency of the request was, I wish by genuine holy listening I had held her with more heart. I wish that I at least had had the audacity to ask the officer to give me more time with her after the service.*

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*During Prayers of the People in my busy urban parish a young man (I will call him Don) was visiting that day. Don was a junior in the local high school. He offered the most elegant appropriate extemporaneous prayer during Prayers of the People. I shared my delight about that with him at the door as parishioners were leaving the church. He said "Rev. Sandy my dad, a surgeon, and my mother, an educator, are both atheists. But I want to be a Christian. I want to be baptized and I want to be a priest." I told him I would be happy to help him with his dream. The following two years were rich for both of us as he served at the altar and attended adult education classes on John Dominic Crossan's *In Search of Paul*, *Centering Prayer*, and *Teilhard de Chardin and evolutionary theology*. With the blessing I sought and received from his parents I gave Don spiritual direction. Don was an advanced student of Christian history and theology beyond adults in those groups. He also beautifully chanted liturgy in Latin. When I asked about his music training that made that possible, he said that all he knew about chanting he learned on YouTube. Don served at the altar, and served at St. Francis Center, and at the nursing home. He shared his gifts of theology, history, music, drama and public speaking in the parish during those two blessed years before he left for college.*

*Don met with indifference to his dream of becoming a priest in the Colorado Diocese before his high school graduation, so I contacted a wise old Jesuit friend and sent him to the Jesuit Retreat House for two weeks to be under his care. Don struck up an enduring and meaningful friendship there with a young Roman Catholic priest retreatant who was not indifferent to Don's dream. Four years later after Don graduated from college, he has joined a Liberal Catholic (Apostolic) Community he said because of its depth of mysticism, esoterica, and practice of the Eucharist that is more meaningful to him than the Episcopal Eucharist. In this community Don can proceed with theological education without the control of his bishop in the ordination process.*

Both young Christians from different venues arrived at the same place, engaging the symbolic content of death (addiction and indifference) and resurrected new life in the sacrament of baptism.

Carl Jung would say the symbolic content of baptism was rooted in their psyches, and was part of the individuation (psychological integration) process for each of them. *s. blake, chapter 3 page 29*

*CHRIST CONSCIOUSNESS  
PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH IMAGINATION*

The situation/opportunity/intervention that is the focus of this dissertation project at St. Luke's Episcopal Church/Denver is the researcher/priest's desire to add spiritual depth to program-rich faith environments of the parish and beyond in the interest of human thriving and human development. The researcher/priest was interested to find out what would happen if St. Luke's parishioners engaged the deeper inner work of the Sacred Heart's Ignatian *Spiritual Exercise* process, encountering the risen Jesus by *praying scripture with imagination*. Her research was based on the supposition that parishioners encountering the risen Jesus, praying scripture (using scripture as a guide for imagination) can make divine intention and presence more intimate, incarnational in their ministries, and experiential of Christ consciousness in their daily lives.

*THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE OF EARLY 21st CENTURY AMERICA*

*"Trumpism both terrifies and fascinates precisely because every attempt to denounce it reveals the internal inconsistencies in American culture."*<sup>1</sup>

Peter W. Marty, publisher of *The Christian Century* wrote in the May 9, 2018 edition how the language of our institutions has the power to shape American culture and relationships. For example, he said the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) recently changed its mission statement from America's promise as a nation of immigrants, and its generous welcome, through the words *providing, granting, promoting, and understanding*, to *safeguarding, protecting* [Americans], and *securing* [the homeland]. The language now is more about keeping immigrants out than on allowing them in. More than 35 times the Hebrew Bible commands love of the stranger. Marty quotes Rabbi Jonathan Sacks about love of the stranger (not the neighbor) because "the stranger is one we are taught to love precisely because he is not like ourselves."<sup>2</sup> Officially, generosity of spirit is not who we are as Americans these days.

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1. Aaron Pidel, S.J., "Revisiting the Dictatorship of Relativism Did Benedict XVI predict the rise of Trump and fake news?" *America Magazine, The Jesuit Review of Faith and Culture*, May 14, 2018, 30.

2. Peter W. Marty, "From the publisher," *The Christian Century* (Congers, NY, May 9, 2018), 3.



Human thriving, human development and transformation is a daunting task in what some experience in American as an era of dystopia, while others experience as utopia finally within reach, “that America will be great again.” The researcher/priest brackets her view of the American landscape by saying that more often than not she feels trauma and shame over hope when she thinks about her country these days.

But the “Trumpism” quote in the Jesuit magazine *America’s* article is about the disparagement of alleged ethical relativism in the American culture between the “magical thinking” of the American Left (feminism and “choice,” the LGBT movement, hallucinogenic drugs, fidelity to science as the last word, New Age spirituality and social constructionist thought in general—and the American Right (nationalism, white supremacy, militarism, consumerism, the rule of law over compassion and empathy—the fusion of “God, guns and gonads” (as we say in Colorado). To be sure, American culture finds itself is in the process of authoritarian resurgence, xenophobia, and meritocracy (the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer) and the disparagement of democratic institutions.<sup>3</sup>

Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) revisited by author Aaron Pidel in *America*, is not the first religious figure to come to the researcher’s mind when she thinks of human development and human thriving. But there is some truth in *America* magazine’s characterization of “the Dictatorship of Relativism” in the religious landscape of American culture these days. Ratzinger in Pidel’s article calls for “truth based religion” and he speaks of a free society’s essential need for truth.

And of course, the question is; What is truth? For some like the researcher/priest, the simple “truth” is the risen Christ’s emphasis on love “... for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me...” (Matt. 25:34). Truth is the Great Commandment, the core of Christian religion, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind....Thou shalt love thy

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3. Kurt Andersen, “**BELIEVE** How America Went Haywire, Conspiracy Theories, Fake News, Magical Thinking,” *The Atlantic*, quoted by Aron Pidel, S.J., in *America*, September 2017, 28.

neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:35-40). The overriding truth that Jesus brought from the Father is unconditional love for all of humankind. Who can disagree with that?

But as usual, the devil is in the details. The researcher/priest was intrigued (as was Pidel) with Kurt Andersen’s book *How America Went Haywire*. Pidel reviewed that book the September 2017 issue of, *The Atlantic*. Anderson wrote more extensively about “the unhinged Right’s proclivity toward fantasy ... paranoia-based enthusiasms: such as fear of one-world government, gun-control fanaticism, seven-day creationism, climate-change skepticism.”<sup>4</sup>

For all the impassioned “truths” on both sides of the cultural divide, the point is well taken that being a Christian is about identifying and choosing a serious “plumb line” that can guide social and cultural life over indiscriminate relativism run amok. Still, both sides are hanging on for dear life for what gives life meaning. And scripture routinely argues against itself about the “plumb line.”

Ratzinger believes that God cares about the content of our beliefs. He insisted “that faith needs reason for its own health [and] especially scientific reason needs to be chastened by faith if it is to avoid its own excesses.” The article concludes that the fundamental reality to which Americans, both right- and left-leaning, must return is that of being God’s creatures.”<sup>5</sup>

But of course, we don’t live in a black and white world. Psychologist Karen Horney’s psychoanalytic social theory postulates that our realities are built on social and cultural conditions. For example, she urged women to take male bias into consideration in social and cultural situations in order to clarify feminine reality, including situationally driven ethics that often make more sense to women.<sup>6</sup>

American psychologist Kenneth Gergen argues that social-construction (the alleged sin of the Left in this article) is contextual as well. Gergen’s orders of morality urge worldwide collaborative relationships that get beyond self and community to identifying common understandings of the good,

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4. Ibid., Pidel, 28.

5. Ibid., Pidel, 35.

6. Stephen G. Carley, *Karen Horney, Psychoanalytic Social Theory* (Brockton, MA: SGC Production, 2015).

and collaborating beyond self with community unresolved differences to accomplish those ends. <sup>7</sup>

In our increasingly more complex world, politicizing and legalizing dualistic ethical extremes is a mistake, because very few things are as simple as they seem. St. Paul pointed out that the church itself is a many-membered body (1 Corinthians 12:12). And even scripture is a many-membered library of metaphor and poetry and prophesy and wisdom and myth and legend, and history as told by the victors. Scripture can argue against itself. And so, how do we make the best of the complexity of our lives these days?

Working toward a more sustainable global civilization is the life work of computer scientist, engineer and psychologist Dr. Sally Goerner, who is interested in bringing nation states that are in social, scientific, economic and political crisis into an evolutionary shift into a more integral unifying place.

Like Gergen, Sally Goerner looks at interdependence (collaborative relationships) as shaping the (global) social world, just as interdependence shapes the molecular world. She renames “chaos theory” as “complexity theory” which, she says, is in really a comprehensive circulating interflow of the energy of networks in our increasingly complex world.

In other words, whatever our reality is as Americans today, it isn't static. On the whole, societies across the planet are self-organizing into natural patterns of growth and development. And what we may think as “entropy” goes beyond disorder into becoming a capacity for renewal of order. <sup>8</sup> The poetic Celtic pastor J. Philip Newell speaks of the primal scream of childbirth as a metaphor for the primal scream we all must pass through as individuals and nations “if we are to experience new beginnings in the most broken places of our lives and the world today.” <sup>9</sup> Carl Jung sees the process of moving toward new beginnings as a self-regulating system in a compensatory relationship between the conscious (awareness/reason or ego according to Jung) and the unconscious (symbolism, archetypes, dreams, etc.—the psychic mind below the level of consciousness—the soul) in the development of the person. (I am assuming for Jung this applies to the larger order as well.)

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7. Kenneth Gergen, *Relational Being* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

8. Sally Goerner, *Chaos Theory, Ordered Complexity, and Societal Self Organization*, (2014), YouTube.com, Accessed May 21, 2018.

9. J. Philip Newell, *Christ of the Celts, The Healing of Creation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 72.

Goerner believes we are in a period of great change, not unlike the shift between the medieval to the modern world. Just as corruption sets in, people organize around what brings hope and they begin to work for a better way via integral connected networks of new transformation. She urges acting locally to achieve a higher global order of human networks with balance between giving and taking and a balance of respect and contribution. And to that end, praying scripture—being in conversation with the mind of the risen Christ—is proposed by the dissertation project as acting locally to achieve a higher global order.

The good news is that our species is contributing to that end. For example, in spite of what Andersen calls America’s propensity for “conspiracy theories, fake news and magical thinking” lamenting the demise of factual truth, he concludes his article in *The Atlantic* by celebrating what has gone right. He wrote, “Even as we’ve entered this long winter of foolishness and darkness, when too many Americans are losing their grip on reason and reality, it has been an epoch of astonishing hope and light as well. During these same past few decades, Americans reduced the rates of murder and violent crime by more than a half. We decoded the human genome, elected an African American president, recorded the sound of two black holes colliding 1 billion years ago and created *Beloved...The Colbert Report...Hamilton*. Since 1981, the percentage of people living in extreme poverty around the globe has plummeted from 44 percent to 10 percent. I do despair of our devolution into unreason and magical thinking, but not everything has gone wrong.”<sup>10</sup>

#### *RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE OF THE PARISH*

THE PARISH: The researcher/priest was helped again by “hidden hands” with the St. Luke’s Episcopal Church Parish Profile/Parish Survey 2017 “gifting” her with current data without too much effort on her part. The Profile/Survey was created by Anna Bennett, PhD, and Amanda Ayers for the purpose of calling a new rector to St. Luke’s after the retirement of the Rev. Dr. Doug Dunn from 23 years of ministry at St. Luke’s.

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10. Kurt Andersen, “BELIEVE, How America Went Haywire, Conspiracy Theories, Fake News, Magical Thinking,” *The Atlantic*, September 2017.

In 2017, 119 of St. Luke's parishioners answered questions and provided input for this profile/survey which was sorted and tabulated in 2017 on Survey Monkey. St. Luke's Parish Profile/Survey was published in 2017.

The researcher/priest served with Doug Dunn on the Colorado Diocese High Plains Executive Committee for four years (and one more year after he left that position). When she showed up at St. Luke's in 2014 after retiring as vicar from St. Elizabeth's/Brighton, Doug walked to the back of the church where she was sitting after the service and invited her to join his staff.

January 2018, a new rector was called to St. Luke's. She is 32 years old, a graduate of Harvard Divinity School, African American, and a powerful, talented preacher and administrator. St. Luke's Episcopal Church is embarking on a new era.

St. Luke's Episcopal Church/Denver was part of the fabric of Denver's illustrious Episcopal presence as far back as the 1859 gold and silver rush in Colorado. There was a lot of money in Colorado during those glory years before and after the silver bust in 1893. St. Luke's Episcopal hospital was opened in 1881. The magnificent Episcopal Cathedral of St. John in the Wilderness broke ground in 1909. Jarvis Hall, a Denver Episcopal boy's school, opened in 1882, and in 1890 St. Luke's Episcopal Church was founded and served in its present location ("in the outer reaches of Denver to the east") as a chapel for Jarvis Hall, an Episcopal boys' military school. As the story goes, Jarvis Hall had to be moved to "the outer reaches" to escape the inner reaches of downtown Denver's red light district. But then Jarvis Hall burned down in 1901, and St. Luke's school chapel became a parish, and has remained so ever since.<sup>11</sup>

With additions and upgrades to the original structure over time, St. Luke's has been designated a Denver Historical Landmark,<sup>12</sup> and has been an operating parish for over 100 years since. Its most rapid growth was after World War II, peaking in the 1950s when there were 1,270 baptized Episcopalians on St. Luke's rolls.<sup>13</sup> In 2016 St. Luke's had 429 baptized members, 366 adult

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11. Amanda Ayres, Anna Bennett, *St. Luke's Episcopal Church Parish Profile 2017, St. Luke's Episcopal Church Parish Survey* (Denver, CO: St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 2017), 6.

12. *Ibid.*, Ayres/Bennett, 7.

13. *Ibid.*, Ayres/Bennett, 5.

and 63 youth (under age 16) communicants in good standing. Average Sunday attendance in 2016 is 50 for the 7:45 a.m. service and 100 for the 10:15 a.m. service. In 2016 there was one marriage, ten burials, six baptisms (under age 16), and one youth and two adults confirmed. <sup>14</sup>

St. Luke's church has remained in an appealing old neighborhood all these years. And two newer younger neighborhoods with educated middle-class families were developed 20 years ago within three miles of St. Luke's due to in-fill of Lowry Air Force Base and in-fill of Stapleton International Airport. While the Lowry and Stapleton additions have brought new members to St. Luke's, they have not brought as many as was hoped. <sup>15</sup> Like so many Episcopal churches in the Colorado Diocese, it has been a challenge to attract significant numbers of new members, particularly the young to parish life. While St. Luke's is one of the flourishing parishes in the Diocese, in all truth, it is like the rest of mainline white Christendom, on a steady downward slope. When I look at all those faithful white-headed souls from the chancel every Sunday morning, I realize they (and I) will be no more in 10 to 15 years. Five to twelve little ones in St. Luke's Sunday School aren't a very hefty legacy for carrying on after we are gone.

Robert P. Jones, CEO of Public Religion Research Institute, in his book *The End of White Christian America* thoroughly documents with the help of Pew Research Center the demise of this group. Part of the "demise" of white Christian America has to do with ethnic demographic changes in American culture since the 1950s, the low birth rate of white Christian Americans, and a Church that is anathema to the younger generation.

I am thinking of my 15-year-old granddaughter from Dallas who won't have anything to do with church because of her observation of the politicized church that she has experienced in Dallas. She is a humanist at heart, but it is more likely that she sees herself as an agnostic that wants to save society from religion. She says she just wants to stop the war and get on with solving the problems. I wonder if she is bored with the poverty of spirit she experiences in and around organized religion. (Not that both grandmothers haven't tried to inspire her).

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<sup>14</sup>. Ibid., Ayers/Bennett, *Profile/Survey*, 10.

<sup>15</sup>. Ibid., Ayers/Bennett, *Profile/Survey*, 22.

And so, Robert Jones in *The End of White Christian America* suggests that it isn't all about bearing bad news. He is thinking about the demise of white Christian America in the same way as scientist Sally Goerner, who speaks with optimism about the behavior of self-organizing entities into natural patterns of growth and development. Jones believes there is life after the death of white Christian America. He sees it (among other things) as an opportunity for entering a new era of interfaith cooperation, an opportunity to reconfigure and revitalize national politics.<sup>16</sup> He says, that white Christians may have to become guests of the "holy others." They may have to cross color lines in their religious communities.<sup>17</sup> Without regret, he sees Trump's unlikely victory as the death rattle of factions of white Christian America as they have moved beyond voting for values to voting for nostalgia.<sup>18</sup> What about the future of white Christianity in America? Diana Butler Bass, referenced in Jones' book, urges a panentheist vision of God infusing the world beyond the church.<sup>19</sup>

*This movement is the most explicit about urging the church to join forces with broader forces—both interfaith and secular—particularly around environmental and global poverty issues. Finally, a liberationist vision seeks to animate the church experience with social justice commitments, connecting particularly with the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the tradition of black church activist.—Robert Jones*<sup>20</sup>

Jones also embraces the thoughts of Russell Moore of the Southern Baptist Convention in his book *Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel* about "reclaiming the freakishness of the gospel, which gives it power in the first place."<sup>21</sup> And this is the hope of the dissertation project pointing to taking on the mind of Christ praying scripture with imagination.

PARISHIONERS: There is a treasure trove of faithful women and men in their 70s, 80s and 90s who grew up, raised their children, taught Sunday School and served in many other ways over the years at St. Luke's. Some are still serving. Thirty-four percent of respondents to the profile/survey have attended St. Luke's for 20 years or more. Twenty-five percent of parishioners have attended

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17. Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2016), 234.

18. *Ibid.*, Jones, 236.

19. *Ibid.*, Jones, 244.

20. *Ibid.*, Jones, 215.

21. *Ibid.*, Jones, 217.

11-19 years and 16 % have attended 5-10 years. In 2016 there was a discernible increase to 25% of those attending St. Luke's for four years or less. Ages reported by 113 parishioners are 65 % age 65+, 12% age 55-64, 20% age 35-54, 3% age 25-34, and 2% age 18-24.

Ethnicity of the parish is 91% White/Caucasian, (the neighborhood within a 3 mile radius of St. Luke's is 54% White/Caucasian); 1% of the parish is Black/African, (the neighborhood within a three mile radius of St. Luke's is 15% Black/African); 2% of the parish is Asian, Pacific, or Native American (the neighborhood within a 3 mile radius of St. Luke's is 7% Asian/Pacific/Native American); 2% of the parish is Hispanic/Latino (the neighborhood within a three mile radius of St. Luke's is 24% Hispanic/Latino.<sup>22</sup> Six percent of the parish preferred not to answer the ethnic survey. Thirty five percent of St. Luke's parishioners reported being raised Roman Catholic. <sup>23</sup>

FINANCIALS AND MUSIC: St. Luke's is financially blessed. Plate and pledge at St. Luke's in 2016 was \$400,000+. Total assets in cash, money market funds, bonds and equities equal \$1,049,527. The church building is paid for. There is a more than adequate budget for organist, the organ, music, maintenance, choir section leaders, and soloists. Fifty-seven percent of St. Luke's parishioners that responded to the survey are retired. Thirty percent are employed full time.

Ninety parishioners responded to questions about income for the Profile/Survey. Fourteen percent have household incomes of at least \$34,999/year. (Thirty-three percent of the community within a 3 mile radius of St. Luke's have this level of yearly income). Forty-seven percent of St. Luke's parishioners reported incomes in the range of \$35,000-\$99,999/year. (That is the income level of 39% of the community within a 3 mile radius of St. Luke's). Thirty-nine percent of St. Luke's parishioners reported incomes of \$100,000+/year. (Twenty-nine percent of the community within a 3 mile radius of St. Luke's have this level of income.) <sup>24</sup>

OUTREACH: The outreach budget at St. Luke's is 9% of total expenditure for parish programs. Outreach serves the immediate neighborhood, the Colorado Episcopal Diocese, interfaith initiatives, local civic organizations, local schools, and national and international outreach opportunities.

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22. Ibid., Ayers/Bennett, *Profile/Survey*, 24.

23. Ibid., Ayers/Bennett, *Profile/Survey*, 43.

24. Ibid., Ayers/Bennett, *Profile/Survey*, 24.



*St. Luke's 2019 Annual Report* listed seven core ministries for outreach. These ministries (and more) involve unnumbered parishioners who give time and talent to outreach programs. Ninety-three percent of St. Luke's parishioners as reported in the *Parish Profile/ Survey* feel supported as ministers (including overseas NGO and other activities) beyond the formal outreach groups in the parish. Extensive volunteer participation and formal outreach at St. Luke's are good indicators of spirituality at St. Luke's—of hearing and doing the Word in the dissertation project.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION/FORMATION AT ST. LUKE'S: The folks at St. Luke's are believers in education. A number of them are educators themselves. Twenty five to thirty individuals at St. Luke's have participated in or graduated from the University of the South/Sewanee Education for Ministry's four-year program, with many current lay leaders being graduates of this program. <sup>25</sup>

In the 2017 Survey 16.8% of St. Luke's parishioners reported having some college in their backgrounds, 38% reported having college degrees and 38.9% reported having earned post graduate advanced degrees. <sup>26</sup> It would seem that St. Luke's is an ideal target audience for Christian Education and Christian Formation. The question for the dissertation project is if parishioners are open to deeper spiritual inner work. Most respondents to the Parish Profile indicated that adults attend adult education only occasionally. Only 17.5 % report in the Parish Survey that Christian Education keeps them coming back to St. Luke's. <sup>27</sup> What, if anything beyond the excessive busyness of the congregation, is happening at St. Luke's in adult Christian formation and education?

The Director of Christian Education at St. Luke's has a PhD in archaeology. During my four years at St. Luke's, adult education has included two classes on the archaeology of the Holy Land where the Dir. of Christian Ed. does annual archaeological digs. There was a class on the history of St. Luke's parish, a class on the history of the Reformation, a class on the history of Reformation music, and a class on Genesis with roughly 14 -30 in attendance depending on venue. Wednesday night classes with *Rudolf Shalom*, a Jewish community in Denver, have studied Exodus and Numbers. This program, in my experience, has provided the most intimate spirituality of all of St. Luke's adult education programs. This group includes roughly 20 members, currently slightly more from St. Luke's than from *Rodef Shalom*.

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25. Ibid., Ayers/Bennett, *Profile/Survey*), 14

26. Ibid., Ayers/Bennett, *Profile/Survey*), 24.

27. Ibid., Ayers/Bennett, *Profile/Survey*.

Interfaith participants freely share what is important to them about their traditions, and we celebrate our commonality with them. Tuesday contemplative prayer/*lectio divina*/Eucharist, touches on inner spirituality. What we do best is “checking in,” though quiet contemplation seems to be getting more comfortable to the group.

St. Luke’s children have five accredited Godly Play teachers in two age-appropriate Sunday School classes. There was briefly a teen leader who resigned due to lack of teen interest. There are currently no teen programs. Adult education is provided most Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings, with contemplative prayer/*Lectio Divina*/Eucharist every Tuesday morning. Out of 114 respondents to the 2017 Parish *Profile/Survey*, 17.54% cited Christian Education as a reason for coming to St. Luke’s.

This dissertation project sought to explore if the spirituality around *deepening relationship with God/praying scripture with imagination* would suit the psychological style of folks at St. Luke’s. And so, the project is exploring what psychology typologies characterize groups and individuals at St. Luke’s. To that end, the project looks at psychological typologies as one way to characterize preferences of groups and individuals at St. Luke’s.

A thumbnail psychological guide to spirituality preferences in any parish, group, or individual is Corinne Ware’s *Discover Your Spiritual Type*, published by the Alban Institute. This book identifies spiritual preferences of parishioners, groups and parishes. <sup>28</sup>

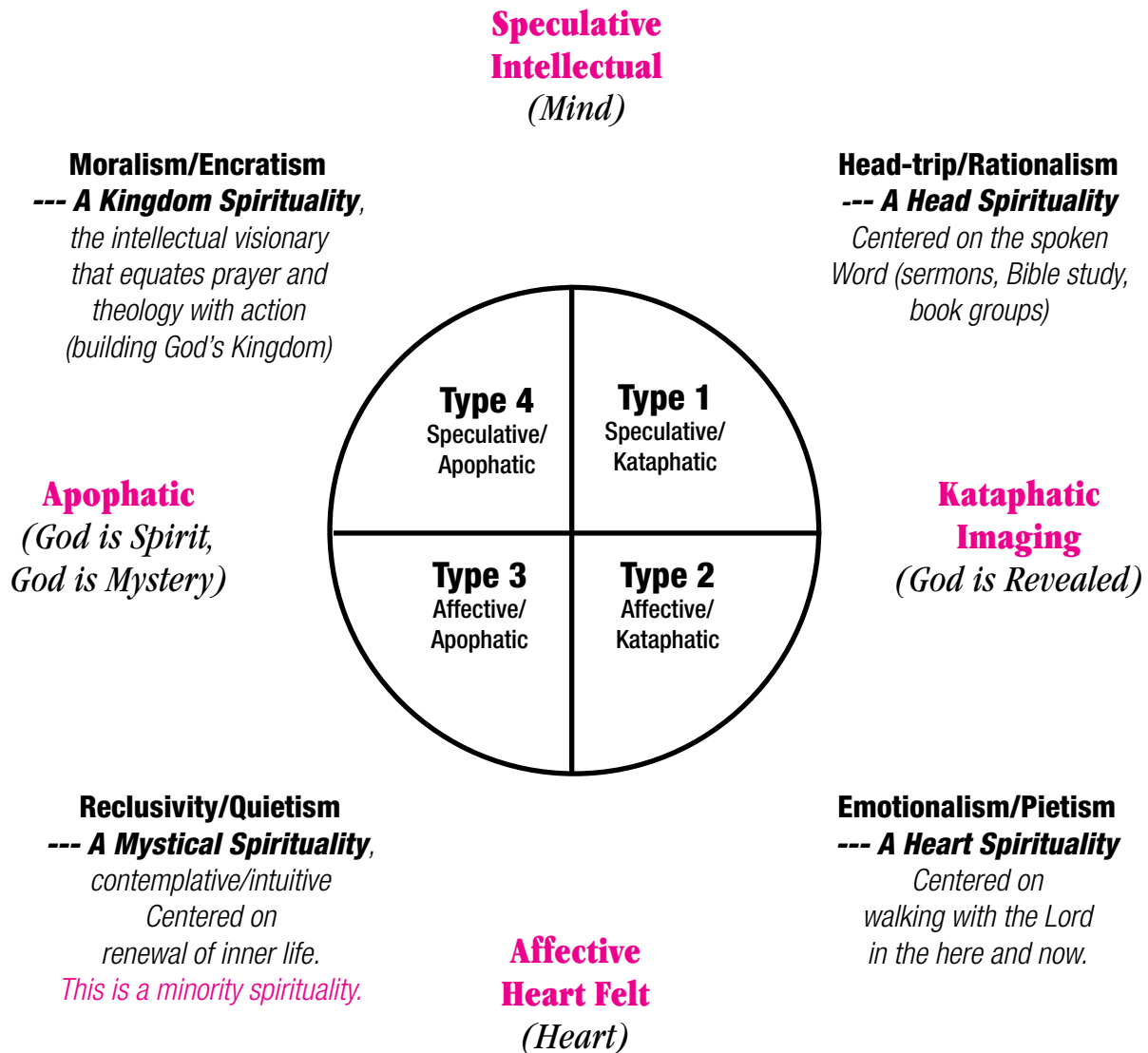
Ware recommends going deeper into one’s own spiritual preference, and she recommends growing beyond one’s comfort zones by trying other approaches to spirituality. Awareness of typology preferences can be an antidote to leaders and parishioners who feel misplaced in their faith communities. It isn’t always the parishioner’s fault or the parish’s fault if there isn’t a good fit. This dissertation project seeks to identify spiritual preferences present at St. Luke’s, and wants to know if Adult Education at St. Luke’s is appropriate for the community, or if it needs to broaden its scope.

The spirituality wheel/Circle of Sensibility on page 13 is based on the original work of Urban T. Holmes, II in *A history of Christian Spirituality*, adapted by Corinne Ware. It has been adapted further by the researcher/priest, whose wheel on page 13 is a synopsis of Ware’s style book.

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28. Corinne Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Type, A Guide to Individual and Congregational Growth* (Durham, NC: The Alban Institute, Duke Divinity School, 1995).

SPIRITUALITY WHEEL OF SENSIBILITY 29



Adult Education programming at St. Luke's is basically Type One (Scripture, History, Archaeology) with a secondary preference for social action (Type Four), and with a little Type Three thrown in by the researcher/priest who leads the Tuesday contemplative prayer group. She aspires to integrate all four types in her dissertation project, *praying scripture with imagination* (Type One),

29. Ibid., Ware, 7, 8, 30, 37, 39, 41, 43.

*deepening relationship with God* (Type Two and Type Three), and manifesting the mind of Christ in building God's Kingdom (Type Four), with action as a measure of success in relationship with God.

The enthusiasm for our new Rector who marches into the center of the congregation and preaches with drama and humor and story and insightful content suggests predominant congregational psychological typology at St. Luke's that favors Type One "head spirituality centered on the spoken Word." This would characterize Adult Education in its present form at St. Luke's as well. Smaller groups like the Tuesday morning prayer/Eucharist group, the choir, and the extensive outreach program at St. Luke's suggest that smaller groups and individuals are engaging Type Two (heart spirituality), and Type Three (inner life spirituality), and Type Four, (Kingdom spirituality taking prayer into action). I think this is a tribute to the Rev. Dr. Douglas Dunn who for 23 years thoughtfully built stability into St. Luke's community—meeting pastoral care needs, intellectual needs, and Kingdom building needs of the differing personality types of the St. Luke's congregation in many ways.

*The valuable thing about a typography, Jung said, "is the critical attempt to prevent oneself from taking one's own prejudices as the criterion of normality."* <sup>30</sup>

There are similarities in the typographies in Ware's book and typographies of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator <sup>31</sup> (extrovert/introvert, sensing/intuitive, feeling/thinking, perceptive/judging) and the Enneagram's <sup>32</sup> (head/heart/gut) personality orientations. These typologies are indebted to Carl Jung's *Psychological Types*, Sufis and other Eastern and Western spiritual systems. By learning personality typology, one can better understand and appreciate other people as well as oneself. It is essential to know that typologies are coping strategies and preferences, that are not set in stone. Preferences are complex, and typology is not the final word. Yet, on a practical level it can illuminate what may be happening in our interactions with each other and better understand our part in interacting with other people.

*The act of faith that it takes to accept the infinite mystery that you are to yourself and the act of faith that it takes to accept the infinite mystery of who God really is are finally the same act of faith.*—Karl Rahner

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30. C. G. Jung, *The Collected Works, of C.G. Jung*, ed Sir Herbert Read (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), X. 471.

31. Isabel Briggs Myers, Peter B. Myers, *Gifts Differing, Understanding Personality Type* (Palo Alto, CA, Davies-Black Publishing, 1980).

32. Helen Palmer, *The Enneagram in Love & Work* (San Francisco, CA, HarperSanFrancisco, 1995). (Helen Palmer's books are source material for the naming types and for the "sins" of each type.)

Franciscan Richard Rohr wrote about spiritual discernment in *Enneagram II*. This book is anecdotal and narrative based (a qualitative hermeneutic). By examining self-image and God-image in this book, Rohr offers a way to get closer to the truth when encountering the risen Christ through praying scripture with imagination. For example, he wrote in *Enneagram II*, “People who have a new and mature self-image but keep their childhood God image are the ones leaving the church.”<sup>33</sup> Nineteenth Century Anglican Samuel Wilberforce referred to personality as “an awful gift.” “*This is the very character of life of each one of us Christians—that we are brought under a set of divine influences by which our evil and perverted will may be thus healed and ordered.*”<sup>34</sup>

Psychological typography of the Enneagram is a tool in the process of letting go of God images, world views and false self images in the inner work of Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*. The Enneagram gets in touch with the “passions,” the “seven deadly sins” of anger, pride, deception, envy, avarice, fear, gluttony, lust, and sloth (entrapped needy energies of the ego self)<sup>35</sup> that can distort relationship with the risen Christ. And a false image of God can distort the “I-Thou” relationship with God. Honest conversation with the risen Christ can reveal aspects of the false self that are no longer useful on life’s journey. Rohr’s abbreviated God images (fleshed out by Helen Palmer and Riso/Hudson) follow:

**The God Image of the Enneagram One:** (The Perfectionist)<sup>36</sup> God is majestic, powerful and male. God is judging — keepings a ledger...who has been naughty and who has been nice.<sup>37</sup> The healthy One is a wise realist. The unhealthy One is an intolerant judgmental perfectionist. The “sin” of the One is anger. The growth area for the One is to use anger consciously and intentionally for good things.

**The God Image of the Enneagram Two:** (The Giver) The Two’s God is the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Two feels compelled (by the “sin” of pride) to play the love-game better than Jesus does. Healthy Twos are unselfish altruists. Unhealthy Twos can be deceptive manipulators who fancy themselves as saints. A growth area for the Two is finding their authentic selves as they are driven to please others (in order to be loved).

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33. Richard Rohr, *Enneagram II, Advancing Spiritual Discernment* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1995), 183.

34. Ibid., Samuel Wilberforce in *Love’s Redeeming Work*.

35. Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene, Discovering the Woman at the Heart of Christianity* (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2010), 65.

36. Helen Palmer, *The Enneagram, Understanding Yourself and the Others in Your Life* (San Francisco, CA: Harper-SanFrancisco, 1988). Type descriptors are from *The Enneagram*.

37. Don Richard Riso, Russ Hudson, *Personality Types Using the Enneagram for Self-Discovery* (New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996). (This book by Riso and Hudson is the source for Healthy/Unhealthy descriptions in the Enneagram section of this paper.)

**The God Image of the Enneagram Three:** (The Performer) The Three's God is a divine architect. The Three tries to accomplish more than God to merit God's unconditional love. The healthy Three is authentic and self-assured. S/he is often charming and knows how to get things done. The unhealthy Three can be a narcissistic status seeker who favors style over substance, telling people what they want to hear, striving to impress others. The "sin" of the Three is deception. A growth edge for the Three is getting in touch with and affirming their true selves beyond obsessing about the affirmation of others.

**The God Image of the Enneagram Four:** (The Tragic Romantic) The Four's God is absent and hiding. Healthy Fours are sensitive, intuitive and emotionally honest. They can be inspired profoundly creative people. Unhealthy Fours can be impractical, withdrawn, and need to be rescued. They can be pessimistic about what they see as meaninglessness of life. The "sin" of the Four is envy. The growth edge of the Four is honoring the positive qualities that they actually possess. And Fours who experience God as absent are invited to open themselves to God's revelation and God's grace.

**The God Image of the Enneagram Five:** (The Observer) The Five's God is strictly Logos—a philosophical abstract eternal ideal. Healthy Fives are masters of whatever interests them. They can be open-minded experts as well as visionaries who pioneer discoveries. They skilfully observe reality as it is in all its complexity. Unhealthy Fives can be secretive and removed from their feelings—unwilling to share their emotional lives. The "sin" of the Five is stinginess/avarice. They are leery of people who might make demands of them. A growth area for the Five who can be squeamish about the fleshiness of God is to know God that became flesh and pitched his tent among us (John 1:14).<sup>38</sup>

**The God Image of the Enneagram Six:** (The Devil's Advocate) The Six's God is "rock", Savior" "deliverer." The healthy Six can be a valiant hero, an engaging friend, an effective leader who understands and honors the insecure follower. An unhealthy Six can be an ambivalent pessimist, overly dependent, and an authoritarian rebel. The "sin" of the Six is fear with an obsession for security. The growth edge of the Six is accepting that "the real God is going to lead into deeper darkness and deeper insecurities." God is an "upsetter" of the status quo—"leading into dangerous uncharted territory where the ego has no control and no certitude."<sup>39</sup>

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38. Ibid., Rohr, 77, 178.

39. Ibid., Rohr, 179-181.

**The God Image of the Enneagram Seven:** (The Epicure) The Seven's God is Glory, Eternal Light, Delight, Beauty, Splendor. For the Seven it is all Easter with no Crucifixion. The healthy Seven bathes people around him/her in sunshine and joy. They are free-spirited optimistic grateful celebrators of life. An unhealthy Seven can be an overbearing hyperactive extrovert—a one-sided conversationalist. The “sin” of the Seven is gluttony that can manifest in hedonism. The Seven can't get enough of the splendor. The growth edge of the Seven is realizing that life without pathos is a distortion of the Paschal mystery of the redeeming, saving, liberating, loving God—the way things really are.

**The God Image of the Enneagram Eight:** (The Boss) The Eight has a powerful God. But the Eight is disappointed in God's apparent lack of power and effectiveness in remedying the tragedies of the world. Healthy Eights can have magnanimous hearts, and are capable of relating to others as equals. They are powerful when they exercise self-restraint. Eights tend to be champions of justice and the underdog with a simplicity and purity of spirit about them. They can present as fearless and strong with powerful protective energy. Unhealthy Eights can be confrontational dominating destructive power brokers assuming personal invincibility. They can detach from their feelings, and have contempt for the weakness of others. They don't mind provoking a fight just for the excitement of it. <sup>38</sup> The “sin” of the Eight is lust—following their impulses into excesses of every stripe relatively free of guilt. The growth edge for the Eight is entering into the Mystery and the power of powerlessness embracing the redeeming, saving, liberating, loving God. <sup>40</sup>

**The God Image of the Enneagram Nine:** (The Mediator) God is a constant, unquestioned Presence that doesn't ask a lot of the Nine, who is content to let God do the work. Healthy Nines are known as peacemakers. They have an inner integrity, an aura of contentment, wholeness with beauty, creativity and joyfulness about them. They have a capacity for loving and sustaining others. They can be non-judgmental stable and solid emotional anchors for others, creating harmonious environments.

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40. Ibid., Rohr, 181.

Unhealthy Nines can end up as role-players, not wanting to disturb the environment. They can become disengaged from participating in the world around them. At their worst they can become doormats, resigned fatalists and automatons. The “sin” of the Nine is indolence and sloth. They can feel overburdened, unable to distinguish between the essential and the inessential in life. Inertia, depression and clutter can be hazards to the Nine. Growth edge for the Nine is to be in co-creation with the Presence, to wrestle with God and bring their energy to the relationship.

BRACKETING my Eight (with a Seven wing) Enneagram orientation confirms my image of the all-powerful God. My passion is lust—meaning I have a propensity to take on too much without discrimination or good sense. As a “gut” person, Richard Rohr is right that I need holy spaciousness around ideas, opinions, feelings, and relationships.<sup>41</sup>

This incomprehensible astonishingly creative all-powerful God image accounts for my interest in evolutionary theology of the cosmos (the grand scheme of things), and the Cosmic Christ. But this powerful transcendent God is also tenderly immanent in my experience. My seven “wing” accounts for my passion for the energy, the love, and the splendor of it all—*“the proclivity for universalism and positive idealism.”*<sup>42</sup>

These typological preferences explain my unmet need at St. Luke’s for deeper inner spiritual and theological engagement, to be centered and anchored in silence. These are things I have sought elsewhere in contemplative groups, with the Jesuits at Sacred Heart and studying Christian spirituality at VTS. Corinne Ware believes contemplative need is not served well by mainline congregations. And that has been my impression as well. She wonders if this is why so many mainline churches are struggling to stay alive.<sup>43</sup> And so do I.

One might recall here the golden mean of Aristotle (and also alluded to by Corinne Ware) that in defining self with personality typology as in exploring any extreme, moderation is recommended. There is flourishing and balance in traveling the middle way (*via media*), for example the middle way between excess and deficiency. And there is wisdom in paying attention to growth edges. By the grace of God we can all aspire to Thomas Merton’s identity ideal—that love will be our [true] identity.

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41. Ibid., Rohr, 39.

42. The Rev. Dr. David Gortner, notes on Sandy Blake’s dissertation (Alexandra, VA, Virginia Theological Seminary, March 19, 2019), Chapter 3, page 16.

43. Ibid., Ware, X.



*DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY AND CHRIST CONSCIOUSNESS  
PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH IMAGINATION*

*“I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known, so I created the worlds visible and invisible.”—Hadith Qudsi (a saying) attached to the Quran)*

*In a universe where everything exists “in, from and toward” this unfolding tapestry of divine love, the intimate interwovenness of the visible and invisible realms is the medium in which this self-communication takes place; the warp and weft of theophany (divine self-disclosure). The strength and precision of the alignment is essential, not only for the attainment of one’s personal “completed human being,” but for the ultimate revelation of the “hidden treasure” that the divine heart yearns to make known.”<sup>44</sup>*

In the interest of human thriving and human development— in the journey toward wholeness—the dissertation project invited St. Luke’s parishioners into the deeper inner work of Sacred Heart’s Ignatian *Spiritual Exercise* process. Parishioners were invited to fall in love with God encountering the risen Christ praying scripture with imagination, and journaling (annotating) the encounter for future reference. The project is based on the supposition that parishioners meeting the risen Christ praying scripture (using scripture as source material for the imagination) can make divine presence and intention more intimate and incarnational in ministry as there is growth in Christ consciousness in daily life. Synchronicity (coincidence between praying scripture and its manifestation in daily life) is one indicator of Christ consciousness. In Jungian terms, we are talking about a journey into “individuation” and wholeness (into an enriched state)—reconciling the visible world of consciousness with the invisible world of the unconscious. This dissertation project aims to engage the “God within,” in the process of getting more in tune with one’s “true self.”

*“THE GRAY GOO” AND THE MECHANICS OF CONSCIOUSNESS: What is it about the biophysics of a chunk of highly excitable brain matter that turns gray goo into the glorious surround sound and Technicolor that is the fabric of everyday experience? <sup>45</sup>*

We begin by exploring the mechanics of Christ consciousness (taking on the mind of Christ) as a neurological phenomenon in the process of praying scripture with imagination. Using magnetic imaging, neuroscience provides some empirical information about human consciousness. For all

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<sup>44</sup>. Ibid., Bourgeault, *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene*, 131. with quote from *Quran*.

<sup>45</sup>. Christof Koch, “Neuroscience, What Is Consciousness,” *Scientific American* (New York: Nature America, Inc., June 2018). 63.

the dramatic new insights of MRI, Christof Koch in *Scientific American* tells us what is really going on in the gray stuff of the human brain still remains a mystery. The best we can do is follow the physical footprints or the Neuronal Correlates of Consciousness (NCC), which are the “minimal neuronal mechanisms jointly sufficient for any specific conscious experience.”<sup>46</sup> In reality “conscious neurons” relating to consciousness routinely get turned on all over the brain matter. But the locus seems to hint that it is in the cerebral cortex (the outer surface of the cerebellum at the back of the skull).

Neocortical tissue of the cerebellum of the Parietal Lobe is the most active “hot zone” during conscious experience. Integrated information theory (ITT) developed by neuroscientist/psychiatrist Giulio Tononi and favored by Koch states that the larger the integrated complexity of interconnected mechanism of the brain, the higher the level of consciousness. Referencing Descartes, Tononi said, “I am conscious, therefore I am. Consciousness is all of experience.” He concludes that consciousness cannot be computed. Consciousness is built into the structure of the system.<sup>47</sup> And enhanced Christ consciousness is the point of praying scripture with imagination.

To that end, there is evidence that the architecture of the brain is impacted by spiritual practice. George Vaillant a psychoanalyst, a research psychiatrist, and professor at Harvard University has studied adult development for 35 years and studied changes in brain architecture via MRI advances in brain science. Vaillant celebrates the limbic brain (the seat of emotion located in the center of the brain). He thinks the task of neural science in the 21st century will be to connect the “prose and the passion” of the neocortex (the focus of Koch above) with the limbic brain.<sup>48</sup>

This is similar to Cynthia Bourgeault’s exploration of MRI evidence of the “entrainment of the mind and the heart” documented by the HeartMath Institute.<sup>49</sup> There have been similar studies of mindfulness —“train your mind, change your brain” — in Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>50</sup> Bourgeault thinks spiritual ascent progresses from the kataphatic (via positiva) prayer of the *Spiritual Exercises* to the

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46 Ibid., Koch, 61.

47. Ibid., Koch, 64

48. George E. Vaillant, *Spiritual Evolution, How We Are Wired for Faith, Hope, and Love, A Scientific Defense of Faith* (New York: Broadway Books, 2008).

49. Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer, Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2016), 113.

50. Ibid., Bourgeault, 103.

apophatic (via negativa) receptive prayer of *kenosis* and self-surrender of Centering Prayer. My best guess about this is that letting go of thoughts engages a whole different dynamic of the brain—less thought processing as occurs in the kataphatic processes in *Spiritual Exercises*. Centering Prayer strives to step back and consent to God’s presence and action. In contrast to what is happening in Christof Koch’s “hot zone” of consciousness in the parietal lobe, the parietal lobe reportedly goes dark during Tibetan Buddhist meditation (similar to what happens in apophatic Centering Prayer) when neuroscientist Andrew Newberg’s did experimental brain scans of religious people in prayer as reported on NPR in 2009.<sup>51</sup> Speech related spiritual brain activity seems to center in the Parietal Lobe of the Cerebral Cortex in close proximity to the brain location where the ecstasy of sexual activity processes as well.<sup>52</sup> It is safe to say that we are intentionally rewiring our brains when we engage in the prayer process of Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*, but specifically how and where this happens is as mysterious as ever. And the brain responds differently to apophatic as opposed to kataphatic prayer.

#### MYTH, SYMBOL AND THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS:

Carl Jung speaks of the symbolism of ritual, tradition, myth and story—beyond reason—as a vital bridge between the realities of consciousness and the unconscious. In fact, myth and symbol are the stuff of the collective unconscious. And so, Jung does *not* want to “demythologize” biblical stories, unlike theologian Rudolf Bultmann, who was famous for “demythologizing” the world views of the New Testament. Bultmann wanted to rid the text of “superstition.” He was using “myth” in a different way than Jung. For Bultmann, “myth” was unintelligible and unacceptable attachment to literal historical events such as the virgin birth, resurrection, etc., found in biblical texts and tradition. It is more accurate to say that Bultmann was anti-historical, because he still believed (like Jung) in “*kerygma*,” in proclaiming deep meaning and truth found in the story.<sup>53</sup> The “good news” of the New Testament is that God in Jesus is in a new relationship, a new covenant, with humankind. But Jung warned, if impoverishment of symbolism and rationalism continues, “Protestantism will become even more boring and penurious than it already is.”<sup>54</sup>

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51. Barbara Bradley Hagerty, “The Science of Spirituality, Prayer May Reshape Your Brain...And Your Reality,” a three part series, *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, Inc., May 20, 2009, <https://www.npr.org>, accessed June 8, 2018.

52. Lynne Blumberg, “What Happens to the Brain During Spiritual Experiences?,” *Health*, June 5, 2014.

53 Alister E. McGrath, “Rudolf Bultmann: The Resurrection as an Event in the Experience of the Disciples,” *Christian Theology, An Introduction, Second Edition* (Malden, MA: 1997), 379, 380.

54 C. G. Jung, *Letters, Vol. II Bollingen Series XCV:II*, ed Gerhard Adler, trans Aniela Jaffe (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 7.

For Jung, “myth” is a living truth (a psychic reality)—a meaning giver—that goes beyond Bultmann’s anti-history. Jung goes even further in embracing biblical stories (as well as myths in general) anthropologically. “Myths” contain archetypes of the collective unconscious and are part of the DNA of the human unconscious (the psyche). Truths found in myths from all over the world are true always and everywhere. Myths weren’t invented. They were experienced. They are revelations of the preconscious psyches of humankind and expressions of that memory.<sup>55</sup> Preconscious myths are built into human DNA, and they get accessed in *Spiritual Exercises*—praying scripture with imagination—engaging the unconscious psyche of the believer. According to theologian Wallace Clift, there are four psychological functions found in these textual “myths.” The functions are eliciting awe before the mystery of being, explaining creation and cosmology, group awareness and belonging, and helping the individual learn more about himself/herself.<sup>56</sup>

#### RECONCILIATION OF THE CONSCIOUS AND THE UNCONSCIOUS:

For our purposes here we use the psychological language of Jung for the reconciliation of the human conscious and the unconscious in the process of “individuation.” Jung explains in his own terms the divine/human encounter—*praying scripture with imagination*—in the interest of transformation and human wholeness. It is important to the process to journal this encounter.

George Vaillant in *Spiritual Evolution* had similar instincts about wholeness in striving for reconciliation of thinking and feeling. But can we take this reconciliation even further? Anthropologically speaking, Jung, and other evolutionary thinkers from Teilhard de Chardin to consciousness visionary Ken Wilber<sup>57</sup> see evolving levels of [Christ] consciousness as the path to wholeness of the species. Teilhard went even further to see the evolution of [Christ] consciousness to wholeness as the evolution of the “Cosmic Christ.” Could we be on the dawn of a new axial age?

#### THE GRACE/THE DESIRE — GATEWAY TO THE UNCONSCIOUS:

*“True love opens vistas into that ‘broad place where there is no cramping’, and in this it is spirit of God’s Spirit. It sounds paradoxical, but in the experience of love it is no contradiction to say that to desire and to liberate are one and the same thing.”*<sup>58</sup>

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55. Wallace B. Clift, *Jung and Christianity, The Challenge of Reconciliation* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), 55.

56. *Ibid.*, Clift, 65.

57. Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality, A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World* (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2006), 68-69.

58. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life, Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 262.

My first surprise during my seven month *Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life* (19th Annotation Retreat) at Sacred Heart was the first step—the grace/the desire. “Really?” I asked. “It’s OK to ask for anything I want?” “Yes.” The Jesuit Father answered. “The sky is the limit. Speak what is on your heart. But write it down before you take on scripture. It is important to be honest with the Lord and yourself while you are seated there together on that park bench.” (The sneaky truth in Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*, is that with the retreatant’s consent the “Divine Majesty” will duly regulate his desires and change his former attachments.)<sup>59</sup> Jesuits are fond of saying that what we desire is likely to be God’s plan for us. As a self-described “pastor of souls” Jung helped his patients find out what it was that they longed for. What was their desire? What gave life meaning for them?

It is this researcher/priest’s hunch that it is the grace/the desire that is a gateway to Jung’s unconscious—to the person’s inner life. While Freud attributed psychic energy to the sex drive, and Adler to quest for power, Jung’s psychic energy was focused on the quest for meaning. That is why Jung is so right for this project.

But I wasn’t used to thinking that my willful flights of imagination were grist for holy conversation. Being Calvinist without admitting to it, I assumed my will/my desire was corrupt and insignificant. But naming the grace/the desire when beginning the process was crucial. The grace/the desire often anchored the conversation with the Lord in praying scripture. Calvin’s take on self and agency (action) minimized the possibility of bond and intimacy with the Lord. And Calvin closed the door to co-creation with God that is so integral to the Ignatian process. But like Freud, Calvin obsessed about the sinful potential of memory and the unconscious shaping of conscious will with self-delusion.<sup>60</sup> Of course, they were both right, but there is more to the story. Ignatian spirituality insists that it is *all* holy.<sup>61</sup> It is all sacred (though the sacred can be desecrated). And there are even

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59. Louis Puhl, ed., “The Mysteries of Our Lord,” *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 1951), 7.

60. David Gortner, *Theology and Psychology of Human Development*, class notes, The Virginia Theological Seminary, Alexandria, Virginia. July 4, 2016.

61. Philip F. Sheldrake, *Explorations in Spirituality, History, Theology, and Social Practice* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 137, 177.

greater prospects offered in the spacious world of Ignatius' "indifference" (detachment) not to mention the possibilities brought forth by graduating into apophatic solitude and the silence of contemplation—"letting go and letting God" where indifference is possible (though apophatic solitude is not part of the Ignatian program).

#### THE TEXT – PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH IMAGINATION:

*We are invited to identify ourselves in the story being contemplated, to re-appropriate who we are now, and who we shall or can be, in terms of the story. Its movements, transactions, transformations, become ours; we take responsibility for this or that position within the narrative. This has some affinity with what exegetical tradition has called 'moral' interpretation, in that the text is read as something requiring change in the reader."*<sup>62</sup>

Scripture can be hazardous material when it is taken literally, and if it isn't read in context and with a theology of love. Nevertheless, it is the standard for the dissertation project, the reference point—the one sure thing. As time went on, I stopped taking a hurried view of text born out of excessive familiarity with it, and began to sink into it, to look for hidden meaning in allegory, in its perversity, in its genius, reading it in relation to the biblical whole and then taking it line by line "each line, as enunciating a single vision,"<sup>63</sup> letting Jesus in the text speak to me. There was little time for folks in the Advent Retreat group to explore these many ways of exploring the texts. Their experiences varied, though letting Jesus in the text speak was emphasized to the group.

Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* in their original form was selective of text to accomplish Ignatius' purpose of examining the conscience—ridding the soul of attachments and seeking and finding the will of God.<sup>64</sup> The retreatant was invited by Ignatius to put himself in the story. My seven-month annotated retreat at Sacred Heart used daily Lectionary readings of the texts beyond the Gospels, but still putting myself in the story. It eventually occurred to me that it didn't always matter what the text was. There was still rich conversation about what was on my mind and in my heart, and that was often referential to the grace/the desire, at the same time speaking what was on the Lord's heart, the Lord's desire as revealed in the text.

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62. Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 36.

63. *Ibid.*, Williams, 47.

64. *Ibid.*, Puhl, 1.

THE INSIGHT: Jürgen Moltmann talks about the personhood of the Spirit and uses metaphors for experiences of the Spirit. He writes, *“It is hardly necessary to stress that this is not an attempt to arrive at a systematic structure. No limits are set to the power of the imagination to discover metaphors and to devise ways of expressing experience.... If we then still take these images to express the operation of the creating, preserving and life-giving Spirit of God, our intention is not romantic; it is critical and therapeutic.”*<sup>65</sup>

What insight does this text provide? What jumps out of this text for me? What is the living truth of this passage? Are there archetypes in this story—an innocent, an orphan, a hero, a caregiver, an explorer, a rebel, a lover, a creator? Do I identify with one of the archetypes? How is the Spirit speaking to God’s people here? How do I imagine my Beloved speaking to me? Do I trust this relationship enough to let it influence, even change my way of thinking? Do I trust myself in this relationship?

THE COLLOQUY/THE CONVERSATION with the risen Christ (two beloved friends seated together on a park bench). What do you say to the Lord? What does the Lord say to you? My second surprise at Sacred Heart was that I could use my imagination in prayer—write it all down as if it mattered. Jung would say in the “colloquy” that my rational ego “self” is in conversation with my unconscious self... *“instead of using the term God you say ‘unconscious,’ instead of Christ ‘self,’ instead of incarnation ‘integration of the unconscious,’ instead of salvation or redemption ‘individuation,... wholeness.’* <sup>66</sup>

Am I open to being transformed by relationship with the Beloved seated beside me on the park bench?

REMAIN/BE STILL/INSIGHT: Abraham Heschel said, *“The stillness is full of demands, awaiting a soul to breathe in the mystery that all things exhale in their craving for communion. Out of the world comes the behest to instill into the air a rapturous song of God.”* <sup>67</sup>

Heschel’s “stillness” and stillness of *Spiritual Exercises* process is definitely kataphatic, potentially full of demands. Even in “stillness” the mind is in conversation processing “insights.” Being a contemplative, I’ve often felt this to be only a wrap-up of the colloquy—maybe leading to transforming action through engaging *Spiritual Exercises*. For the contemplative it can feel like a busy, noisy kind of praying.

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65. Ibid., Moltmann, 270.

66. Carl G. Jung, *The Collected Works, XVIII, in correspondence with H. L. Philip*, ed Sir Herbert Read (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 736.

67. Abraham Heschel, quoted in *Creating Uncommon Worship* by Richard Giles, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004, inside flap.

*“Be still, and know that I am God.”* (Psalm 46:10b): Apophatic (contemplative) stilling of the mind frees God (of the unconscious) to do God’s work beyond active thinking. Magnetic Imaging has proven this kind of prayer to be a powerful rewiring of the brain for a different kind of consciousness. Jung would call that reconciliation of the conscious with the unconscious. Thomas Merton said about that: *“The contemplative...has a strange and paradoxical power to confront the world of false consciousness. The unmasking of illusion comes to be the special mark of the monk or those who, more broadly, followed the monastic way. Through solitude and inner struggle, the monk listens more deeply to the hidden voices of the world.”* <sup>68</sup>

THE COLLOQUY: the conversation with the Lord follows that insight or anything else that comes to mind. Second time around—where is the Spirit leading at this point in the conversation? Have I been changed by this relationship with the Beloved?

THE CONCLUDING PRAYER: is a time for parting words between two lovers on a park bench intoxicated with each other. I end as I begin with the grace/the heart’s desire:

*Blood of Christ, inebriate me...  
permit me not to be separated from Thee...  
As the hour of my death call me  
And bid me come to Thee...  
That with Thy saints I may praise Thee  
For ever and ever. Amen.* <sup>69</sup>

And the Lord concludes: “What do you say we meet again, my friend, on the park bench?”

This is a heavy date. It is a commitment. A lot of inner work happens here. Am I up for being transformed by this relationship? Am I serious about this eloquent desire?

Scholars Phyllis Zagano and C. Kevin Gillespie wrote about Ignatian spirituality and the ‘flow’ of optimal experience: *“The Spiritual Exercises aim to ground individuals in the acceptance of God’s creation and graces, and to train people to recognize the movements of the Spirit as God is inviting them to fuller forms of life and relationship. What marks out an individual as a Christian in the spirit of Ignatius is a sensitivity to moments of consolation and desolation, a growth in true discernment, and hence an absolute openness to the will of God.”* <sup>70</sup>

George Vaillant, a proponent of positive psychology and of the broad spiritual potential of the limbic system, added to that, “The great legacies of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola

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68. Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1973), 137.

69. Ibid., Puhl, excerpts from *Anima Christi*, unnumbered page.

70. Phyllis Zagano and C. Kevin Gillespie, “Ignatian Spirituality and Positive Psychology,” (PDF), *Ignatian Spirituality* Web site, 49, ignatianspirituality.com, accessed August 10, 2016.



were not just individual dispossession and self-forgetfulness, but a legacy of founding innumerable and surprising tolerant Jesuit universities that eventually spread throughout the world.”<sup>71</sup> Ignatian spirituality was rooted in action. And how this prayer manifests in action in the world is a measure of this dissertation project.

SYNCHRONICITY is also a measure of the fruits of *praying scripture with imagination*. Jung calls synchronicity “an acausal connecting principle.” It is synchronicity when events connect with no apparent casual connection. Synchronicity occurs beyond human consciousness, yet seemingly reveals the same experiential reality. We don’t always understand what is happening. But something is happening.<sup>72</sup>

An example from the researcher’s experience was when the content of morning prayer with imagination manifested in her work life at another time and in another place. She called it “uncanny.” But Jung would say, what looks like synchronicity of the prayer with daily life is not always coincidence. There aren’t any coincidences in the reconciliation of the unconscious with consciousness.

The hope of this project, and Jung’s hope was that this conversation between the conscious and the unconscious psyche *praying scripture with imagination* is really transformational in relationship with God. Jung said this relationship is letting the Spirit take the lead in the process.<sup>73</sup>

*Falling in love with God*, like most mystical experiences, is best described poetically—in the symbols and images of the *Song of Songs*, or by those God-lovers par excellence, the Sufis. It is, insomuch as is possible, joining human desire and longing with God’s perceived desire and longing. *Praying scripture with imagination* beginning with desire and longing is a good start. Mystics are typically mad in the eyes of the world. For them *God is fire and they are wood!* All the sense of separation between the human and the Beloved gets burned away, and manifests in the human seeing God everywhere—in everyone and everything. It can manifest in indifference—relinquishing even desire to God. It can be a dangerous adventure. “*On the altar of the heart, the lover sacrifices everything.*”<sup>74</sup> “*You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me*” (Mark 10:21, NRSV). For God even that is possible. This kind of love is without measure. And so, in the interest of measure, we are settling for measuring as best we can—identifying *deepening relationships with God* at St. Luke’s/Denver during the 2017 Advent Retreat.

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71. Ibid., Vaillant, 170.

72. Ibid., Jung, Collected Works, 417-519.

73. Ibid., Jung, Letters, 435.

74. Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, “Layla and Majnun, Love is Fire and I am Wood; A Sufi Allegory of Mystical Love,” *Sufi, Issue 81*. New York, Khaniqah Nimatullah Publications, Summer Issue 2011), 33, 35.



**CHAPTER FOUR:**  
*Theology That Has Informed This Thesis Project*

*FALLING IN LOVE WITH GOD*

*GOD, THE SELF-COMMUNICATING MYSTERY AND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN*

*THE SACRED HERE AND NOW*

*THE LOVE AFFAIR/PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH IMAGINATION,  
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*THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT*

*THE COSMIC CHRIST*

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## **CHAPTER FOUR:** *Theology That Has Informed This Thesis Project*

### FALLING IN LOVE WITH GOD

*I wondered if parishioners and offenders in the jail (some who weren't sure they could even trust God) would consider falling in love with God, the Beloved, Vince Hovley, SJ, encouraged me to meet praying scripture with imagination as—"two lovers in conversation on a park bench." For seventeen years we practiced praying scripture with imagination in the Liturgy of the Word in Episcopal group worship at the county jail and in Colorado prisons.*

*One evening I introduced the Song of Songs to male offenders at the county jail, and asked what they thought about preaching this shamelessly intimate text in the parish. I told them how Ed Kinerk, a Jesuit confessor, said that the most difficult challenge he has with people who come to him for spiritual direction is to convince them that God really loves them. I knew some men at Christian Worship/St. Elizabeth, my jail parish that night, couldn't believe they were loved by God or by anyone. But they thought this text would preach with impunity in the church parish. "You go girl," they said.*

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*And so, I decided to use the Song of Songs to talk about God's love for each of us as a kick-off homily for the 2017 Advent Retreat at St. Luke's. The homily celebrated eros love as creative life energy in any intimate relationship that longs for union with the lover—human or divine. It spoke of eros love as more than sensual love—though in this case sensual love is a metaphor to understand relationship with the divine. And so eros love is really divine love in the Song of Songs. It is holy. It is sanctified. It is at the same time God's intention written in the holy book of nature.*

*The homily talked about how Americans are still pretty puritanical (and dualistic) about the body being bad and the spirit being good—as opposed to God's spirit already present in the body as well as the material world. It pointed out how accustomed we are to sensual love being a marketed and cheapened commodity in our culture. It explored the various possible interpretations of this text as a literal love affair between earthly lovers, or an allegorical/symbolic love affair between YHWH and Israel; as love between the denominations of divided Christendom; between Christ and the Church; or a love affair between the divine and the human soul. I invited parishioners at St. Luke's to let go of inhibitions and surrender to divine presence in their souls, to drink in the joy and the adventure of this text and texts to follow:*

*The human says to the Divine in the Song of Songs: "We'll celebrate, we'll sing, we'll make great music...As an apricot tree stands out in the forest...all I want is to sit in [your] shade..."<sup>1</sup> In other words, lets turn away from the world for awhile, and lets hang out in the mystery of our hearts! Then the Divine lover gets poetic "O get up dear friend, my fair and beautiful lover—come to me." The Divine lover is saying "Hey! isn't it time we got together? It will be intoxicating." The human and the Beloved yearn to be together. (They are two lovers on a park bench praying scripture with imagination.) Eros love becomes agape love when God is allowed to love others through us. We ended with Eucharist in both venues—taking the Divine lover into our bodies that we might radiate that love in our lives beyond (see Appendix C).*

*Feedback for this homily at St. Luke's was tepid, though not scandalized by eros in the text. It can be one of the dilemmas of male mystics with the male gender specificity of God in Abrahamic traditions that makes them uncomfortable with an eros relationship with the divine Beloved.*

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1. Eugene H. Peterson, "Song of Songs 2:3-4," *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2002), 899.

*GOD, THE SELF-COMMUNICATING MYSTERY,  
AND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN*

20th Century Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner writes that God is a “self-communicating mystery.” He also speaks to what it means to be human and to be a human in relationship with God. Rahner’s theology is foundational to this dissertation project. It gives meaning of the process of *falling in love with God* via a deeper intimate relationship with God *praying scripture with imagination* in conversation with the risen Jesus, and manifesting the grace of this relationship in daily life.

Rahner explores who we are as human persons in relationship to “the self-communicating Mystery.”<sup>2</sup> He says that we, an aspect of God’s creation/God’s self-expression, are actually able to be in relationship with and communicate with God because God made that possible for us.<sup>3</sup> Yet, we are free to say yes to this relationship or not. But God still remains in connection with us even when we say no to the relationship. This relationship is God’s reality “*opened upwards*” for us. This is our God-given capacity to go beyond ourselves. And this is an openness that only God can provide.<sup>3</sup>

*Those who have lived the experience of God in one way or another have lost their every-day identities. All that is left to them is what we might call their profound identity.*<sup>4</sup>

And beyond praying scripture with imagination, the Ignatian attitude of “indifference” begins to expand the possibilities of God coming to meet us in a multitude of ways in the enigmas of our daily lives. In this sense, every aspect of our lives is in touch with of God’s eternity. We live in sacred space (though it can be desecrated). When we are actively engaged in encountering and responding to God in our lives, God is meeting us even in the most trivial events like eating and sleeping. With the attitude of Ignatian indifference, we come to “*see things as only temporary and in certain respects as not so important.*” With indifference, Rahner says, “*...we [find] the power to break loose from that which holds us.*”<sup>5</sup> I am thinking trusting surrender to the Beloved is key to breaking loose from that which holds us—the key to indifference.

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1. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Crossroad, 1997). 119.

2. *Ibid.*, Rahner, 120.

3. Richard Lennan, “Graced Humanity,” *Karl Rahner: Theologian of Grace*, CD and Study Guide (Now You Know Media, 2014).

4. Raimon Panikkar, *The Experience of God, Icons of the Mystery*, trans. Joseph Cunneen, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 137.

5. Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 23-24.

The attitude of indifference helps us to realize that we have the God-given capacity for the more. It makes us more in touch with the ends that we seek, like our heart's desires that are created by God that reveal God's dream for us. Rahner said, "*We [must] remain elastic—always ready for that call of God that will lead us to higher things.*"<sup>6</sup>

As human beings, we are called to *obedience*. That means that we are invited to *hear* God speaking in God's Word as well as in God's book of nature, "*the book of the graced universe.*" The good news is that we have the capacity to receive God's revelation in the Word and in nature. God is at the heart of every human experience,<sup>7</sup> but God doesn't twist our arms. But God invites us to be in conversation as "*two lovers on the park bench.*"

### THE SACRED HERE AND NOW

We come to God as people who have already experienced grace because each of us has a unique story that can bring us to the place of sensing God's place in the story. In our life scripts, grace has already been at work in us. And that grace makes us ready to encounter/receive God and what God offers beyond our souls (or not).<sup>8</sup> Rahner believes this is the deepest reality of what makes us human. And God's delight is our response to God who has been present all along and desires to keep us growing into fullness as human beings.<sup>9</sup>

*It is about being receptive to God's presence in all of life. Our God is a God of consuming love. He [God] wants to possess us completely! He gives us no rest and pursues us our whole life long.*"<sup>10</sup>

We do not seek God as an unattainable otherness. We become conscious of God and engage God where we are.<sup>11</sup> This is not about controlling God, but encountering God as a loving presence through it all. We experience God's revelation to us as we develop sensitivity to God's presence. *Praying scripture with imagination* is a (kataphatic) way to open ourselves to God's presence, and be in conversation with God's dream for us revealed in God's Word.

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6 Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 26.

7. Ibid., Lennan, *Rahner: Theologian of Grace*.

8. Karl Rahner, *Karl Rahner, Theologian of the Graced Search For Meaning* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 28.

9. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 102.

10. Ibid., Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, 134.

11. Ibid., Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, 143.

So then, Ignatian *discernment* leads us beyond the worlds we have constructed, and helps us to realize that God is at work even in places that we may not choose. Wherever we are in the world, God has already come to meet us. Every day life, the sacred here and now, is where humankind encounters God.

So we are counseled to see God in all things. Ignatius' *Exercises* are about discerning God's will and surrendering to God's dream for us. And we draw from the *Exercises* the freedom for deeper intimacy with God and freedom to participate in "God's project"—the reign of God on earth.<sup>12</sup>

*THE LOVE AFFAIR/PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH IMAGINATION,  
THE PROCESS AND THE ACT OF MINISTRY*

The basic process for this dissertation project came from from my experience of receiving spiritual direction from two Jesuit priests during a seven-month *Spiritual Exercises* in Daily Life 19th Annotation Retreat at Sacred Heart Jesuit Retreat House, Sedalia, Colorado in 2011. The process in this experience was unique to Gene Arthur, S.J., the spiritual director at Sacred Heart, that directed the Daily Life program. His approach took the form of spiritual direction that was directée focused. The *Lectionary* was prayed rather than texts indicated by Ignatius in the original *Spiritual Exercises*.

The following are the steps toward intimacy with the divine that we practiced at Sacred Heart and that were presented to the Advent Retreat at St. Luke's November/December 2017. The retreatant was encouraged to journal conversation with Jesus in the text. (See Appendix B).

- 1) GRACE (asking what is my heart's desire in this encounter with Jesus today)
- 2) SCRIPTURE (drawing text from the *Lectionary* or preselected by the director)
- 3) INSIGHT (writing down the first impression of what the text saying)
- 4) COLLOQUY/CONVERSATION (using imagination with the text—what do you say to Jesus? What does Jesus say to you?)
- 5) REMAIN/BE STILL (going into a *kataphatic* silence, that is, welcoming thoughts rather than letting them go as is the practice of *apophatic* contemplative prayer.)
- 6) INSIGHT (insight coming out of the silence)
- 7) CONVERSATION (talking with Jesus about that insight)
- 8) CONCLUDING PRAYER (ending in prayer about the experience or any other concern).

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12. Brian O. McDermott, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola*, 8 Lectures/7 CDs, Disc 1, NowYouKnowMedia.



And so where do we begin to engage the process? Raimon Panikkar, S.J., speaks of ordinary and extraordinary initiation processes into relationship with God. For the most part, life's experiences are the fertile ground in the parish to initiate the process. Receptivity to the process is often more urgent in the jail, where offenders are open to transformation. And it seems to be more urgent when the believer is faced with life's inevitable transitions such as marriage, birth of a baby, changing jobs, loss of some sort like death, divorce, loss of relationship, loss of employment, loss of dream, disenchantment, endings and new beginnings. In the parish, it can be about living into the challenges of the aging process itself. This is common ground at St. Luke's with a majority of parishioners over the age of 60. But each is initiated into his/her a unique spiritual journey, regardless of age, into relationship with God.

The spiritual director/spiritual friend/retreat leader is to be a listener—yet to ask questions like the following from various sources like James Finney recalling his spiritual direction sessions with Thomas Merton. Retreatants in the group are invited to ask themselves these questions:

1) *How is it going with you? What is it like being you these days? Be real with me. How is it going?* 2) *How is it going in your surrender to the Mystery that has intimately accessed your heart and has drawn you here that it might have its way with you and translate you into itself?* 3) *How is it going with you in discovering your surrender to the mystery welling up in the intimate details of how it is going with you. For example, how is it going with you when you cry and when you laugh?*<sup>13</sup>

Virginia Seminary professor/dean The Rev. Dr. David Gortner encouraged his students to ask: “*What do you think Jesus desires most in his relationship with you? (John 13-17). Have you asked what God desires for you in your flourishing—regarding your desire?*”<sup>14</sup> These questions were offered during the Advent Retreat at St. Luke's. (Three volunteers requested received one-on-one spiritual direction during the Advent Retreat.)

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13. James Finney, *Following the Mystics Through the Narrow Gate—Seeing God in all Things*, quoting Thomas Merton in spiritual direction, (WWW/soundstrue.com, 2013).

14. David Gortner, *Theology and Psychology of Human Development*, class notes, STH 931 01, (Alexandria, VA: The Virginia Theological Seminary, June, 2016).

My personal experiences over the seventeen years with five different spiritual directors is that they often sit in maddening silence waiting for me, the directée, to begin the conversation. None of my experiences began or ended with prayer unless I as a directée requested prayer. And then I was asked what I wanted to pray about, and invited to pray. No director in my experience sought access to my private prayer journals. Depending on the directée, my preference is to begin with silence and prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to be present in our process. And so, individual spiritual direction was a model for working with the Advent Retreat group. And we ended each Advent Retreat gathering with prayer offered by a volunteer.

Transformation in relationship with God is evident in this project when parishioners in both venues become ministers themselves; when participants ultimately reach out to others in need with compassion, evidencing a Christ-like presence. They are often eager to share their experiences. And their deepening relationship with God is evident in the synchronicity (simultaneous occurrence/connection) reported in human/divine conversations with Jesus in the scripture of the day and how that relates to their day-to-day experiences.

But what else is going on in praying with imagination? Raymon Panikkar in *The Experience of God* says, “*To arrive at the experience of God it is necessary therefore to let oneself be fertilized, be surprised. It is necessary to reverse epistemology: I know because I am known; I love because I am loved, say both John and Paul (1 John 4:11; Gal. 2:20). This attitude of allowing oneself to grasp and to recognize, of permitting the experience to take place in ourselves, is extremely widespread in humanity...[and] it is not my experience of God but God’s experience in me and through me of which I am conscious.*”<sup>15</sup>

Human potentiality born out of this relationship is the ultimate concern and good news to all of us wherever we are. And potentiality is a concern in the pastoral relationship with parishioners in any venue. Theologian/scientist Ilia Delio’s good news regarding the intentional focus of energy through prayer is that it really can move mountains. She calls that the quantum concept of collective will and collective energy focused on some (hopefully good) end—called morphogenic (also morpho-genetic) fields.<sup>16</sup> The ultimate hope in this dissertation project and projects beyond is human transformation into the mind (and action) of Christ through prayer and prayer as unlimited potentiality for each of us, and for all of us.

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15. Raimon Panikkar, *The Experience of God, Icons of the Mystery*, trans. Joseph Cunneen (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 57.

16. Ilia Delio, *The Emergent Christ, Exploring the Meaning of Catholic in an Evolutionary Universe* (New York: Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2011), 60.

Almost all of my experiences have been (as James Finney's was with Thomas Merton) about what is happening now—"tell me about your work with the pigs like on the farm today," with very little interest in theology or spirituality *per se*.<sup>17</sup>

And so the director/retreat leader asks volunteers (pig tenders, or pigs themselves) to reflect on how God has been lovingly at work in their lives. She invites volunteers to ask God to guide in their thinking; to ask for fresh revelation; to ask for evidence of God sharing God's love. Volunteers were invited to notice God's love for humankind, and God's love for themselves. And if God's grace doesn't seem so evident (as it was in the case of one of the volunteers at the Advent Retreat) the director invites them to notice experiences as well in waiting in hope for that grace—to be in conversation with the divine whatever the condition.

#### *THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT*

*The experience of God is understood, therefore as a subjective genitive—God experience. It is not my experience of God. God is not an object—either of faith or experience. It is the experience of God that occurs within me, in which I participate more or less consciously. In this sense, however, the phrase is inexact, since to say that God is part of my experience requires trinitarian precision: it is the Son in the Spirit that constitutes this divine experience.—Raimon Panikkar<sup>18</sup>*

I have found the synchronicity positively uncanny, praying scripture with imagination and having the content of that prayer become a part of my experience in the world beyond the prayer. What comes to mind is what Cynthia Bourgeault describes as a kaleidoscopic/holographic process of the Holy Trinity at work in the world. Her audacious theological speculation on the Holy Trinity is built on esoteric hermeticism as well as the integral mystical evolutionary cosmology of Teilhard de Chardin, Raimon Panikkar and others. Her seven-part hologram (envisioned as a turning kaleidoscope) of the Trinity juxtaposes seven dynamic trinities *of process* (not of persons).

You may be excused if your mind is boggled by Bourgeault's "wager," as is mine. It is a reach. But Bourgeault strives to give life to the Trinity as we experience it; to set it in motion again; to make

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17. Ibid., Finney.

18. Ibid., Panikkar, 137.

it flow<sup>19</sup> She thinks this Trinity of energy, motion and flow solves a host of conundrums in our current Christian trinitarian understanding. A dynamic Trinity such as this seems to describe my experience of surprise and synchronicity in praying scripture with imagination.

In the danger of being called a heretic “Modalist,” this director doesn’t differentiate between the “persons” of Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in praying scripture with imagination. For me it is all divine presence. I have always struggled with the doctrine of the Economic/Immanent Trinity that speculates on the interior life and nature of God. Something in me keeps protesting—“This is heavy baggage. Who the heck knows?” But I certainly wouldn’t discourage the Economic/Immanent doctrine for those who find it helpful. The Rev. Dr. Cynthia Bourgeault sees this doctrine as a “valid but arcane theological side show” that doesn’t make a lot of sense to Christians today.<sup>20</sup> I agree that there has got to be a whole lot more to the story for it to make sense to the modern mind. Bourgeault’s speculation of the Spirit is that it is more like a turning kaleidoscope, a multi-layered motion and flow of divine energy. This has been my experience as well.

In a similar vein, holistic pneumatologist, Jürgen Moltmann speaks of the Holy Spirit as hope, wholeness, and help. This suits my contexts in the parish and in the jail. Moltmann says it is a life-giving adventure that “*the formed/transformed person who waits for God is always ready for surprises in personal, social and political life.*”<sup>21</sup> The Holy Spirit is a liberator for that person’s life. The Holy Spirit is the righteousness and justice of God that gets played out in the world. Moltmann says that we don’t talk *about* the Spirit; we talk *out of* the Spirit that is closer to our inner being than we are ourselves.<sup>22</sup>

That said, the Father and the Holy Spirit don’t get a lot of attention in Ignatius’ *Exercises*. Ed Kinerk, S.J. references our beloved friend “*on the park bench*” as the “risen Jesus.”<sup>23</sup> And Ignatius’ *Exercises* themselves are Christ-centric with scriptural content focused on “the Kingdom of Christ”

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19. Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three, Discovering the Radical Truth at the Heart of Christianity* (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2013), 35.

20. Ibid., Bourgeault, 34.

21. Ibid., Moltmann, 103.

22. Ibid., Moltmann, 157.

23. E. Edward Kinerk, “Personal Encounters With Jesus Christ,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* (Washington, D.C.: Jesuit Conference, Inc, 48/3, Autumn, 2016).

and “The Mysteries of the Life of Our Lord”.<sup>24</sup> However, the Evangelical Vineyard Church group,<sup>25</sup> also a resource for this project, and certainly this director, have a clear sense of the Holy Spirit operant in Christ as the integral force and energy behind human transformation. And we think the Holy Spirit is operant in all of the “holy others” of differing traditions and differing world views that partake of this prayer process whether they know it or not.

Ultimately I remain open (learned in jail ministry) to the so-called “Higher Power” as it manifests in the “holy others” among volunteers, (particularly among “unchurched” incarcerated volunteers). The Spirit helps us in our weakness. And so, what is being formed (developed) is a living relationship with God’s Spirit in Christ through surrender to that relationship.<sup>26</sup> Surrender to that relationship is the salient process in Ignatian spiritual practice as well as in Vineyard prayer groups..

And so, developmentally we commend our spirits to the life-giving Spirit of Jesus Christ. And the Spirit makes us rich in experience, and rich in hope. Moltmann adds to that... “at the same time [our spirits are] poor and lonely in a world gone wrong.”<sup>27</sup>

*No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another. (John 15:15-17, NRSV).*

My own sense of the risen Christ goes beyond the immanent beloved friend “*on the park bench.*” Praying scripture with imagination is the way to get to know the risen Christ as friend, and to evolve in his consciousness, into Christ consciousness. But then it is an mystical evolutionary leap into the transcendent/immanent “Cosmic Christ” with possibility for the human race as it embarks on its evolutionary future. This was alien theology to the 2017 Advent Retreat group. In fact, it confuses the relationship for them. But my North Star is the risen Christ—the Universal Christ/the Cosmic Christ as awe inspiring, immense and as mysterious as the cosmos itself—as well as the immanent Jesus generously present and in loving conversation with us on the park bench. This Jesus, God in Spirit and God in the flesh, is God’s intimate gift to the human race on *this fragile earth, our island home.*<sup>28</sup>

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24. St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, ed Louis J. Puhl (Chicago, IL: The Loyola Press, 1951), pp.124-261.

25. T.M. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back, Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012).

26. *Ibid.*, Moltmann, 83.

27. *Ibid.*, Moltmann, 74.

28. Charles Mortimer Gilbert, Custodian, “Eucharistic Prayer C”. *The Book of Common Prayer*, (New York, Church Publishing Incorporated, 1982), 370.

## THE COSMIC CHRIST

Jesuit paleontologist/theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin recognized the contextual and provisional nature of knowledge dawning in the 20th Century. His theology offers hope in an era that often has reason to despair more than it has reason to hope. Still, Teilhard, ahead of his time, spoke about the evolution of Christ in the expanding consciousness of humanity transformed by science and technology. And when we glimpse into outer space with our humble enough technology we are struck—awestruck—by the poetry and extravagantly outrageous artistry and energy (dare we call it love?) of the Creator’s imagination, not to mention the elegant mathematics and science of it all. According to astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, the universe doesn’t owe us a full explanation.<sup>29</sup> So, we continue to ask questions and seek answers both of science and of our faith. More and more we as people of faith can embrace science as a partner in our search for better understanding of the mind and heart of the Creator, the astonishing unfathomable Mystery of God.

I think Teilhard’s Cosmic Christ is essential to believers catapulted with increasing velocity into an unknown future as we in our own complexity and consciousness are evolving and caught up in the complexity of the universe as a whole. Teilhard anchors his evolutionary theology on the Deutero-Pauline letter to the Colossians (1:15-17), that in Christ all things hold together. Teilhard believed we as members of the Body of Christ as well as Christ are all evolving into the “Omega Point—into God and Father of all, who is above all and in all and through all” (Ephesians 4:6, NRSV). Ilia Delio adds that the whole universe—matter and spirit—is in the process of *Christogenesis*.<sup>30</sup> All of creation will ultimately be united with God through Christ. *When all things are subjected to him [Christ], then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all* (1 Corinthians 15-28, NRSV). We, and all of creation, are in a “teleological” process evolving in union into the *Pleroma*—into the fullness of God.<sup>31</sup>

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29. Neil deGrasse Tyson, *Astrophysics for People in a Hurry* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2017).

30. Ilia Delio, *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being, God, Evolution and the Power of Love* (New York: Orbis Books 2013), 124.

31. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960), 134.

It doesn't require to great a stretch of imagination in our lifetimes, because we personally have experienced the evolving interlacing/interconnecting *noosphere*—those networks of the collective mind and networks of collective altruism on the Web and with networks of global communication in social media. We are “texting” our thoughts back and forth across the planet with our fingers dancing on little iPhones—and we lace the planet in flight from one continent to another without giving it much thought. For better or for worse, we are spiritually and materially connected to each other as well as to the cosmos itself. Delio concluded, “Interconnectedness lies at the core of all being.” That seems to be God's dream for us.

Winter term, 2015 at the Virginia Theological Seminary, Franciscan Sister, scientist and theologian Iliia Delio spoke of our quantum reality “that we are energy shown up in a mass. Mass is a property of all energy, and energy is a property of all mass,” she said. “Matter can be converted to energy, and energy to matter. Mass and energy are two facets of the same thing.”<sup>32</sup>

This is reassuring science that corroborates what our faith tradition has been telling us all along—that we are indestructible even in death. Matter is a form of energy that informs a quantum world—in Delio's mind (and in her book *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being*) matter/energy is “a vast unified sea of possibility, with matter and energy as two facets of the same universal process.” Dark matter, itself, is an organizing force and a sea on which the galaxies float.<sup>33</sup>

In her book, *From Teilhard to Omega*, Delio cited Karl Rahner's conviction that resurrection is “the beginning of the transformation of the world as an ontologically interconnected occurrence... that the final destiny of the world is not only promised, but already begun. The risen Christ is the “pledge and beginning of the perfect fulfillment of the world. [The risen Christ] is the representative of the new cosmos. And heaven is the place of unlimited potentiality.”<sup>34</sup> Think of it. This is our Beloved with whom we have the privilege of befriending and conversing with *on the park bench!*

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32. Iliia Delio, “Christ in Evolution and the Emergent Christ,” lecture based on her book, *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being, God, Evolution, and the Power of Love* (Alexandria VA: The Virginia Theological Seminary January 13, 2015).

33. Iliia Delio, *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being* 24, 25.

34. Ibid., Delio, lecture 3.

And so, Delio imagines a fresh narrative for the 21st Century. Her integral approach includes theology, spirituality, philosophy, technology, history—science and religion.<sup>35</sup> She builds this meta-narrative with Teilhard de Chardin.<sup>36</sup> Nothing is profane in this point of view. And all of the cosmos is part of the *divine milieu*. This allows the person to step back with less fear and take a cosmic view of God's grace in the world, our place in it, and the events around us.

The transformed person sees evolution and change as a meta-narrative of the big picture that is in the mind of God. Evolution is the dynamic process of love unfolding. And believing is seeing the transformational power of that. Incarnation [Christ] consciousness continues in evolution. (Delio doesn't use the term "Christ consciousness" in this book. I use it, hoping Karl Rahner's "anonymous Christian" undergirds what Delio has in mind.)

Delio's is a religious imagination centered on the "fundamental energy of love." She says this is the same love that moves the sun and the stars. This love is "whole making" moving all of us (the cosmos included) to a higher level of (Christ) consciousness. This is why we *pray scripture with imagination*. All of it is an integral part of the cosmic whole. The mathematics and science of evolution in the natural world is itself a "whole making" process.<sup>37</sup> God is revealed in the multidimensional cosmic order. Devolution as well is part of the evolutionary process. This helps us to put meaning to the inevitable devolution of ourselves and others as part of a greater plan—that we can trust. And it is transformational to see/believe this is so. This is reason enough to deepen our relationship with Jesus. *Fear not, little flock, it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom* (Luke 12:32).

The goal is oneness of our hearts with God, the basis of the mystical life, the convergence of religions, and the thriving, the evolving, of the planet and its species. Delio says that thinking itself is a spiritual act when it takes a deep long look at reality.<sup>38</sup> She thinks contemplation is the gateway to the "real." Contemplation is one of the practices of a transformed person. (Unfortunately, apophatic contemplation is not part of the *Spiritual Exercises* program at Sacred Heart).

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35. Ibid., Delio, *Wholeness of Being*, xvii.

36. Iliia Delio, ed "Evolution and Rise of the Secular God," *Teilhard to Omega: Co-creating an Unfinished Universe* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 24, 25.

37. Ibid., Delio, *Wholeness of Being*, xxv.

38. Ibid., Delio *Wholeness of Being*, 147.



And so, our inner soul work is part of the whole evolutionary process that is “an intertwining of love and suffering, and isolated existence is relinquished for greater union...each star, atom, leaf, plant and creature is Word-expressed energy of love and thus open to more life and being. God creates by letting go in love, a paradoxical withdrawal of power that makes new being possible.”<sup>39</sup> This in itself can foster and energize transformation. The transformed community is an open system where creativity is possible in the exercise as well as the withdrawal of power.

How do we become a transformed community? How do we deepen our relationship with God? One way is to *pray scripture with imagination*—let go in love and pray scripture in conversation with Jesus—just the two of you, two beloved friends *sitting on a park bench* sharing what we have on our minds.

### SCRIPTURE

*“You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”* John 5:39

My experience praying scripture with imagination guided by the Jesuits at Sacred Heart, was that it often didn’t make much difference what scripture I was praying—there was synchronicity (meaningful coincidence) between prayer, the grace I sought, and what was going on in my life. If this is so, it means that praying (communing with the Lord) with imagination was where the “juice” was in the process. Prayer was the intentional focus of energy. I find this to be true in my ecumenical study group as well. Whether we are reading about archaeology of the Holy Land, church development, or *Fields of Blood, Religion and the History of Violence*<sup>40</sup> (which we are reading now) there is synchronicity between the grace we are seeking and our yearning to be present with God, the intentional focus of energy. (To be fair, not everyone of this group feels this way about prayer.) Having said that, all of us in ministry are needful of a compass for our work of ministry. And that compass is trusting friendship with God—the love of God, and love for each other.

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39. Ibid., Delio, *Wholeness of Being*, 79-80.

40. Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood, Religion and the History of Violence* (New York: Anchor Books, 2015).

Healthy doctrine and scripture are foundational to staying on course, keeping the “conversation” a two way street. Sometimes in a quandary I hear God ask, “*Do you want to talk about that? Go open the Book.*”

The great 20th Century Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote: *More decisive than the origin of the Bible in God is the presence of God in the Bible. It is the sense for the presence that leads us to a belief in its origin.*” He continued, “*What we must ask is whether there is anything in the Bible that is beyond the reach of reason, beyond the scope of common sense; whether its teaching is compatible with our sense of the ineffable, with the idea of unity, helping us to go beyond reason without denying reason, helping man to go beyond himself without losing himself. This is the distinction of the Bible: on the highest level of radical amazement, where all expression ends, it gives us the word. Revelation is an issue that must be decided on the level of the ineffable...It is not enough to read the Bible, we must pray the Bible to comprehend its claim.*”<sup>41</sup>

This is an elegant way of spelling out some of my parameters around reading/praying scripture; that it can be problematic as well as a blessing; that it needs to be read in context, read with our heads as well as our hearts, and read it with a theology of love. Know that it is a many faceted library containing allegory, poetry, myth, history and story. It is a splendid collection of books, but get comfortable with paradox and ambiguity in *praying scripture with imagination.*

### *E U C H A R I S T A N D T H E P R A X I S*

In contrast to celebrating Eucharist in Sunday worship in the parish, where liturgy can get complex, I keep worship in small groups and at the jail as simple, yet as memorable as possible. Some of the offenders have never experienced Eucharist before. Others aren't sure what to make of it. I invite all of them to meet the Lord in praying the scripture of the day to the Lord's table whether they are sure that they are believers or not, whether they feel worthy or not—to take Christ's body into their bodies (see the Iona Welcome, Appendix H).

*Think of it as Christ, a burning coal, that you are taking into your body,” I say. “And radiate the warmth and love of Christ in all of your encounters this week. You don't have to preach anything. Just BE that. Let me know how that works out for you.”* One could say this is *transubstantiation of the Eucharist (the Real Presence) into divinization (sanctification) of the world/the universe.*—Sandy Blake<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup>. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man, A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farr, Straus and Giroux, 1955), 250, 251.

<sup>42</sup>. Sandy Blake, *The Holy Spirit and the Holy Other, Comparative Theology at the County Jail*, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry program in Christian spirituality (Alexandria VA: The Virginia Theological Seminary, Summer term, 2016), 7 - 9.

Often offenders return to tell about their ministries in the facility, their prayer groups, the way the Word of God speaks to them in their lives. Following up on Teilhard's thoughts about being a priest, they too can follow in the footsteps of the priesthood by becoming "*aware of what the world loves, pursues, suffers...the first to sympathize, to toil..to be the first in self-denial.*"<sup>43</sup>

And so, whether in the parish or in a secular setting, I connect the Eucharist to the incarnation—the embodiment of Christ in praxis—in one fell swoop. It is a seamless transition from Table to discipleship. Ordained clergy will come and go in our lives, but we remain as the real ministers in our contexts. The priesthood of believers includes the medics in the trenches in divinization of even the diminishment and the suffering of sisters and brothers who are grieving; who have lost a critical relationship in their lives; who have lost their home; who have lost a loved one; who have no loved ones; who have lost children to social services; who are paralyzed by anger; who want to kill themselves or someone else. All of us are ministers in this world. Praxis (practice) brings even those who question their faith into faithfulness. Incarnating/embodying Christ can transform doubt about "belief"—into "be-loving" God.<sup>44</sup>

This is how we draw believers (and doubters) into the life of the kingdom of God. The Eucharist is not only the symbol, but the power of divine "capacity to produce a miraculous thing."<sup>45</sup> The incarnational and sacramental gifts of the Anglican experience are the gifts we bring to the syncretistic diversity of worship in the jail and to a lesser extent in the parish. Rowan Williams wrote about Eucharist and Incarnation in *On Christian Theology*:

*"God [has] become human and thereby shown that human nature [can] carry the divine glory; God had raised the whole of human nature and therefore every man and woman to new dignity, by opening to all a share in the fellowship of Christ's body; the human God had established, as abiding tokens of his presence, material acts and objects, bread, wine and water, and so declared all material existence to be potentially charged with the life of God."*<sup>46</sup>

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43. Teilhard de Chardin, *The Priest*, referenced by Donald Goergen in, *Teilhard de Chardin's Cosmic Christology and Christian Cosmology*, CD (St. Louis, MO: The Aquinas Institute of Theology, Now You Know Media, 2014).

44. Marcus J. Borg, *Speaking Christian, Recovering the Lost Meaning of Christian Words* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2011), 119, 121.

45. Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 18.

46. *Ibid.*, Rowan Williams, 225.

Ultimately with Walter Brueggemann we use our imaginations in praying scripture to form alternative communities—to form a prophetic witness mindset—a counter-cultural consciousness. Brueggemann’s thesis is that we can’t be prophetic without using imagination. And, he says, Old Testament texts are really imaginary poetic scenarios that propose alternative realities of increasing liberation, justice and compassion. The challenge is to get our prophetic imaginations to trump the imagination of the secular community (i.e. consumerism, imperial religion) and of that of the State (imperial politics with a monopoly over instruments of torture). The challenge is to transform fear into energy by grieving the injustice all around us, not by criticizing injustice in anger, but with imagination coming to an alternative consciousness by entering with our hearts into the pathos of it.<sup>47</sup>

Our little parish in the jail as well as the parish outside the jail are laboratories of the power of scripture, sacrament and prayer. They are laboratories of the power of the Holy Spirit at work. Offenders and parishioners both liberally share what it is like to be a Christ follower in group homilies, in testimonials and in group *lectio divina*. All of us get a chance to hear and celebrate the triumphs of God acting in our lives.

*“We live in an enchanted universe where there are forces at play that we can’t begin to understand,”* says Yale professor/Episcopal priest Randall Balmer who imagines “call” beyond the sterility and rationalism of faith to the mystery and enchantment and genuine embrace of the Real Presence of Christ through the sacrament of Holy Communion to (what he calls) *“the alchemy of grace—meeting (in that place) God, that ultimate Force in our lives.”*<sup>48</sup>

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47. Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001), 125.

48. Randall Balmer, “The Search for Reenchantment,” *Reflections Yale Divinity School, Reformation: Writing the Next Chapter* (New Haven, CT: *Reflections*, Volume 104, Number 2), 52.

**CHAPTER FIVE:**  
*Research Design, and Listening to Volunteers*  
at St. Luke's Episcopal Church/Denver, Colorado  
including a vignette from the Adam's County Jail

*SOCIAL SETTINGS AND WORSHIP*

*DEVELOPING A MODEL AS A TOOL*

*PROJECT TIME LINES, PROCEDURES, PARTICIPATION, INFORMED CONSENT  
AND OBSERVATION OF BEHAVIOR (Staying in the setting)*

*THE WORK IN PROGRESS – LISTENING TO VOLUNTEERS  
Narratives and Meaning Units*

*MATTERS OF METHODOLOGY REVISITED*

*BRACKETING RESEARCH DESIGN*



## **CHAPTER FIVE:** *Research Design, and Listening to Volunteers*

*We set up Christian Worship/St. Elizabeth in one of the large 35-capacity inmate dorm sections of the County Jail on a Saturday afternoon. It is a challenge to create a holy space in windowless, sterile, cost effective gray venues like this—cavernous places flooded with fluorescent light. We found a scruffy table and placed it as an altar between myself and twelve male offenders seated in a scattered arrangement of folding chairs. The setting was awkward, but we still had church using the Book of Common Prayer and music on CDs with words to liturgy and song printed on photocopied sheets and distributed. And it was the Holy Spirit that turned this into a cathedral of grace and prayer.*

*Offender/parishioners were invited to be the readers of the Liturgy of the Word. As one of them held up his hand to volunteer, several others stood up and wrestled a rather fragile and spastic young fellow offender out of his chair and onto his feet. They led him to the table in front of the assembly and turned him around to face our little congregation. “Jake is going to read the scripture today,” one of them said. I wondered if they were going to make a spectacle of Jake because he was obviously physically, and possibly even mentally challenged.*

*Jake was unnerved, reluctant, and somewhat resistant. But his fellow offenders urged him to take charge and read the text. Jake read haltingly at roughly a third-grade level, slowly sounding out each word. The assembly sat silent leaning forward to hear what Jake was saying. As Jake finished struggling through the text, the whole group of offenders stood up and cheered for him. He was startled. Then he was pleased and smiled his asymmetric smile. He was obviously nourished by his brothers who believed in him that day and were willing to hear to what he had to say.*

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*My little suburban parish was blessed, by being adopted by a mom and ten-year-old triplet boys. She was a single mother doing her best financially to feed, clothe and manage all those boys. The parish priest invited the triplets to participate in worship services as altar boys, even though all three were being medicated (with various levels of success) for ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and their performance in worship tended to be unpredictable. They were a sight to behold with their day-glow pink tennis shoes (often with streaming untied shoe laces) under their white albs. The Altar Guild Chairman was appalled. Obsessed with church traditionalism, she agitated for them not to serve, especially in their day-glow tennis shoes, though that was all they owned.*

*The triplets found their niche in our Bible School drama, *The Ten Best Ways* (about *The Ten Commandments*). They were thrilled to be trusted to be sound effects “men” with an amply amped electronic piano loaded with special effects. They made exploding thunder over Mt. Sinai, the sound of camels’ hoofs, and rushing wind. This priest was a little apprehensive about the performance, but as always ready to be charmed by the unexpected when kids are on stage. And the boys were excited to make big sound for a captive audience. Their mother was apprehensive too, and the afternoon of the performance she gave each of them a hefty dose of Ritalin. The triplets were so sedated, we could scarcely discern the sound effects at all, though the mountain (thanks to a fan and buckets of dry ice) did smoke impressively as Moses brought the *Ten Best Ways* down the mountain to the Israelites below.*

## SOCIAL SETTINGS AND WORSHIP

What constitutes a sanctuary? What makes worship holy? Is it the tight ship of traditionalism? Is it attitude? Is it inclusion and participation? Is it purpose? Is it having fun? Is it permission to enter into the pathos and the particulars of our lives glorifying and celebrating God being who we are—celebrating each other being who we are?

Unlike that sterile cost-effective human warehouse of a space at the jail, being a worshiper in St. Luke's sanctuary feels like being safely enclosed the hold of a giant protective ark with its strong dark wood beams ribbing and supporting the ceiling above and wrapping around the nave and the people. This holy space comforts and reassures folks gathered below. And the library at St. Luke's where we gathered for the Advent Retreat is reassuring as well. The walls are ringed with tradition, with books and photos of bishops and priests spanning over one hundred years of parish history.

But, in spirit, the library table where we met at St. Luke's for Advent Retreat wasn't so different from those improvised tables in the warehouse dorm where offenders gathered to hear the Word, or the prayer table in a womens' maximum security section at the jail, where ten orange-suited women gathered to pray. These women were of no consequence to the officer who stood at the steel door and yelled for each of them by name to come and pick up her toilet paper and her sanitary napkins. The humility of that humiliation was normalized. Without missing a beat, the women returned to join their cohorts at the table who were deeply in prayer. At our table at St. Luke's there was a certain normalized humility as well, as volunteers trusted each other with their vulnerability by sharing what was happening in their lives, and they trusted each other with the intimacy of their prayer lives.

People gathering to celebrate God's presence make holy space wherever they assemble. And that was what folks were up to at St. Luke's, volunteering to be participants in the dissertation project. Volunteers gathered to share their stories and pray—with all of their disparate experiences of spirituality and conditions in life. Over that five-week period, we immersed ourselves in each other's stories, *praying scripture with imagination* together. The ethnomethodology of our gathering was bringing all that uniqueness together to the purpose in *falling in love with God/praying scripture*



*with imagination.* And the question that we brought to the study was if we could, in such a busy short time, grow in intimacy with the risen Christ.

### *DEVELOPING A MODEL AS A TOOL*

The model proposed (explained in detail in Chapters 3 and 4) was the Ignatius-inspired *Spiritual Exercise* process presented to the researcher/priest by her spiritual director at Sacred Heart Jesuit Retreat House in Sedalia, Colorado, during a seven-month *Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life (19th Annotation Retreat)* in 2011. That retreat began with a contract from the retreatant to pray scripture with imagination an hour every day with a weekly one-hour spiritual direction meeting with the Jesuit director. A subsequent conversation with the director of Sacred Heart Retreat House revealed that the *Spiritual Exercise* proposed in this dissertation project was the creation of the Jesuit spiritual director, who tailored the exercise to each directée's spiritual life. This is one of the hazards of this dissertation project offering a one-size-fits-all exercise to volunteers at St. Luke's, and presenting what was a seven-month program at Sacred Heart to volunteers at St. Luke's meeting for only five weeks. And spiritual direction at the Advent Retreat was not as personalized at St. Luke's as it was at Sacred Heart. It was a group process. Given all of these caveats, the best the researcher/priest could hope for would be to get a sense of spirituality at St. Luke's in 2017.

### *PROJECT TIME LINES, PROCEDURES, PARTICIPATION, INFORMED CONSENT AND OBSERVATION OF BEHAVIOR*<sup>1</sup>

*Below is a record of eight consecutive Sunday events for the Advent Retreat at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, beginning with sermons on introductory Sundays, followed by four Sunday group meetings in the church library. Sacred Heart's Spiritual Exercise process was the model for prayer during the retreat. It is found on page 2 of the Advent Retreat booklet (Appendix B-2).*

**OCTOBER 29, 2017:** (The researcher/priest began preparing for the retreat by preaching two services each Sunday, two Sundays prior to, and three Sundays during the Advent Retreat. Sermon themes were related to the retreat, using Lectionary texts for the Advent season).

**SERMON ONE: God's Love Relationship with Humankind**— with texts from *Song of Songs* and Matthew 22:37, NRSV, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your*

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1. Valerie J. Janesick, "The Choreography of Qualitative Research Design, Minuets, Improvisations, and Crystallization," *Handbook of Qualitative Research, Second Edition*, Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds (Thousand Oaks, California, 2000), 384, 385.

*heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind...You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Appendix C).*

RESPONSE TO THE SERMON was lukewarm in the researcher/priest’s opinion, though eros love in the *Song of Songs* was not objected to by parishioners polled about the sermon.

ANNOUNCEMENT: INVITATION TO CONGREGATION (both services) to participate in *Falling in love with God/praying scripture with imagination* (Appendix A).

RETREAT INVITATION HANDOUT, **Research into deepening of the inner journey in Christian Spirituality** was given to parishioners in the congregation, (Appendix A).

INFORMED CONSENT: This was addressed in the handout for the project.

PARTICIPATION: Two young adults were the first to sign up for the Advent Retreat.

### **NOVEMBER 5, 2017:**

#### **SERMON TWO: The Ignatian Practice of Seeing God in the World,**

Psalm 8:3, NRSV, *“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?”* and Psalm 43:3, NRSV, *“O send out your light and truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God,”* (Appendix C).

PARTICIPATION: There were coffee-hour conversations about the proposed Advent Retreat with parishioners.

### **NOVEMBER 12, 2017: WEEK ONE OF THE ADVENT RETREAT,** meeting every Sunday from

9 a.m. - 10 a.m. in the library at St. Luke’s Episcopal Church:

#### **SERMON THREE: Showing up for friendship with God,**

Matthew 7:21, *The Message Bible*: *“Jesus said, knowing the correct password – ‘Lord, Lord’ – isn’t going to get you anywhere with me...”* (Appendix C).

The intention of this sermon was not to admonish or threaten, but to issue an invitation, using the Lectionary text for the day.

PARTICIPATION: The Advent Retreat had its first meeting in the parish library with 13 in attendance (10 women and 3 men). Two women from the St. Luke’s Contemplative Prayer class joined the project after November 12, bringing the total initial participants to 15.

THE PROJECT BOOKLET, **Advent Annotation Retreat, Falling in Love With God/Praying Scripture With Imagination** (Appendix B) was distributed, explained and discussed with volunteers meeting in the library for the first time as a group.

RULES AND PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT were discussed—that honesty is more important than pleasing the researcher or setting out to manifest presuppositions about the project.

INFORMED CONSENT was discussed in regard to the anonymous feedback form on page 11 of the booklet (Appendix B-11). The opportunity to write signed narratives about the spiritual exercise experience was offered and encouraged. Volunteers were reminded that their signatures indicated permission for the researcher to publish aspects of the narrative. Originators of signed narratives were assured that their identities would be disguised in the published version of the dissertation project.

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL SCRIPTURES in the booklet were addressed and practiced, using a handout worksheet with Exodus 19:3-6 (*a kingdom of priests, a holy nation*) as sample text (Appendix D-1). Work sheets were also provided in the booklet (Appendix B7-B-9). Journaling was encouraged. The researcher/priest prayed the texts with retreatants, sometimes sharing her entries. Ending prayer was solicited by the researcher/priest and provided by a retreat volunteer.

*SPIRITUAL DIRECTION – what is that?* on page 10 of the booklet (Appendix B-10) was discussed to deepen intent in working through the prayer process.

OBSERVATION OF BEHAVIOR: Three volunteers asked for and received one-on-one spiritual direction during the seven weeks of the Advent Retreat. Others who were interested in spiritual direction were referred to directors from Episcopal and Roman Catholic sources.

#### **NOVEMBER 19, 2017: WEEK TWO OF THE ADVENT RETREAT:**

SERMON FOUR: **God Relationship/God Experience, pro-actively waiting for the**

*s. blake, Chapter 5, page 81*

**Son of Man (realized eschatology); taking holy risks, putting talents and time to God's good use, Matthew 25:14-30, NRSV, *The Parable of the Talents* (Appendix C).**

PARTICIPATION: (Attendance was not taken.) Volunteers were invited to share with the group their experience of *praying scripture with imagination* during the first week. Using the handout sheet, we practiced praying Matthew 11:25, *Come to me all you that are weary..* (Appendix D-2). We discussed quotes on the back of the handout sheet about God's love for God's people, and the power of prayer (Appendix D-3).

OBSERVATION OF BEHAVIOR: Volunteers shared life experiences including family crises, struggles with belief and trust in God. Some shared daily prayer practices like reading *Forward Day by Day* and contemplation. Several spoke about the challenge of adapting to a new prayer process and fitting it into their daily prayer routines. We ended in prayer solicited by the researcher/priest and offered by a volunteer.

**NOVEMBER 26, 2017: WEEK THREE OF THE ADVENT RETREAT:**

SERMON FIVE: **The Ignatian Practice of Seeing God in the World; Jesus in Matthew 25 speaking his bias for the vulnerable among us** (Appendix C).

PARTICIPATION: (Attendance wasn't taken.) Using practice sheets (Appendix D-3), the group prayed John 15:15 (*I no longer call you servants, but friends*), and discussed quotes on the back of the handout sheet, about getting to know the risen Lord (Appendix D-4, D-5). Using the text, we journaled conversations (colloquies) with the risen Lord.

Retreatants were encouraged to think about and work on the confidential form on page 11 of the booklet (Appendix B-11), and to think about writing signed narratives about their experiences with the spiritual exercises. We ended in prayer offered by a volunteer.

OBSERVATION OF BEHAVIOR: Some writers in the group took easily to using their imaginations and journaling the conversation with the Lord. Others told the group that they were stumped by scripture and the process, and in addition that writing was an effort for them. The researcher/priest offered to notate more easily shared verbal experiences.

A verbal report was given in three cases. Several complained that shortness of time interfered with practicing this prayer during the week. One of the men dropped out of the retreat, saying this form of prayer was “arcane,” but talked his wife into joining the group instead. Another expressed difficulty trusting God in this encounter. Some attended intermittently (due to conflicts with a vestry meeting, travel, visiting family, etc.). Four had positive things to say about the healing aspect of this prayer practice during this busy time of year. Two dropped out (one struggling with doubt, one thinking that conversation with scripture was beyond her ability). Another was leery of writing down personal intimate thoughts. Being intimidated by scripture (without professional interpretation) was an obstacle for another. Two joined the retreat from the St. Luke’s Tuesday Contemplative Prayer group (led by the researcher/priest).

**DECEMBER 3, 2017 (FIRST DAY OF ADVENT, WEEK FOUR OF THE ADVENT RETREAT):**

PARTICIPATION: Sunday, December 3, Advent Retreat was canceled to welcome a new interim priest at the 9:00 hour. On November 26, volunteers were encouraged to continue using the booklet (Appendix B) with texts to pray during the week of December 3.

**DECEMBER 10, 2017: WEEK FIVE OF THE ADVENT RETREAT:**

PARTICIPATION: (Eight in attendance). Using the handout sheet, the group practiced praying Luke 13:10 (the bent woman, *...and immediately she stood up straight*) and discussed quotes on the back of handout sheet about taking on the mind of Christ (Appendix D-6, D-7).

INFORMED CONSENT: The ethics of research projects were revisited, emphasizing not signing the anonymous feedback form (thoughts about the retreat—before and after) found on page 11 of the booklet (Appendix D-11). Forms were to be placed unsigned in the researcher/priest’s mail box in the church library by first week of January 2018.

SAMPLE FEEDBACK QUESTIONS (Appendix E) were provided for writing signed narratives (signatures indicating permission to publish), and reassurance that names and some details would be altered in the published report of feedback.

SIGNED NARRATIVES: It was announced that signed narratives (which were optional) were due the first week of January 2018, to be put in the researcher/priest's mail box in the library. Oral feedback to the researcher/priest was offered again as an option that would be accommodated as well.

VOLUNTEERS WERE THANKED for their essential participation in the dissertation project. The group ended with prayer provided by a volunteer.

**DECEMBER 17: WEEK SIX OF THE ADVENT RETREAT:**

PARTICIPATION: (Eight in attendance). Using the handout sheet, the group practiced praying scripture with imagination using John 5:39, 40 (*come to me to have life*) as the text. Prayers of Ignatius of Loyola printed on the back of the handout sheet were read and discussed (Appendix D-8, D-9). There was additional discussion on this the last day the group gathered about their experience of the dissertation project.

FEEDBACK participation was solicited again using handouts and information (Appendix E), distributed on December 10. Retreatants were encouraged to continue praying scripture with imagination, using texts scheduled in the booklet (or any text they preferred) during the week leading up to Christmas.

INFORMED CONSENT was revisited by the researcher again on December 17.

VOLUNTEERS WERE THANKED again for their essential participation in the dissertation project. Completion of anonymous and signed narrative feedback was requested, to be provided to the researcher/priest in her library mail box the first week of January. Sample narrative feedback questions were distributed again (Appendix E), suggesting topics to pursue in feedback narratives. The group ended with prayer provided by a volunteer.

*THE WORK IN PROGRESS --- LISTENING TO VOLUNTEERS  
NARRATIVES (written and verbal in class and one-on-one with the researcher/priest) AND  
MEANING UNITS, (textual descriptions and interpretive descriptions) found in Appendix F.*

*The research process for qualitative researchers is emergent. This means that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and that all phases of the process may change or shift after the researchers enter the field and begin to collect data. — John Creswell <sup>2</sup>*

PARTICIPANTS: Initially there were ten women and three men in the class in the library at St. Luke's. Attendance ranged from six to thirteen participants in five Sunday meetings of the class with two volunteers from the Contemplative Prayer class (led by the researcher/priest), bringing the number of participants to fifteen.

Emergent design for the dissertation project began early in the game with the necessity of flexibility to accommodate schedules that didn't always allow for 100% participation in the retreat on Sundays. The initial plan was modified to include two volunteers from the Tuesday Contemplative Prayer group who did spiritual exercises on their own apart from the Sunday group.

Dialogue in the class and verbal feedback to the researcher is referenced in this section as well as dialogue that was written, signed, and submitted at the end of the retreat. Nine volunteers responded to anonymous questions. Eight responded with written narratives. None of the men wrote narratives. Only one man offered input in the class. One man was present at every meeting but didn't offer either verbal or written narrative. One man dropped out of the class after the first day but sent his wife instead. Three volunteers dropped out of the class after the second session. Three volunteers requested and were provided one-on-one spiritual direction (which was integral to the Sacred Heart experience, but not for the Advent Retreat).

Participants in the Advent Retreat (with fictionalized names) were Andrea, Eva, Devon, Doris, Rylee, Gary, Brianna, Meriam, Willow, Debra, Joel, Maddie, Nova, Terra, and Ariana.

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2. John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design, Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 39.

MEANING UNITS (CLUSTERED THEMES): Seven meaning units emerged from the narratives offered by Advent Retreat volunteers about their “lived experiences” of the Advent Retreat. Aspects the meaning units were suggested to them (but not required) in the anonymous questionnaire (Appendix B-11) and in the researcher’s sample feedback questions (Appendix E). Meaning, itself was unplanned and “emergent.”<sup>3</sup> Volunteers gave the *praying scripture with imagination* project meaning for this particular time and place. At times, volunteer commitment to the process seemed to be “catch-as-catch-can.” That was emergent, as well. Some intermittent attendees hung in there in the best way they could, their attendance contributing its own truth to the subject of spirituality at St. Luke’s.

1) HOPES FOR THE ADVENT PRAYER RETREAT: Hopes for the project were offered by six volunteers who were already committed to serious prayer practices. Eva saw *falling in love with God/praying scripture with imagination* as an opportunity to explore a new spiritual practice. Doris said her hope and her desire was to get closer to God. Andrea saw these spiritual exercises as a structure that helped to focus her prayer time. Brianna, who had already been journaling, wanted to deepen prayer with this new spiritual exercise. Meriam reported that the process was a “*lifeline after being in a hiatus from church.*” Terra joined the dissertation project because she thought it would be interesting and fun, and she wanted to help the researcher/priest with her project. The majority of these volunteers hoped to go deeper into already existing prayer practices.

2) SETTINGS FOR PRAYER DURING THE WEEK – TIMES AND PLACES (Appendix F-3, F-4): Eight volunteers shared stories about the times and places that they pray during the week. Three reported praying “unceasingly” in all places and at all times. Five reported early morning prayer at home. One couple prayed together. Doris prayed later in the morning with her neighbor. Andrea prayed in the morning after she got her kids to school. She wrote about little altars everywhere in her home. She especially liked praying in the park and in nature. She said she prays first thing in the morning and last thing at night every day, wherever she happens to be. Willow spoke of praying with her Osage tribe doing a ritual dance for a loved one who died.

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3. Ibid., Creswell 187.



Brianna, an over-scheduled career mom, said evenings and Saturdays were the only times she could really commit to thinking about prayer.

3) THE GRACE (desire of the heart), SCRIPTURE (conversation with God) AND GOD (the One we meet *on the park bench* (Appendix F-5, F-6, F-7) was one of the meaning units/clusters. Ten volunteers participated in this meaning cluster (taking desires of the heart into conversation with God via scripture). Volunteers' experiences of God were as varied as the personalities involved and as diverse as their spiritual journeys. Doris reported a wide range of experiences in conversing with God. At times she spoke of conflict and surrender. At other times she shared problems and experienced miracles. Conversation with God was helpful at times for Doris, and at other times it was not so helpful. She concluded, "*There is no certainty or control over what happens in conversations with God.*" Eva said she was thinking with the Sufis that happiness is submission to God when it comes to desire of the heart, scripture, and God.

Terra said taking her heart's desires to God was a new experience for her. Having steps spelled out in the retreat booklet made conversation with God via scripture a do-able task. It brought her to give more thought than usual to what her heart's desire really was. Nova said "*This [process] is too hard. I'm not used to praying in this way.*" She dropped out of the group the third week. Brianna said she sometimes struggled to understand the text. Eva and Andrea both wondered if this conversation with Jesus via the text was conversation with Jesus or just self-talk.

Several volunteers reported meaningful conversations with God in the text – including insights on what really mattered, problems solved in dreams, conversation about what was on their hearts, ordinary thoughts and concerns that fit the scripture of the day. Devon said prayer for him was "*knowing Jesus is my best friend, I choose you.*" Debra, who dropped out of the group the first day, said, "*This prayer practice is like friendship. Friendships demand time, commitment and a lot of attention.*" The essence of *falling in love with God/praying scripture with imagination* for this group was about finding time and taking time for this friendship. It was about showing up, wrestling with God, loving God, surrender, trust, and noticing miracles that emerged from the practice.

4) PRAYER, JOURNALING AND GOD (Appendix F-8, F9, F-10): Eight volunteers participated in this meaning unit/cluster about journaling conversation with God in scripture. Journaling is salient to the process because it not only documents unexpected insights that come out of conversations with God in scripture, but it can be a doorway into the unconscious. Carl Jung would say we are experiencing insights from God speaking to us from our unconscious. Terra said from the beginning she recognized messages from her unconscious as the essence of journaling the spiritual exercise: *"I really enjoy the process. It is creative like writing my book. It brings things forward from the unconscious."* Terra said she trusts that God is the goodness in all of us and God speaks to us from that perspective.

Meriam loved the structure of the process—*"that provides framework within which I can be free to be led by the Spirit, yet remain 'on task'. My relationship with God has been renewed, and this process allows me to stay in conversation with God throughout the day, throughout my life."* Andrea spoke again about struggling to know if she was in conversation with God or talking to herself in the spiritual exercise. She said, *"I didn't always know where I was going; and ended up with some pretty distinct insight at times...I feel that God sparks those light bulb moments and that when I seek Him in genuine faith, He gives me clarity in my thinking."* Devon said, *"I get stubborn sometimes. God says, 'you've got your answer.' And sometimes the answer is 'no'."*

Three volunteers spoke of the mechanics of writing the conversation down. Eva said she thought the first three steps of the process were sufficient for this prayer, and journaling in the group setting was more successful for her than journaling alone during the week at home. She thought her reluctance to journal at home was because it seemed like another burdensome demand on her time. *"God's mind is different,"* Eva said, *"so I am sometimes suspicious of what I think I am hearing."* Amanda said, *"One of the most significant benefits of this practice was that it held a space for me to stop and listen...this process served to guide me into a two-way conversation."* Doris said, *"I like writing down things. It helps me to purge problems and get off my chest what may help or hinder me in my prayer life."* Terra wrote, *"I'm not sure that journaling this way is in my future for every day. I'm not feeling that dedicated."* Terra thought she might journal during holidays and at Lent.

She said, *“It is a good reminder and [the exercise] really gave me a spiritual boost—it made me feel close to God.”*

Two volunteers declined to journal the process. Maddie, who quit on the first day of the retreat, said she never writes down [private] thoughts, let alone prayers. Ariana said she talks to God all day/every day but doesn't write her conversations down either. Ariana said she doesn't ask God for much. Mostly she prays for her dog, and prays that all the senseless killing in the world will stop.

5) SYNCHRONICITY (meaningful coincidence) BETWEEN PRAYER AND MINISTRY, AND CHANGE AND GROWTH IN FAITH (Appendix F-11, F-12, F-13) was another meaning unit/cluster. Four responded to this meaning unit about meaningful coincidence between the *Spiritual Exercise* and what was happening outside the exercise, and about change and growth identified through this spiritual practice. This is one of the measures of the dissertation project that is discussed in Chapter 6.

Eva saw the synchronicity of *praying scripture with imagination* as “enhancement” of her practice of praying with *Forward Day by Day*. Synchronicity went both ways for her. She said, *Forward Day by Day* recommended reading scripture aloud. *“I tried it”,* she said, *“and found that reading the [exercise] passages aloud after first pausing to reflect on what I wanted to ask of the Lord, helped me to focus even more on what the scripture was saying to me [without] distraction.”*

Doris spoke about the influence of God in scripture over her many lay ministries over the years.

Meriam wrote that praying with imagination Joshua 2:2-9 (Rahab's fateful decision) one morning gave her insight she needed and spoke directly to an impossible decision she had to make that day. She wrote, *“After stillness, my insight was that sometimes hard decisions have to be made, and don't seem 'fair' to all parties involved, but the decision needs to be in the light and will of God. In further conversation, God reminded me to be still and listen before acting, and that we would need to do this together. This led me to spend time 'listening' to the whole situation making a tough decision, and acting on it in light of God's will. God helped me to acknowledge the difficulty this would cause one party, having compassion, but a firm boundary with my decision.”*

Andrea wrote extensively about synchronicity. She said, *“I think the practice of deliberately listening for God’s voice in a conversation instead of merely talking has indeed added a dimension to my relationship with Him...Getting to know another requires time together and an exchange of information.”* She added, *“The insight coming out of these conversations has come back to me on many occasions. Much of what I felt I was hearing during the prayer sessions addressed the grace requested but on a much broader and deeper level than I think I was expecting.”*

6) FEELING PEACE/CLOSENESS TO GOD (Appendix F-14) was another meaning unit/cluster. Six volunteers responded to this meaning unit about closeness to God. Doris wrote, *“The [Advent Retreat] experience was very beneficial. I really did remain happier, calmer, and more focused during the holiday season. It simplified my life and kept my priorities straight during a potentially crazy time”* In another context the same volunteer said that her heart’s desire was to maintain and gain closeness to God, a closeness she didn’t always feel. Eva wrote, *“Following the steps of praying scripture with imagination over the past six weeks has led me to feel greater intimacy with God.”* Rylee said, *“Sometimes I just crawl up in God’s lap – ‘Abba/Father’. He heard what I had to say and spoke back.”* Andrea shared, *“I think the practice of deliberately listening for God’s voice in a conversation instead of merely talking has indeed added a dimension to my relationship with him.”* Meriam wrote, *“As my relationship with God has been refreshed, I am definitely interested in a one-on-one spiritual direction, and very interested in a prayer retreat. Thank you, again, for the gift of praying scripture with imagination.”*

Ariana had a different point of view about intimacy with God: *“I think God is indifferent,”* she said. *“Not only is God indifferent (because he gave everybody free will), he is also impartial. He does not interfere with outcome – it is up to you whether you want to take care of yourself.”*

7) TO CONTINUE PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH IMAGINATION IN THE FUTURE (Appendix F-15) was the final meaning unit/cluster. Four volunteers contributed to this meaning unit. And these four were the most present to the process of *praying scripture with imagination* as it was presented. Four out of thirteen is perhaps significant information for the conclusion of the dissertation project.

Three of the four expressed the desire to continue in the future, one-on-one with a spiritual director. Eva said, *"I expect to continue the practice I have learned so far and hope to build on it in the future."* She expressed interest in exploring other spiritual practices, and attending prayer retreats at St. Luke's, or at Jesuit or Benedictine retreat houses. Andrea said, *"I would very much like to continue using this process. I don't know that I will use it daily in place of my regular prayer time, but I think I will use it at least once a week or more...this was the first guided process I have ever used for prayer and I feel that it has been beneficial."* Andrea would also be interested in other spiritual practices and retreats. Meriam thanked me for introducing praying scripture with imagination. *"I love this practice!"* She wrote, *"I've continued using it daily, and it has truly been a blessing in my life. I'm amazed that whatever is on my mind, the selected text speaks to it, and prompts conversation with God. In the last few [weeks] there have been only a couple of occasions where the conversation was, 'Sorry, God, I've got nothing here.' Other than these couple of occasions, every prayer session has been extremely fruitful."* Terra, who identified the process as conversation with God in her unconscious, said *"I'm not sure that journaling in this way is in my future for every day. I'm not feeling that dedicated."* But she said praying scripture with imagination gave her a spiritual boost.

#### *MATTERS OF METHODOLOGY REVISITED*

*"In our present social context, a relationship of mutual exploration and reflective consideration of options may be possible between pastor and people, facilitating greater freedom and honesty on both sides."*—Charles Gerkin <sup>4</sup>

The *Spiritual Exercise* process became a mutual exploration between retreatants and the researcher/priest. She was an interpretive guide, who presented the process of *praying scripture with imagination* to retreatants on the first day. She along with volunteers did the spiritual exercises, exploring Christian Spirituality at St. Luke's together. <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>. Charles Gerkin, *Widening the Horizons, Pastoral Responses to a Fragmented Society* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1986), 99.

<sup>5</sup>. Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology, An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 19.

Even though an intentional design for the project was presented in the retreat booklet, as noted earlier, the Advent Retreat design became an emergent process. For example, one volunteer cut the seven-step process down to three steps, and that made a lot of sense. Four of the volunteers integrated Sacred Heart's Ignatian *Spiritual Exercise* process with their own prayer practices using *Forward Day by Day*. One connected *praying scripture with imagination* to Native American dance that she prayed with her Osage tribe as they celebrated the life of a beloved cousin who had died.

Even though the retreat volunteers were self-selecting, their commonality was that they were all well educated, relatively affluent urban/suburban Americans. There was one African-American and one Native-American in the group. Eight of the thirteen volunteers in the group were retired. And the group was socially cohesive, typically meeting most Sundays for worship, coffee hour, and other programs at St. Luke's. Nine of the fifteen original volunteers for the project had leadership roles in the parish.

#### *BRACKETING RESEARCH DESIGN*

One of the presuppositions of the researcher/priest was that it is in the human DNA to want relationship/intimacy with God—that in the school of life humankind is at least goaded by life's vicissitudes and awe into moving into closer contact with the “God within” and/or the transcendent God. Not all of us make it. Contrary to Karl Rahner's supposition explored in Chapter 4, I wonder if it is possible that not all of us even desire or care about relationship with God. Perhaps there are some who don't give God any thought at all. And that may be due to God's economy of personality. Is it possible that some may not be wired by God for intimate relationship with God? (Notice, for example, psychological preferences of the Enneagram and the MBTI in Chapter 3.)

On the other hand, the Lurianic Kabbalists give us another way of looking at God's perceived absence. Author, professor Gottlieb Zornberg, who has opened herself to the Biblical unconscious and deep psychology of the Word, wrote, “*God withdraws the plenitude of His being to make space for a world. God is absent. But He is present in the void itself. His present absence brings to life the absent presence as the basis of communication.*”<sup>6</sup>

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6. Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Murmuring Deep, Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2009), xvii, xix.

In our class discussions during the retreat, I sensed some of the volunteers even feared an intimate relationship with God. There wasn't time at the time to explore the obstacles that grew out of the life experiences of those volunteers. Franciscan Richard Rohr in his on-line meditation suggested that some of us just get stuck in "ripening" to that point. Some have given up trying. Of the eight respondents to the anonymous questionnaire, seven indicated desire for union with God (Appendix G-3). But for many of us, it can seem to be an arduous process that can't be rushed, and may never come to a satisfactory conclusion. Is it possible that for some, God, though eternally present, seems to make God's word and God's self scarce?

*The time is surely coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. — Amos 8:11 NRSV. Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.— 1 Samuel 3:1, NRSV.*

For the purposes of this project, it is helpful to be reminded by Richard Rohr that our Western culture typically isn't tuned into "interiority"—that as a culture we tend to be "spiritually adolescent." Rohr thinks the American church itself may for the most part be spiritually adolescent. Some think that partially accounts for the drift away from main-line Christianity. And spiritual adolescence may account for much of the hopelessness on the American scene today that seeks existential pain relief in drugs and other idolatrous adventures.

*"Through the modern schemas of Jean Piaget,... Eric Erikson, Abraham Maslow, Carol Gilligan, and others, each clarify that there is a clear direction and staging to maturity and therefore to human life...There must be a direction to ripening...An understanding of ripening teaches us the wisdom of timing, love, and patience, and allows us to be wise instead of judgmental...Hinduism teaches that there are four major stages of life: 1) the student, 2) the householder, 3) the forest dweller or hermit (the "retiree" from business as usual), and 4) the beggar or wanderer (the wise or fully enlightened person who is not overly attached to anything and is detached from everything). Western cultures tend to recognize and honor only the first two stages at best. We are an adolescent culture...angry because we do not honor variety, staging, interiority, or depth in most of organized Christianity;...If we do not allow our own ripening, resistance and denial set in. Yet when we surrender to our own natural journey, we find authentic hope, hope that is not identified with outcomes or goals."—Richard Rohr <sup>7</sup>*

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7. Richard Rohr, *Richard Rohr Meditation: Stages of Life* (Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation, Center for Action and Contemplation<@cac.org), August 15, 2018, 1-4.





## **CHAPTER SIX:**

### *The Act of Ministry: Ignatian Spiritual Exercise Process at St. Luke's*

#### *STEPS AND PROCEDURES OF ANALYSIS*

*Starting with honesty about self engaging the spiritual exercise process.*

#### *EVALUATION OF INTERPRETIVE CLUSTERS*

*Significant statements, meaning and meaning units with descriptions, perspectives, relationships, and tensions of participants in the study.*

#### *COMPOSITE DESCRIPTION*

*Textural and structural descriptive essence of the dissertation project.*

#### *HIGH FLIGHT*



## **CHAPTER SIX:**

### *The Act of Ministry: Ignatian Spiritual Exercise Process at St. Luke's*

*It was the last Friday of the month in Section D of the county jail. Ten male offenders had gathered in the contact room at the end of the day for Christian Worship/St. Elizabeth's. Liturgy of the Word featured John 15:15—"I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from the Father. You did not choose me but I chose you." And the familiar John 3:16 told us that we are so loved by the Father that the Father sent his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him would be clear about that love and may not perish but have eternal life."This is the truth Jesus brought from the Father" I said. "Do you believe it?"*

*During the group homily that followed, not everyone believed they were loved by God. Not everyone believed they could be friends with God. Several were sure they deserved the wrath of God. Three offenders in the group began to talk about a religious class they had attended earlier that week. It was a county jail version of Jonathan Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." They shared terrifying vivid images of hell as a real place that they could believe was a likely destination for all of them. One offender said that given his lifestyle and all the hurt that landed him in the county jail, he was sure that he would be cast into hell because that was what he deserved. One said their teacher quoted another source that said, "Nothing keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God." Some weren't so sure that they could convince Jesus that they had mended their ways so they might be saved. One wasn't sure it was possible to mend his ways. He thought God's wrath toward him was inevitable.*

*I asked, "How would it be if we thought of ourselves as God's beloved instead—at least friends chosen by God as Jesus said in the text tonight—friends instead of God's cursed and damned? How would it be if we thought of hell merely as a trip we lay on ourselves—not as a loving God's wrathful punishment of humankind?" After a thoughtful silence, an incredulous offender replied, "I am going to hedge my bets on that, and take both ways of thinking seriously."*

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*"Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you (1 Corinthians 3:16, NRSV)? This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you (John 14:17, NRSV)."*

*Self-talk was a recurring concern of volunteers for the Advent Retreat. They worried that self-talk was superseding conversation with the risen Lord, praying scripture with imagination. Debra said, "I can't imagine a God I can talk to." Willow wrote, "Sometimes in two-way conversation in prayer, I wonder why I am thinking that." Andrea said, "I question—is this me or am I interfering in what I'm hearing?" Eva evaluated the experience: "God's mind is different, so I am sometimes suspicious of what I think I am hearing."*

*Self-talk was/is an issue for me too. The retreat booklet counseled the retreatant to continue referencing scripture to better hear what Jesus in the text is saying, and to note the context of the text, and read scripture with a theology of love.*

*Carl Jung challenged the analytic empirical Western mind to venture into the deeper*

*wisdom of the unconscious mind. Jung thought God within is accessible through the unconscious—even in self-talk, in dreams, and in our imaginations. Jung thought the unconscious mind was a window into our true selves (our souls), and into the wisdom of that trustworthy, yet wild and unpredictable Spirit of God where (as Sigmund Freud said), “The ego is not master in his own house”.*

### *STEPS AND PROCEDURES OF ANALYSIS*

*Starting with honesty about self engaging the Spiritual Exercise process.*

Professor/author John Creswell, whose steps and procedures of analysis I am using for this chapter, wrote : *The researcher begins with a full description of his or her own experience of the phenomenon. This is an attempt to set aside the researcher’s personal experiences (which cannot be done entirely) so that the focus can be directed to the participants in the study.*—John Creswell<sup>1</sup>

My faithfulness to the practice of *falling in love with God/praying scripture with imagination* has been as sporadic as that of many of the volunteers in the project. Faithfulness to the process depends upon life’s demands on time and attention. And much of that (for myself and for them) centered around roles—in work, in family and in the church. What was meaningful and enduring for me in practicing the *Spiritual Exercises* (as they were presented to me) has been *falling in love with God*, and trusting God in that love affair. And that has been enduring and integral to my ministries inside and beyond the church. As expressed in an earlier chapter, when life starts to get complicated and beyond my ability to love God’s people, and/or God’s world, I hear the Lord ask, “Want talk about that?” Then I write down the desire of my heart, go to the assigned Lectionary reading, and engage Jesus in conversation with the text. It has never lost its relevance to my life as it is being lived in that moment. And that has driven my passion for passing *Spiritual Exercises* on to as many folks as possible.

Having said that, my default prayer practice is much more “apophatic,” and that is about letting go (as much as possible) of inner dialog and whatever else has a grip on me at the time (including the consoling stuff like desire, and elation and joy), surrendering to God in the silence of Centering Prayer. That is a constant prayer practice for me—showing up and trusting the Mystery—the

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1. John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 159.

Beloved in the love affair. But whether it is contemplation or colloquy (quoting Doris, a retreat volunteer), “There is no certainty and no control in what we are doing here.”

*EVALUATION OF INTERPRETIVE CLUSTERS*  
*Significant statements, meaning and meaning units with descriptions, perspectives,*  
*relationships, and tensions of participants in the study.*

What follows in this chapter, using hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, is the exploration of how the loving God is at work in the silence and in the colloquies of volunteers for the Advent Retreat/*Spiritual Exercise* project at St. Luke’s. Research strategy was a field study of St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, that presented the process and gathered narratives about the experience from 15 volunteers involved in group and individual engagement with Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*. (*Spiritual Exercises* are *praying scripture with imagination*.) Narratives emerging from the *Spiritual Exercises* process were shared with the group and shared in written form with permission to be published. These narratives were referenced in Chapter 5. And they are categorized into seven groups—“interpretive clusters” or “meaning units” in Chapter 6.

This chapter is qualitative inquiry that also quantifies (as much as is possible) cumulative responses offered by nine volunteers from the group. Verbatim accounts are referenced again in this chapter in a condensed form. (The original not-condensed narratives are found in Appendix F.)

Meaning units were formed by clustering volunteers’ experiences with the project. They were intended to be spontaneous, but in reality they were clustered by volunteers in response to *Sample Feedback Questions to Consider* (Appendix E) provided by the researcher/priest. Some meaning units merited more response than others—another example of *emergent design* in process.

The sample feedback questions drove the narratives and hence the meaning units. They questioned the “why” of volunteering for the dissertation project and the Advent Retreat. They questioned information about preexisting prayer practices, and time and place where prayer is practiced. There were sample questions about what worked and what didn’t work in *Spiritual Exercises*, and what could be improved. There were questions about journaling and praying the *Spiritual Exercises* process outlined in the Advent Retreat booklet. There were questions that compared group experiences on Sunday with individual prayer experiences during the week.

Inspired by the *Sample Feedback Questions*, narratives clustered around the experience of friendship/deeper intimacy/trust in God, the effect of the *Spiritual Exercise* prayer practice on relationships, coincidences between scripture and life and spirituality and ministry. Prospects for *praying scripture with imagination* in the future, and obstacles and hopes for that process also emerged from *Sample Feedback Questions*. Nine volunteers also offered feedback on the anonymous form from page 11 of the retreat booklet (Appendix B-11) that solicited feedback before and after the Advent Retreat. Feedback from the anonymous form is addressed qualitatively and quantitatively in this chapter. Graphic charting of all of the anonymous response data is found in Appendix G1-G4.

Chapter 5 touched on significant statements from the group and “structural descriptions:” the “how” of the experience, including the setting/context in which the phenomenon was experienced by volunteers *praying scripture with imagination* during the five weeks of the Advent Retreat meeting in the Library as a group at St. Luke’s. This chapter (Chapter 6) gets to the essence of phenomenological inquiry, exploring *textural* (what happened) and again *structural* descriptions (the how of what happened) with speculative analysis of what that might mean—interpretation—the hermeneutic of the experience by the researcher/priest.

John Creswell’s process of phenomenological analysis and representation is the task of this chapter that abbreviates and organizes thematically, the “significant statements” from field testing in Chapter 5 (and Appendix F).

Included in narrative meaning units are three related “after” questions added to the anonymous form by the researcher/priest. Statistical analysis of the questions on the anonymous forms are graphically displayed in Appendix G. The anonymous form (minus the three added questions) is a creation of psychologist Lynn G. Underwood.

Part two of John Creswell’s process of phenomenological analysis and presentation is ending with a composite description of the phenomenon. This tells what happened, and concludes with a speculative interpretive description by the researcher/priest of what happened. <sup>2</sup>

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2. Ibid., Creswell, 159.

MEANING UNITS FROM THE DIALOGUE,  
WITH RELATED RESPONSES FROM THE ANONYMOUS FEEDBACK FORM

MEANING UNIT ONE Phenomenological Inquiry into HOPES FOR THE ADVENT PRAYER RETREAT six verbatim examples	TEXTUAL DESCRIPTION “What Happened” HOPES FOR PRAYER RETREAT	INTERPRETIVE DESCRIPTION “Experience Interpreted” HOPES FOR PRAYER RETREAT
<p><b>Eva:</b> hoped to explore a new spiritual practice, and to see more of the researcher/priest’s spirituality.</p> <p><b>Terra:</b> thought it would be interesting and wanted to help.</p> <p><b>Brianna:</b> had already experienced journaling her thoughts, and that contributed to her interest in the retreat. She said, “This is something I need in my life right now.”</p> <p><b>Doris:</b> “[wanted] to get closer to God ... taking problems to God, and seeing miracles happen.”</p> <p><b>Andrea:</b> “liked having a process... [had] a need to focus attention in prayer. It sets tone for my day.”</p> <p><b>Meriam:</b> said “the process “was a life line.”</p>	<p>a) October 29, after giving a sermon on <i>falling in love with God</i>, an invitation was issued to the congregation (both services) to volunteer for this dissertation project, an Advent Retreat at St. Luke’s. The subject was <i>Falling in Love with God/Praying Scripture with Imagination</i>.</p> <p>b) Three related homilies (Appendix C) preceded the retreat and two related homilies accompanied the retreat (both services) on the days of the retreat.</p> <p>c) Thirteen parishioners attended Advent Retreat the first group meeting on November 12, 2017. (Later two more joined the project from St. Luke’s Contemplative Prayer group.)</p> <p>d) According to the 2017 Parish Survey <sup>3</sup> 62% percent of St. Luke’s parishioners never participate in Adult Education, 15% participate occasionally and 3% participate regularly. Out of a parish of 366 adult members, 15 attendees for the retreat reflected average regular attendance in Adult Education programming at St. Luke’s.</p> <p>e) November 12, the guide booklet to the <i>Spiritual Exercise</i> process was discussed and <i>Spiritual Exercises</i> prayer process was demonstrated and practiced.</p>	<p>a) Several expressed interest in the retreat during coffee hour. Eva attended because she wanted to explore another spiritual practice, and was curious about the researcher/priest’s practice. Terra thought it might be interesting and wanted to help. There were expressions of “historical antecedent”—that is, of meaningful relationships with the researcher/priest, and with each other. Brianna was interested because she had already been journaling the muse in her imagination in a different context.</p> <p>b) The process of <i>Spiritual Exercises</i> was appreciated by two volunteers in this meaning unit. The desire to get closer to God was also expressed in other meaning units. Meriam said the process was “a lifeline.” Andrea said it focused her prayer and set the tone for her day.</p> <p>c) The “microethnography” of the educational culture at St. Luke’s is that Adult Education is typically regular history, archaeology and scripture. Spirituality as such has not been part of the curriculum at St. Luke’s—at least for the last four years. <i>Falling in love with God/praying scripture with imagination</i> was alien to this parish.</p>

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3. Ibid., *St. Luke’s Profile*, Q-II.

## MEANING UNIT TWO

Phenomenological Inquiry into  
SETTING FOR PRAYER  
time and place  
eight verbatim examples

## TEXTUAL DESCRIPTION

“What Happened”  
SETTING FOR PRAYER  
time and place

## INTERPRETIVE DESCRIPTION

“Experience Interpreted”  
SETTING FOR PRAYER  
time and place

**Devon:** “[prays]...at home (with Doris) ...early morning before leaving for work.”

**Doris:** “[prays]...at home (with Devon)...first thing early morning... then *Day-by-Day*<sup>4</sup> with my neighbor.”

**Eva:** “My usual practice is to get up early...go back to bed...read and reflect on the daily readings.”

**Andrea:** “I begin and end each day by briefly checking with God... short prayers throughout the day as well.” Andrea said the den in her basement is her “park bench.” She prefers praying outside in nature.

**Terra:** “I pray in the morning [at home] ... quietly at my dining room table.”

**Ariana:** “God and I have conversations all day long.”

**Willow:** prays with her Osage tribe.

a) Home (bed, dining room, den) —most of the volunteers for the project spoke of special sanctuaries (little altars) in their homes.

b) One reported that nature (“flowing through from other duties in a busy life”) was also a valued setting for prayer and the deepening of her inner life.

c) Early morning was the primary time for prayer for four of the volunteers. But it wasn’t the only time for prayer. Two reported praying throughout the day. An other volunteer liked praying as part of an Osage ceremony.

d) *Forward Day-by-Day* was mentioned by three volunteers as a prayer discipline they already practiced. The experience of using the prayer practice in *Forward Day-by-Day* influenced some volunteers to join the Advent Retreat.

*Forward Day-by-Day* is a guided daily meditation resource booklet distributed to St. Luke’s parishioners for prayer and bible study.

a) The “ecology” of this volunteer group — (their natural behavior) is morning prayer at home before the day begins. Volunteers for the Advent Retreat were already a praying group of parishioners.

b) Two young adult volunteers (mothers)—were the first to volunteer for the project. They spoke about their need for a deeper prayer practice. Both grabbed time for prayer when they could after their families were cared for. They made special efforts to maintain prayer practices and were sometimes critical of themselves for not managing their prayer lives better. They were reminded what Spiritual Director Margaret Guenther said to an overworked, anxious, and “unworthy” young mother—to consider changing diapers as prayer—and at the same time to remember that self-sacrifice is born of maturity, beyond servitude.<sup>5</sup>

c) In addition to the age cluster of five retirees and eight members of the group being parish leaders, the other “Historical Antecedent” in this group was *Forward Day-by-Day* as an existing prayer practice prior to the retreat by four of the volunteers. One of the volunteers claimed it, in the end, as her only prayer practice.

4. Scott Gunn, Executive Director, *Forward Day-by-Day* (Cincinnati, OH: Forward Movement, Quarterly Manuals).

5. Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening, The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Boston MA: Cowley Publications, 1992), 122.



**MEANING UNIT THREE**  
 Phenomenological Inquiry into  
 THE GRACE (DESIRE OF THE  
 HEART), SCRIPTURE, AND GOD  
 ten verbatim examples

**Terra:** “Conversations with God about my heart’s desires [was] a new experience for me...I thought about what I desired...it gave me insight and made me think.”

**Eva:** “Looking for what was on our minds in these readings — naming the grace [in advance] helps.”

**Andrea:** “There were times when the scripture seemed to speak... directly to the grace...other times when it didn’t at all. Much of what I felt I was hearing during the prayer sessions addressed the grace requested but on a much broader and deeper level than ... I was expecting. One day...I asked for grace in understanding what it is to truly follow God.”

**Meriam:** “I liked...having had a meaningful conversation with God and insight and inspiration for whatever was on my heart that morning.”

TEXTUAL DESCRIPTION  
 “What Happened”  
 GRACE, SCRIPTURE, AND GOD

a) This meaning unit contains a *cluster* of meanings, and so it is divided here between the “grace—the heart’s desire” and “scripture—conversation with God” beginning with the heart’s desire.

b) Naming the “grace” (the heart’s desire) is the first step in the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercise* process as it was given to the researcher/priest at Sacred Heart. Three of the ten volunteers that contributed to this meaning unit talked about the grace.

c) Eva thought grace/heart’s desire was a helpful entrée into the scripture readings. Andrea heard scripture speak to the grace—which brought her into an even deeper level of prayer than she was expecting. Meriam took what was on her heart into conversation with God.

INTERPRETIVE DESCRIPTION  
 “Experience Interpreted”  
 GRACE, SCRIPTURE, AND GOD

a) *“The priest desires. The philosopher desires And not to have is the beginning of desire... It knows that what it has is what is not”*  
 —Wallace Stevens <sup>6</sup>

b) The grace/the heart’s desire can be seen as a “Jungian” door to the unconscious in the *Spiritual Exercises*. It is an opening into the mental “in-scape” of the imagination while praying scripture. Jung, in seeking meaning with his clients asked, “what do you want?”

c) There can be tension between the familiarity of the text and that wild and crazy muse in the imagination given free reign in the process.

c) *“In biblical and midrashic texts, God must seduce, because God desires. What He desires cannot ultimately be gained by force...God desires the prayers of the righteous. [And] like human desire, God’s desire cannot be forced.”* <sup>7</sup>

6. Wallace Stevens, “Notes toward a Supreme Fiction.” quoted by Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire, Reflections on Genesis* (New York: An Image Book/Doubleday, 1995), xv.

7. Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Murmuring Deep, Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious* (New York: Schocken Books/Random House, 2009), 28, 29.

### MEANING UNIT THREE

Phenomenological Inquiry into  
THE GRACE (DESIRE OF THE  
HEART), SCRIPTURE, AND GOD  
ten verbatim examples

**Andrea:** “I question—is this me or am I interfering in what I am hearing [in the text]? Sometimes what I am hearing is...on a broader and deeper level...comes back to what really matters...Sometimes I get important information and solve problems in my dreams.”

**Debra:** “Struggling with doubt, I can’t imagine a God I can talk to. Friendships demand time, commitment and a lot of attention.”

**Willow:** “The dialogue can be hit or miss...in two-way conversation in prayer, I wonder why I am thinking that...I note if I am hearing a question or a suggestion: ‘Are you going to follow me?’...a different feel [the message is] in the delivery.”

**Eva:** “God’s mind is different, so I am sometimes suspicious of what I think I am hearing.”

**Doris:** “Sometimes scripture helps, other times not so much...but it always gives me fruit for thought.”

**Devon:** “My concerns and thoughts fit the scripture.”

**Eva:** “[Reading scripture aloud, I am] more likely to process it...hear it...reflect on it.”

TEXTUAL DESCRIPTION  
“What Happened”  
GRACE, SCRIPTURE, AND GOD

a) Andrea, Debra, Willow and Eva spoke to the tension between God-talk and self-talk in *praying scripture with imagination*. Andrea added that she gets important information and solutions to her problems in her dreams (the unconscious beyond praying scripture with imagination). Eva’s analytical mind wants to think responsibly about the hazards of hearing “God” in the unconscious. Willow was interested in the nuances of her dialogue—tone of voice in how we hear textual questions that come to mind.

b) For Doris, Devon, and Eva the exercise of *praying scripture with imagination* may have been a “head trip” with the text (which is the way scripture is read and taught at St. Luke’s, and it is the first two steps of the *Spiritual Exercises* process—reading the text and writing down insight about it). These three volunteers didn’t mention entering into conversation with Jesus in the text.

INTERPRETIVE DESCRIPTION  
“Experience Interpreted”  
GRACE, SCRIPTURE, AND GOD

a) “*Then he [Jesus] called the crowd again and said to them, ‘Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come.’*”  
—Mark 7:21-23 NRSV.

There was good reason for volunteers to be leery of self-talk in conversation with Jesus. The retreatant was counseled to reference the text (biblical guidance) to hear Jesus’ voice in the conversation, and to enter the scene in the text (as Ignatius would counsel)—in order to hear the Spirit speak (from the unconscious). Editorial comment: “This was a courageous act on the part of volunteers.”

b) Wrestling with doubt, suspicion, conviction and commission may be what Thomas Keating calls unloading (“letting go” of) outdated programming of the unconscious. Dismantling the “false self” is a goal of Centering Prayer.<sup>8</sup>

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8. Thomas Keating, *Open Mind Open Heart, The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1986), 72.

**MEANING UNIT THREE**  
 Phenomenological Inquiry into  
 THE GRACE (DESIRE OF THE  
 HEART), SCRIPTURE, AND GOD  
 (continued)

TEXTUAL DESCRIPTION  
 “What Happened”  
 GRACE, SCRIPTURE, AND GOD  
 (continued)

INTERPRETIVE DESCRIPTION  
 “Experience Interpreted”  
 GRACE, SCRIPTURE, AND GOD  
 (continued)

**Terra:** “I focused on the scripture and what it was saying to me. With... guidance,...it made this task easy...I really appreciated having readings listed...for direction and exposure to different parts of the bible.”

**Meriam:** “I liked...having had a meaningful conversation with God... insight and inspiration [about] what was on my heart that morning.”

**Debra:** “[I was] struggling with doubt...I can’t imagine a God I can talk to. Friendships demand time, commitment and a lot of attention.”

**Brianna:** “Praying [scripture] this way is about trust. And sometimes there are things you don’t want to hear...some days I didn’t get into it. Sometimes I struggled with the text.”

**Nova:** “This process is too hard.”

c) Terra and Meriam referenced *praying scripture with imagination* as spelled out in the retreat booklet—that it made the task easier, and it made conversation with God about what was on the heart possible.

d) Debra, Brianna, and Nova shared their reticence to *praying scripture with imagination*—about doubt, demand on time and attention, trust, difficulty of the process, and resistance to engaging texts that made uncomfortable demands on them.

e) Debra dropped out of the Sunday group early in the retreat because it demanded more attention and commitment than she was able to give.

f) Nova dropped out of the Sunday group after the first meeting of the retreat. For Nova *praying scripture with imagination* was too hard.

c) *Spiritual Exercises* engaged the lived experiences of volunteers as they hoped to enter into a deeper intimacy with God. Whether or not they were conscious of Jung’s interpretation of the process, according to Jung they were engaging in reconciliation of the conscious and the unconscious as they prayed the text.

d) Like praying the Psalms, *Spiritual Exercises* can touch upon “the anatomy” of the soul—with all of its joys and vicissitudes. Ideally, this exercise helps to get real about how it is for us. Not everyone is ready to go there. It can be a painful enterprise that not everyone is ready to engage in. Others were “getting real” praying other processes.

e) Debra was right to equate commitment to *Spiritual Exercises* (meeting the Lord every day *on the park bench*) as the kind of commitment required to maintaining any friendship. That was an important insight that she offered to the group on the first day of the retreat—a commitment she couldn’t make at this time.

## MEANING UNIT FOUR

Phenomenological Inquiry into  
PRAYER, JOURNALING AND GOD  
eight verbatim examples

## TEXTUAL DESCRIPTION

“What Happened”  
PRAYER, JOURNALING AND GOD

## INTERPRETIVE DESCRIPTION

“Experience Interpreted”  
PRAYER, JOURNALING AND GOD

**Terra:** “I ‘m often the skeptic in the conversation, but [I know] the good of God persists.”

**Eva:** “While I had no problem writing my answers...in the group setting, I could not get myself to set pen to paper even once at home.”

**Andrea:** “Journaling my conversation with God was completely new to me...it held a space for me to stop and listen. This process served to guide me into a two-way conversation.” “I didn’t always know where I was going, and ended up with some pretty distinct insights at times.”

**Meriam:** “This process allows me to stay in conversation with God throughout the day, throughout my life.”

**Ariana:** “I have a conversation with God most every day...”

**Maddie:** “There are some things that [I] don’t write down.. Conversation with scripture is beyond my ability.”

**Doris:** “I like writing things down. It helps me to purge problems and get off my chest what may help or hinder me in my prayer life.”

**Devon:** “ I have to give myself time to think about it. I get stubborn sometimes. God says ‘you’ve got your answer.’ And sometimes the answer is ‘no.’”

a) Andrea was the only volunteer who referred specifically to *journaling*. Eva, Maddie and Doris spoke of *writing*. *Conversation* was mentioned by Terra, Andrea, Meriam, Ariana, and Maddie.

b) Eva, Andrea, Meriam, Doris and Devon touched upon the process of conversation with God via scripture, (if only in the group setting). For some, like Devon, conversation with God was a thinking process rather than a writing process. Devon didn’t mention scripture, though he spoke about going into deep conversation with God. Devon was not a stranger to wrestling with God.

c) Terra and Ariana didn’t write the conversation down, but claimed to be in conversation with God and God’s goodness every day anyway.

d) Maddie opted out of the process altogether. She dropped out of the retreat after the first meeting. Journaling private thoughts was too risky for her.

a) Cultural context—naturalistic inquiry (NI) of the Advent Retreat group revealed that *praying scripture with imagination* was a new experience for all of the volunteers.

b) Ecological Inquiry (EI) (the relationship of volunteers to the process) revealed ubiquitous resistance to writing down conversation with Jesus *praying scripture with imagination*. This was in addition to the ecology of busyness and distraction hindering this prayer practice for many volunteers.

c) For Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*—as well as Carl Jung, Ira Progoff and others, journaling is a tool to access the psyche, the unconscious—deeper parts of ourselves. The five-week retreat leading up to the busy Christmas season was likely not enough time to settle into accessing deeper parts of the psyche.

d) What may be a hindrance for some in accessing the psyche is fear of the “shadow” (the dark side)—that it can take over the “conversation” with Jesus, the Beloved. While engaging the shadow can lead to a transformational awakening, too much rumination on the dark side might point to the common sense of Maddie, who opted out of the process altogether. On the other hand, courageously challenging the dark side might render the surprise of God’s embrace through it all!

## MEANING UNIT FIVE

Phenomenological Inquiry into  
SYNCHRONICITY/MEANINGFUL  
COINCIDENCES IN MINISTRY,  
CHANGE/GROWTH IN FAITH  
four verbatim examples

**Eva:** “*Forward Day-by-Day*... spoke of the blessing of reading scripture aloud and recommended the practice. I tried it and found that reading the passages aloud, after first pausing to reflect on [the grace] helped me even more to focus on what scripture was saying to me about distraction.”

“Sometimes I have reflected on what transpired in prayer when I am involved in other activities during the day and, I think, that has influence my behavior towards others on the tasks I am performing.”

“I’m thinking of the Sufis — ‘*happiness is submission to God.*’”

**Meriam:** “...I had a difficult decision to make...the text that morning was Joshua 2:2-9... God reminded me [in the text] to be still and listen before acting. This led to spending time “listening” to the whole situation, making a tough decision and acting on it in light of God’s will. God helped me to acknowledge the difficulty this would cause one party, having compassion, but a firm boundary with my decision.”

**Andrea:** “Sometimes I get important information and solve problems in dreams.”

TEXTUAL DESCRIPTION  
“What Happened”  
SYNCHRONICITY AND CHANGE

a) Eva discovered meaningful coincidence between the suggestions to reading scripture aloud in *Forward Day-by-Day* and Ed Kinerk’s recommendation in the guide book to read scripture aloud in praying the *Spiritual Exercises*.

b) Both Eva and Meriam noticed meaningful coincidences in their daily lives *praying scripture with imagination*. They noted the effect of *Spiritual Exercises* on their lived experiences.

c) While it isn’t synchronicity *per se*, both Andrea and Meriam assigned difficult decisions and problem-solving dreams to the conscious/unconscious dialogue.

INTERPRETIVE DESCRIPTION  
“Experience Interpreted”  
SYNCHRONICITY AND CHANGE

a) Jungians are fond of saying that there are no coincidences, that even seemingly random events like Eva’s linking of *Forward Day-by-Day* and the *Spiritual Exercises*, can be an expression of a deeper order. In both Eva’s and Meriam’s cases there was a certain “intellectual intuition” at work, a “**causal** parallelism,” between two events connected by meaning.<sup>9</sup>

b) Eva’s thinking about the Sufis belief *that happiness is submission to God* can lend itself to a meaningful coincidence of “**acausal** connecting,” (non-reproducible connecting through meaning) which is what Jung had in mind as synchronicity.<sup>10</sup>

c) According to Jung, synchronicity is based on symbolism. And symbols create meaning. Symbols point to the unknown. Meriam took the symbolism of the Joshua story—Rahab’s living faith—into the unknown of her difficult decision. The synchronicity of this exercise—conversation with God in the text—appeared in her lived experience outside of prayer. It was transformational. It was a meaningful coincidence. Both Andrea’s dreams and Meriam’s solution originated as they processed dilemmas in their lives.

9. Richard Tarnas, *Cosmos and Psyche* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), 50.

10. Carl Jung, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973) 8.

## MEANING UNIT FIVE

Phenomenological Inquiry into  
SYNCHRONICITY/MEANINGFUL  
COINCIDENCES IN MINISTRY,  
CHANGE/GROWTH IN FAITH  
(continued)

**Doris:** "I have tried to use my talents not so much in the church, but in the world... I think the bible reminds us these are our duties as Christians to use our talents and abilities to build up His kingdom."

## TEXTUAL DESCRIPTION

"What Happened"  
SYNCHRONICITY AND CHANGE  
(continued)

c) Doris, in looking back on her many years of service to the church, to ministry outside the church, to God, and the study of scripture through it all, wrote about her lifetime of faithfulness to the Word of God, to God and God's people. Doris didn't speak of any particular synchronicity in her narrative. It is possible that meaningful coincidences were normalized in her experience. Meaningful coincidences seemed to be "the fractals" – the repeated unifying patterns of the random events of her life.

## INTERPRETIVE DESCRIPTION

"Experience Interpreted"  
SYNCHRONICITY AND CHANGE  
(continued)

d) Doris's faithfulness to the Word of God over her lifetime must have opened for her a world of possibilities because of the ubiquitousness of symbolism in all those stories in the bible that were ever present in her life.

e) Eva, Meriam and Doris engaged the "Symbolic Interactionist Perspective" of social science, by using biblical symbolism to create meaning for their lives.

f) All four women made themselves available to the unconscious in *praying scripture with imagination*. They expanded their mindsets beyond their rational worlds by opening their inner lives to the mystery of God.

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FROM THE ANONYMOUS FEEDBACK **AFTER** THE RETREAT: 9 volunteers responded (Appendix G-4)  
SYNCHRONICITY/MEANINGFUL COINCIDENCES IN MINISTRY, CHANGE/GROWTH IN FAITH  
(Questions 16, 17, 18 below were additions to the anonymous questionnaire by the researcher/priest.)

**16) *I experience God speaking God's word (in praying scripture with imagination) reoccur again during the day. SIX RESPONDED "REOCCUR"***

0 responded "Many times a day".

**5 responded "Every day" – 56 %**

**1 responded "Most days" – 11%**

1 responded "Some days" – 11%

0 responded "Once in a while".

2 responded "Never or almost never" – 22%

**17) *I discover myself being God's instrument in loving and caring for others since I have started praying scripture with imagination. 5 RESPONDED.***

**1 responded "Many times a day" – 11.1%**

**4 responded "Every day" – 44.4%**

0 responded "Most days".

2 responded "Some days" – 22%

0 responded "Once in a while".

2 responded "Never or almost never" – 22%

*s. blake, Chapter 6, page 108*

## MEANING UNIT SIX

Phenomenological Inquiry into  
FEELING PEACE/CLOSENESS TO  
GOD, six verbatim examples

TEXTUAL DESCRIPTION  
“What Happened”  
PEACE/CLOSENESS TO GOD

INTERPRETIVE DESCRIPTION  
“Experience Interpreted”  
PEACE/CLOSENESS TO GOD

**Doris:** Doris said the praying the *Spiritual Exercises* kept her calmer and more focused during Advent – simplifying her life.

**Eva:** “Following the steps of *praying scripture with imagination...* has led me to feel greater intimacy with God.”

**Andrea:** “Deliberately listening for God’s voice in conversation instead of merely talking has indeed added a dimension to my relationship with Him.”

**Meriam:** “My relationship with God has been refreshed.”

**Terra:** “[This prayer practice] is a good reminder and really gave me a spiritual boost—it made me feel close to God.”

**Rylee:** “Sometimes I just crawl up in God’s lap – *abba/father*. He heard what I had to say and spoke back. For the last two days nothing came to me. *Forward Day-by-Day* told me who God is.”

**Ariana:** “I think God is indifferent. Not only is God indifferent (because he gave everybody free will), he is also impartial. He [God] doesn’t interfere with outcome – it’s up to you whether you want to take care of yourself.”

a) The prayer process kept Doris calmer and more focused during Advent. The retreat simplified her life. For Doris the process on this particular day seemed more therapeutic than relational.

b) Eva, Andrea, Meriam and Terra reported a deeper relationship/intimacy with God in *praying scripture with imagination*.

c) Rylee, while faithfully present in the group, talked about her prayer practice with *Forward Day-by-Day* during the week.

d) Ariana was the skeptic in the group who thought free will accounted for the occurrences in her life, and God is indifferent to the consequences of that.

As referenced in Chapter 5, *Tzimzum* (Hebrew) is what Kabbalists call God’s withdrawal for the creation of space for free will and human creativity. It is an act of generosity and love on God’s part.

a) “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.*” Proverbs 3:5, NRSV. Trust is job one for those seeking intimacy with God. Doris, Eva, Andrea, Meriam, Terra, Rylee’s relationships with God were made possible by trust in God. And their insights were born out of that trust.

b) “*Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Hebrews 4:14-16). It was with boldness that volunteers *prayed scripture with imagination*. And in doing so, they got closer to God.

c) Though Rylee didn’t warm up to the *Spiritual Exercises*, she was already in love with God, praying *Forward Day-by-Day*.

d) I wondered if Ariana was also thinking about God in the divine Book of Nature who is seemingly indifferent to the inevitability of life and death all around us, to the foolishness of challenging gravity—indifferent to the movement of tectonic plates—indifferent to those who live by, and (therefore) die by the sword (Matthew 26:52, KJV).

e) *But ask in faith, for the one who doubts is like a wave, driven and tossed by the wind.* (James 1:6, NSRV).”

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FROM ANONYMOUS FEEDBACK AFTER THE RETREAT: (nine volunteers responded), Appendix G-4  
FEELING PEACE/CLOSENESS TO GOD

**18) In general, how close do you feel to God? SIX RESPONDED TO “CLOSE”**

0 responded “Not at all”  
 3 responded “Somewhat”— 33.3%  
**4 responded “Very close” — 44.4%**  
**2 responded “As close as possible” — 22.2%**

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<b>MEANING UNIT SEVEN</b> Phenomenological Inquiry into CONTINUING <i>SPIRITUAL EXERCISES</i> four verbatim examples	TEXTUAL DESCRIPTION “What Happened” CONTINUING <i>SPIRITUAL EXERCISES</i>	INTERPRETIVE DESCRIPTION “Experience Interpreted” CONTINUING <i>SPIRITUAL EXERCISES</i>
<p><b>Eva:</b> “I expect to continue the prayer practice ... and hope to build on it in the future.”</p> <p><b>Andrea:</b> “I would like...to continue using this process. I don’t know that I will use it daily in place of my regular prayer time. I will use it at least once a week if not more. This is the first guided process I have ever used for prayer, and I feel that it has been beneficial.”</p> <p><b>Terra:</b> “I’m not sure that journaling this way is in my future for every day. I’m not feeling that dedicated.” Terra said she would possibly <i>pray scripture with imagination</i> during special times of the church year like Christmas or Lent.</p> <p><b>Meriam:</b> “I love this practice! I’ve continued using it daily, and it has truly been a blessing in my life.”</p>	<p>a) Eva, Andrea, Terra, and Meriam seem to have been the four left standing out of nine to answer this final question after five weeks of <i>praying scripture with imagination</i>.</p> <p>b) Andrea intends to integrate the <i>Spiritual Exercises</i> into her regular prayer time.</p> <p>c) Terra, who was journaling <i>The Artist’s Way</i>, is used to listening to the muse in her unconscious and trusts that as a resource for her life.</p> <p>d) Meriam celebrated the way <i>praying scripture with imagination</i> manifested in her life beyond the prayer. She was open to more synchronistic encounters in the future.</p>	<p>a) These four “<i>approached the throne of grace with boldness</i>” from the start—each in her own way: Eva with reason and surrender (expanding beyond her rational mind). Andrea was captivated by all the Lord had to say to her when she stopped talking and started listening. Terra was wise to messages from the Lord that she independently attributed to her unconscious. Meriam shared her story about scripture speaking to her lived experience.</p> <p>b) For Meriam symbolism in the Rahab story in Joshua held the power to bring order to the complexity of her life.</p>



1) ***I feel God's presence.***

**5 BEFORE...7 AFTER**

**BEFORE THE RETREAT:**

0 responded "Many times a day"  
**3 responded "Every day" — 33.3%**  
**2 responded "Most days" — 22.2%**  
2 responded "Some days" — 22.2%  
2 responded "Once in a while" — 22.2%  
0 responded "Never or almost never"

**AFTER THE RETREAT:**

**3 responded "Many times a day" — 33.3%**  
**3 responded "Every day" — 33.3 %**  
**1 responded "Most days" — 11.1%**  
1 responded "Some days" — 11.1%  
1 responded "Once in a while" — 11.1%  
0 responded "Never or almost never"

---

2) ***I experience a connection to all of life.***

**5 BEFORE...6 AFTER**

**BEFORE THE RETREAT:**

0 responded "Many times a day" —  
**1 responded "Every day" — 11.1%**  
**4 responded "Most days" — 44.4%**  
2 responded "Some days" — 22.2%  
1 responded "Once in a while" — 22.2%  
1 responded "Never or almost never"

**AFTER THE RETREAT:**

0 responded "Many times a day"  
**5 responded "Every day" — 56 %**  
**1 responded "Most days" — 11.1%**  
1 responded "Some days" — 11.1%  
2 responded "Once in a while" — 22.2%  
0 responded "Never or almost never"

---

3) ***During worship or at other times when connecting with God, I feel joy which lifts me out of my daily concerns.***

**4 BEFORE...6 AFTER**

**BEFORE THE RETREAT:**

0 responded "Many times a day"  
**2 responded "Every day" — 22.2%**  
**3 responded "Most days" — 33.3%**  
1 responded "Some days" — 11.1%  
3 responded "Once in a while" — 33.3%  
0 responded "Never or almost never"

**AFTER THE RETREAT:**

0 responded "Many times a day"  
**5 responded "Every day" — 56 %**  
**1 responded "Most days" — 11.1%**  
1 responded "Some days" — 11.1%  
2 responded "Once in a while" — 22.2%  
0 responded "Never or almost never"

---

4) ***I find strength in my religion or spirituality.***

**5 BEFORE...7 AFTER**

**BEFORE THE RETREAT:**

**1 responded "Many times a day" — 11%**  
**3 responded "Every day" — 33%**  
**1 responded "Most days" — 11%**  
3 responded "Some days" — 33%  
1 responded "Once in a while" — 11%  
0 responded "Never or almost never"

**AFTER THE RETREAT:**

**2 responded "Many times a day" — 22.2%**  
**4 responded "Every day" — 44.4 %**  
**1 responded "Most days" — 11.1%**  
1 responded "Some days" — 11.1%  
1 responded "Once in a while" — 11.1%  
0 responded "Never or almost never"

---

5) ***I find comfort in my religion or spirituality.*** **7 BEFORE...8 AFTER**

**BEFORE THE RETREAT:**

**1** responded “Many times a day” – 11%  
**4** responded “Every day” – 44.4%  
**2** responded “Most days” – 22.2%  
1 responded “Some days” – 11.1%  
1 responded “Once in a while” – 11.1%  
0 responded “Never or almost never”

**AFTER THE RETREAT:**

**3** responded “Many times a day” – 33.3%  
**3** responded “Every day” – 33.3 %  
**2** responded “Most days” – 22.2%  
0 responded “Some days”  
1 responded “Once in a while” – 11.1%  
0 responded “Never or almost never”

6) ***I feel deep inner peace or harmony.*** **6 BEFORE...8 AFTER**

**BEFORE THE RETREAT:**

0 responded “Many times a day”  
**1** responded “Every day” – 11.1%  
**5** responded “Most days” – 55.5=56%  
2 responded “Some days” – 22.2%  
1 responded “Once in a while” – 11.1%  
0 responded “Never or almost never”

**AFTER THE RETREAT:**

0 responded “Many times a day”  
**2** responded “Every day” – 22.2 %  
**6** responded “Most days” – 66.6 = 67%  
0 responded “Some days”  
1 responded “Once in a while” – 11.1%  
0 responded “Never or almost never”

7) ***I ask for God’s help in the midst of daily activities.*** **4 BEFORE...7 AFTER**

**BEFORE THE RETREAT:**

**2** responded “Many times a day” – 22.2%  
**2** responded “Every day” – 22.2%  
0 responded “Most days”  
4 responded “Some days” – 44.4%  
0 responded “Once in a while”  
1 responded “Never or almost never” – 11%

**AFTER THE RETREAT:**

**3** responded “Many times a day” – 33.3%  
**3** responded “Every day” – 33.3 %  
**1** responded “Most days” – 11.1%  
1 responded “Some days” – 11.1%  
0 responded “Once in a while”  
1 responded “Never or almost never” – 11.1%

8) ***I feel guided by God in the midst of daily activities.*** **4 BEFORE...6 AFTER**

**BEFORE THE RETREAT:**

0 responded “Many times a day”  
**4** responded “Every day” – 44.4%  
0 responded “Most days”  
1 responded “Some days” – 11.1%  
3 responded “Once in a while” – 33.3%  
1 responded “Never or almost never” – 11.1%

**AFTER THE RETREAT:**

**2** responded “Many times a day” – 22.2%  
**4** responded “Every day” – 44.4 %  
0 responded “Most days”  
2 responded “Some days” – 22.2%  
0 responded “Once in a while”  
1 responded “Never or almost never” – 11.1%

---

9) *I feel God's love for me directly.*

**7 BEFORE...7 AFTER**

**BEFORE THE RETREAT:**

**1** responded "Many times a day"— 11.1%  
**3** responded "Every day" — 33.3%  
**3** responded "Most days" — 33.3%  
0 responded "Some days"  
0 responded "Once in a while"  
2 responded "Never or almost never"— 22.2

**AFTER THE RETREAT:**

**2** responded "Many times a day"— 22.2%  
**3** responded "Every day" — 33.3%  
**2** responded "Most days" — 22.2%  
0 responded "Some days"  
1 responded "Once in a while" — 11.1%  
1 responded "Never or almost never" — 11.1%

---

10) *I feel God's love for me through others.*

**5 BEFORE...6 AFTER**

**BEFORE THE RETREAT:**

**1** responded "Many times a day"— 11.1%  
**2** responded "Every day" — 22.2%  
**2** responded "Most days" — 22.2%  
2 responded "Some days" — 22.2%  
1 responded "Once in a while" — 11.1%  
1 responded "Never or almost never"— 11.1%

**AFTER THE RETREAT:**

**2** responded "Many times a day"— 22.2%  
**3** responded "Every day" — 33.3%  
**1** responded "Most days" — 11.1%  
1 responded "Some days" — 11.1%  
1 responded "Once in a while" — 11.1%  
1 responded "Never or almost never" — 11.1%

---

11) *I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation.* **7 BEFORE...8 AFTER**

**BEFORE THE RETREAT:**

**5** responded "Many times a day"— 56%  
**2** responded "Every day" — 22%  
0 responded "Most days"  
2 responded "Some days" — 22%  
0 responded "Once in a while"  
0 responded "Never or almost never"

**AFTER THE RETREAT:**

**5** responded "Many times a day"— 56%  
**2** responded "Every day" — 22%  
**1** responded "Most days" — 11%  
0 responded "Some days"  
1 responded "Once in a while"— 11%  
0 responded "Never or almost never"

---

12) *I feel thankful for my blessings.*

**5 BEFORE...8 AFTER**

**BEFORE THE RETREAT:**

**4** responded "Many times a day" — 44.4%  
**3** responded "Every day" — 33.3%  
2 responded "Most days" — 22.2%  
0 responded "Some days"  
0 responded "Once in a while"  
0 responded "Never or almost never"

**AFTER THE RETREAT:**

**5** responded "Many times a day" — 55.5=56%  
**3** responded "Every day" — 33.3%  
1 responded "Most days"— 11.1%  
0 responded "Some days"  
0 responded "Once in a while"  
0 responded "Never or almost never"

---

13) ***I feel selfless caring for others.***

**7 BEFORE...8 AFTER**

**BEFORE THE RETREAT:**

0 responded "Many times a day"  
**2 responded "Every day" — 22.2%**  
**5 responded "Most days" — 55.5=56%**  
2 responded "Some days" — 22.2%  
0 responded "Once in a while"  
0 responded "Never or almost never"

**AFTER THE RETREAT:**

0 responded "Many times a day"  
**4 responded "Every day" — 44.4%**  
**4 responded "Most days" — 44.4%**  
1 responded "Some days" — 11.1%  
0 responded "Once in a while"  
0 responded "Never or almost never"

---

14) ***I accept others even when they do things I think are wrong.*** **2 BEFORE...  
5 AFTER**

**BEFORE THE RETREAT:**

0 responded "Many times a day"  
0 responded "Every day"  
**2 responded "Most days" — 22.2%**  
4 responded "Some days" — 44.4%  
1 responded "Once in a while" — 11.1%  
2 responded "Never or almost never" — 22.2%

**AFTER THE RETREAT:**

0 responded "Many times a day"  
**3 responded "Every day" — 33.3%**  
**2 responded "Most days" — 22.2%**  
2 responded "Some days" — 22.2%  
0 responded "Once in a while"  
2 responded "Never or almost never" — 22.2%

---

15) ***I desire to be closer to God or in union with the divine.*** **8 BEFORE...8 AFTER**

**BEFORE THE RETREAT:**

**2 responded "Many times a day" — 22.2%**  
**4 responded "Every day" — 44.4%**  
**2 responded "Most days" — 22.2%**  
0 responded "Some days"  
0 responded "Once in a while"  
1 responded "Never or almost never" — 11.1%

**AFTER THE RETREAT:**

**3 responded "Many times a day" — 33.3%**  
**4 responded "Every day" — 44.4%**  
**1 responded "Most days" — 11.1%**  
0 responded "Some days"  
0 responded "Once in a while"  
1 responded "Never or almost never" — 11.1%

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***What do we learn from the Anonymous Questionnaire?***

The Anonymous Questionnaire indicated modest "upward movement" by respondents after the 2017 Advent Retreat. This change implied more sensitivity to spiritual issues after the Advent Retreat (as noted by volunteers before the retreat). It is possible that the questionnaire provided *expectations* of volunteers to strive for in the retreat experience. The questionnaire was an effort to quantify what is really a subjective qualitative experience. For that reason, the researcher/priest was tempted to disregard the Anonymous Questionnaire, as manipulative of the process from the onset. Still, attendance at the 2018 Advent Retreat, the following year (Appendices I and J), indicated heightened interest in experiential spirituality at St. Luke's by a more numerous broader range of parishioners. The same was true of attendance at the Tuesday Contemplative group that more than doubled during Lenten season 2019 from the previous year.

*s. blake, Chapter 6, page 114*

## COMPOSITE DESCRIPTION

### *Textual and structural descriptive essence of the dissertation project.*

Chapter 6 incorporates abbreviated volunteer verbatim accounts of the *Spiritual Exercise* experience and what happened in that experience—a textual description. This chapter reveals the setting, context, and the “how” of the *Spiritual Exercise* experience—a structural description. Textual and structural descriptions get to the “essence” of the experience, and represent the culmination of the phenomenological study.

At this point in the project, one might rightfully ask, “How did it go for the volunteers? Did they *fall in love with God*?” Not one retreatant mentioned *falling in love with God per se* in any of their narratives, though the narratives were rich with the phenomenology of each unique spiritual life, and there was definitely a deepening of relationship with Jesus as reported in narratives of volunteers. *Spiritual Exercises* as presented by the researcher/priest at the Advent Retreat became “emergent.” Volunteers adapted the exercises to their own uniqueness—to their own “lived experiences” that they brought to the retreat, and the lived experiences of the retreat itself.

Most of the volunteers were juggling the *Exercises* with the distractions and busyness in their personal lives, and busyness as parish leaders. Faithful attendance at the retreat was a challenge for some of them. In spite of time constraints, seven volunteers reported already existing early morning prayer practices in their homes and in nature. Several prayed *Forward Day-by-Day*. One meditated on the *Exercises* while journaling other texts.

Nine volunteers from the parish became the nucleus of the Advent Retreat. Five of the volunteers were retired women. The remaining volunteers were not retired. Hopes for the retreat reported by volunteers included curiosity about the *Spiritual Exercise* process, wanting to get closer to God, and welcoming a prayer process that could focus their attention.

We began *falling in love with God, praying scripture with imagination* as a group on the first day of the retreat, working through seven steps presented by the researcher/priest that originated in a seven-month retreat at the Jesuit Retreat House in Colorado. This *Spiritual Exercise* process was new for all of the volunteers. “Before” and “after” responses to the anonymous form in the retreat booklet indicated hope for closeness to God across the board for the nine volunteers who filled out that form.

The first step in the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* process was naming a heart's desire. This was a new experience for all of the retreatants—something they had not thought of before. Several reported that naming their heart's desire in advance of reading scripture was a helpful entrée into meaningful conversation with the Lord in scripture. The researcher/priest postulates that naming the desire to the risen Lord psychologically opened the volunteer's access to his/her imagination, to the inner life/the unconscious. Trusting God and self-talk in conversation with scripture was an initial issue for several volunteers, but with patience and persistence, for some, trust and self-talk flowed into deeper insights and meaning—into genuine intimate conversation with God within.

Seventeenth Century Anglican divine, Lancelot Andrewes, spoke to the theology of desire, which ultimately manifests in desire for God, God's self: "*Thyself, o my God, Thyself for thine own sake, above all things else I love. Thyself I desire. Thyself as my last end I long for Thyself for thine own sake, not aught else whatsoever, alway and in all things I seek, with all my heart and arrow....Thyself before all things, to seek Thee in all things, and at the last in the life to come to find and keep Thee for ever.*"<sup>11</sup>

Prayer (conversation with God), annotating/journaling the conversation, and relationship with God in scripture was at the heart of the process. For some this was a time-consuming bugaboo. Conversation with the risen Lord in scripture called for commitment and focus that was a challenge for some with scattered over-programmed lives. Not everyone settled into this process outside of the group experience when they were on their own. And not everyone welcomed what they thought God in scripture was saying to them.

Meaningful coincidences emerged from *praying scripture with imagination*. Insight came for dreams and difficult decisions that needed to be made. The text of the day spoke to life outside of prayer for others. For some, symbolism in biblical stories became a transformational experience. On the anonymous form, the majority reported the experience of God speaking God's word reoccurring again during the day beyond the prayer. Five volunteers reported on the anonymous form that they often discovered themselves being God's instrument in loving and caring for others since *praying scripture with imagination*. In addition, two of the volunteers said they sometimes had this experience.

Seven volunteers in their narratives talked about feeling peace and closeness to God. Only one volunteer questioned the possibility of intimacy with God, though she said that she prays (giving thanks) every day. Trust in God made possible the intimacy six of the volunteers experienced. A salient factor was the willingness of volunteers to boldly *pray scripture with imagination*. Five of

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11. Ibid., *Love's Redeeming Work*, 111, 112.

them spoke of the benefits of this practice. Six volunteers reported on the anonymous form that when connecting with God they felt joy that lifts them out of their daily concerns. In addition, three volunteers reported this joy sometimes or once in awhile. Eight volunteers reported on the anonymous form that they found comfort in their religion. Eight volunteers reported a sense of inner peace and harmony from their religion. Anonymous feedback after the retreat indicated that six felt close to God, plus three that reported that they felt somewhat close to God.

Volunteers were asked if they thought they would continue with the *Spiritual Exercises* after the retreat. The four that responded to that question said they intended to continue with *Spiritual Exercises*—integrating it into their regular prayer practices, building on it in the future, using it as a muse in life. One of the four was passionate about finding answers to her dilemmas in the meaningful coincidences that she experienced *praying scripture with imagination*.

From the anonymous before and after feedback form most of the nine respondents reported some change (growth) in their spirituality from before the retreat to after the retreat. Two volunteers felt God's presence more after the retreat than before the retreat. Only one experienced greater connection to all of life after the retreat, and only one felt more joy lifting her out of daily concerns after the retreat. All nine responded that they found strength in their religion or spirituality. And after the retreat two said they found even greater strength in their spirituality. One volunteer found greater comfort from her religion or spirituality after the retreat. Two volunteers reported greater inner peace/harmony in their lives after the retreat. Three reported asking God for help more often in the midst of their daily activities after the retreat, and two felt themselves more guided by God in their daily activities after the retreat. Seven of the volunteers felt the love of God for themselves directly—before and after the retreat. Only one felt God's love through others more after the retreat. Three felt more thankful for their blessings after the retreat.

If there was profundity in responses on the anonymous form, it was that the majority (8 out of 9) were spiritually touched by the beauty of creation. But only two before and five after the retreat were more inclined to accept others when they do things they think are wrong.

Clearly volunteers for the Advent Retreat were a homogeneously spiritual group—but with disparate experiences. Beyond all the numbers, the analysis, and the meaning units cobbled together

out of clusters of verbatim accounts in this chapter, the qualitative phenomenological inquiry here can't assume to prove anything. And it doesn't aim to assume anything. Rather, it has been about discovering meaning in dialogue, rather than in data. It is more speculative than analytical. It has been an immeasurable creative act—a custom job for each reader and hearer of the risen Lord in scripture. And it was a creative act by the researcher/priest making sense of it all. The narratives about *praying scripture with imagination* drew on the unique lived experiences and meditations of each volunteer and the participating researcher/priest during Advent 2017 in the unique context of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Denver. As indicated earlier, what transpired was sensitivity to spiritual issues by volunteers for the retreat, likely influenced by the Anonymous Feedback Form (Appendix B-11), and wrap up narrative prompt questions (Appendix E) provided by the researcher/priest, who would have preferred the more free-form “poetry” of phenomenological inquiry.

Educator Max Van Manen speaks eloquently about the poetry of phenomenological inquiry: *When you listen to a presentation of a phenomenological nature, you listen in vain for the punch-line, the latest information, or the big news. As in poetry, it is inappropriate to ask for a conclusion or summary of a phenomenological study. To summarize a poem in order to present the result would destroy the result because the poem itself is the result. The poem is the thing. So phenomenology, not unlike poetry, is a poetizing project; it tries an incantative, evocative speaking, a primal telling, wherein we aim to involve the voice in an original signing of the world.*<sup>11</sup>

### HIGH FLIGHT

For the researcher/priest the poetry of *praying scripture with imagination* was the Muppets' “random always arising...chaotic”—real experience dwelling on “the surly bonds of earth.” But it was also about putting out our hands and touching the face of God—the Beloved.<sup>12</sup> It was Cynthia Bourgeault's kaleidoscopic Holy Spirit breathing a higher level of consciousness into God's people. It was striving for Teilhard's “Omega point” in unity with the cosmic Christ. It was Carl Jung, Thomas Merton, Ignatius of Loyola, and Tom Keating's communication with the mystery of God reconciling the rational mind with the unconscious—wrestling the “true self”—the God-self from the “false self”. The volunteers at St. Luke's were bold enough to give it a whirl. “Religion is not an experiment, but an experience of life through which one is part of the cosmic adventure”<sup>13</sup>

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11. Max Van Manen, “Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for Action Sensitive Pedagogy,” *Suny Series in the Philosophy of Education*, P.L. Smith, ed (Albany, NY: Suny Press, 1990), 13.

12. John Gillespie Magee, Jr., *High Flight*, (paraphrase), [https://en.wikipedia.org/John\\_Gillespie\\_Magee\\_Jr.](https://en.wikipedia.org/John_Gillespie_Magee_Jr.), accessed September 24, 2018.

13. Raimon Panikkar, <http://www.raimon-panikkar.org>, accessed September 18, 2018.



**CHAPTER SEVEN:**

*Reflections, Learnings, Recommendations and Questions*

*THE PRIEST AND THE CONGREGATION*

*METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS*

*QUESTIONS FOR THE LARGER CHURCH*

*QUESTIONS FOR THE WIDER CHURCH*

*FINAL REMARKS – AN EPILOGUE*



## **CHAPTER SEVEN:**

### *Reflections, Learnings, Recommendations and Questions*

*It was an unusual day at the jail. We usually filled the contact room to capacity (29) for worship in the women's section of the jail. Today only two women showed up. I learned over my 17 years of jail/prison ministry to welcome what was unusual as providential, and to be grateful. And this opportunity was in retrospect what might be called (in the tired jargon of the times) a "God thing."*

*These two incarcerated women were a study in contrast. One of the women, (I'll call her Zahara) was perhaps 5'8" tall, an awkward, coarsely featured overweight African American woman in her thirties. She had given up on self-care, though that is a challenge for women in jail. They have to have independent wealth to buy makeup or even shampoo in the commissary. Zahara's hair was tangled, untrimmed, and unwashed. She had an aura of hopelessness about her. She was being led reluctantly into the contact room by Mia, an attractive well-cared-for petite Latina, who seemed too innocent and too young to be incarcerated—maybe just out of high school. She was so generously sweet and "together," I couldn't imagine how she had ended up in the county jail. I didn't ask.*

*As we seated ourselves in a little threesome, Mia hastened to tell me that Zahara had been trying to kill herself, that she was looking after her, caring for her, and wanting her to come to worship this day hoping for encouragement for Zahara. I asked what life was like for Zahara in the jail. Mia said Zahara was a lesbian, and one of the worship leaders had told her that she was an abomination to God, and some of the officers in the jail were treating her like the abomination she was convinced that she was. I was aware of the fundamentalist Christian bias in the jail—that homosexuals were flawed people. I was also aware of the challenge of managing the often complex relationships of homosexual inmates in the pods. I felt at risk myself, being known as that "liberal" clergy person in the facility. And so, I was amazed that Zahara and I had managed to get together in that place on that day. I was amazed that Mia would trust me as jail clergy with Zahara.*

*Silently praying for the leading of the Holy Spirit in our hour together, I asked Zahara if it had occurred to her that God purposely made her just the way she was—that God had a purpose in that. I suggested that she take seriously God's purpose for her. I asked her if she had a sense of what that purpose might be that was unique to her and nobody else. She didn't have an answer for that. We prayed for insight and gratitude for Zahara's life, and for Mia who stroked Zahara's arm and told her how much she valued her and wanted her to live into her purpose. There was a certain peace and resolve in their leaving. I will never know how it turned out for Mia and Zahara — what God had in mind for them. I do know what God's purpose for Mia was in the county jail.*

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*I've known and admired Maddie for a long time as a parishioner and mostly as a friend. Maddie in her 90s has had an independent, creative, colorful and adventurous life. She is endlessly interesting, and has a lot to be proud of. Maddie is comfortable (as they say) in her own skin. Now Maddie can't drive her car, and has become more dependent on others than she wants to be.*

*I was glad she showed up to join the Advent Retreat. At one point our discussion in the retreat was about spiritual direction. I pointed out on page 10 of the booklet how Thomas*

*Merton was fond of asking his retreatants—not about prayer and fasting—but how God is present in everyday life. He would ask, “How is it going feeding and cleaning up after the pigs today?” Maddie fell silent. Then she said, “I am not feeding and cleaning up after the pigs anymore. I am the pig.”*<sup>1</sup>

### THE PRIEST AND THE CONGREGATION

*“When he says, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? Ephesians 4:9-10, NRSV*

Like Jesus’ disciples Peter, James and John, who encountered Jesus’ transfiguration on that high mountain, we too get overshadowed by a cloud and the voice of God telling us to listen to God’s beloved Son (Luke 9: 28-43). Jesus led them down from the mountain where they were met by the anxious father of a demon-possessed child. Inevitably we descend—like the disciples, like Zahara, Mia and Maddie in the vignettes above. We are inevitably brought down from High Flight (the mountain top) to the “surly bonds of earth.” This is where we meet God.

St. Luke’s/Denver is a serving church community with generous outreach programs. Meeting God in “the surly bonds of earth” is what St. Luke’s does best. Ignatius of Loyola instructed his retreatants to find the sacred in the mundane. As mystifying as our lives can be in 21st Century America, we are called to listen to God’s beloved Son, and to see God in our ordinary lives. This is the pragmatic element in the poetry of *praying scripture with imagination* at St. Luke’s Episcopal Church.

It finally occurred to the researcher/priest that those remarkable volunteers for the dissertation project were perhaps already the most mystical members of St. Luke’s parish. They just wanted to be even more aware of the presence of God in their lives, as they—each in their own way—negotiated their lived experiences below mountain top experiences. Feedback from them indicated that most of them took the *Spiritual Exercises* with a grain of salt. They were already in conversation with God in ways that suited their personalities and their spiritual journeys in their exceedingly busy lives.

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1. James Finney, “Seeing God in All Things,” *Following the Mystics Through the Narrow Gate, CD* (WWW. soundstrue.com, 2013).

St. Luke's dynamic new rector arrived after the volunteer narratives were processed for the dissertation project. And so, the parish and this researcher/priest are engaging in new processes and new enthusiasm and energy at the writing of this chapter. Our new rector is an outstanding preacher, teacher, and administrator. I think we are "on a roll" these days with an unusual influx of new families. We have already thrown a party for them, and are featuring them in parish public relations efforts, helping them to be made known and as involved in the parish as they wish to be. We feel urgency to pay attention to this gift of new people as an opportunity not to be missed. A new committee, of which I am a member, called Invite, Welcome, Connect is pursuing this opportunity with thought and enthusiasm. What is happening is an ambiance of new energy, creative programming utilizing the talents of new members and a notable influx of new families. Having an outstanding new rector helps. More people are calling each other by name, due to the extensive diligent name tag ministry.

#### CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY PROGRAMS FOR ST. LUKE'S/DENVER

In addition to evangelism, the following are some of the programs born out of this dissertation project in Christian Spirituality that I recommend, design, facilitate, and participate in as an Assisting Priest on staff at St. Luke's/Denver:

- **EXPERIENTIAL SPIRITUALITY:** I am encouraging experiential spirituality that gets beyond talking about spirituality. To that end, I am offering the spiritual experience of silence, prayer, meditation, *Lectio Divina* (conversations with God and each other in scripture), and Eucharist every Tuesday in the ***Contemplative Prayer Group*** at St. Luke's. We invited new members to the group including a notice in church publications, and this group is growing in attendance (Appendix I).

With a team, we are offering experiential spirituality in four 2018 Advent Sundays called ***Advent Contemplative Interlude*** with Taizé chant, candles, icons and psalms (Appendixes I and J). Contemplative Interlude will be offered between the 7:45 a.m. and the 10:15 a.m. services at St. Luke's. There will be contemplation (listening and learning what the Spirit is saying to God's people) with ***mind*** (*Spiritual Exercises*), ***body*** (liturgical dance to Taizé chants), and ***spirit*** (Christian meditation and Centering Prayer). Advent Sunday, December 23 we will explore (in the style of Lessons and Carols) Advent themes in scripture and sing hymns. Scripture will include apocalyptic and annunciation Advent texts followed by the appointed visitation/Magnificat texts (Luke 1-39-55) in church (Appendix J).

- ECUMENICAL SPIRITUALITY: Experiential spirituality extends St. Luke's four-year ecumenical outreach with the Denver Jewish community, *Rodef Shalom*. We continue to meet on Wednesday evenings to read the Hebrew Bible together and share in small groups what matters to us as people of faith in these texts. With the *Rodef Shalom* Conservative Synagogue in Denver, we have expanded our concepts of God, and have made new spiritual friends celebrating one another's spirituality.

- EXPERIENTIAL SPIRITUALITY FOR MY ECUMENICAL STUDY GROUP: I am proposing seven sessions of *Meister Eckhart's Living Wisdom: Indestructible Joy and the Path of Letting Go* by Dr. James Finley for our next study project. We'll see if it flies. The majority in this group are Presbyterians with head-centered (borderline agnostic) spiritualities. Mystical contemplative spirituality is a hard sell for this group. And so, we settled on our Elaine Pagels comfort zone—*Revelations, Visions, Prophecy & Politics in the Book of Revelation*.

- TESTIMONIALS: Episcopalians need to be more at ease sharing their faith (like Baptists, for example). To that end, St. Luke's is featuring the ministries of parishioners outside the walls of the parish by giving them the opportunity to give testimony on their work in the world—in Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), as volunteers, and in their vocations.

- HEALING MINISTRY: I am proposing a new healing ministry (laying on of hands and prayer) at St. Luke's in the side chapel every Sunday at the end of Eucharist. This is experiential spirituality for both the ones praying for the infirm, and the infirm person requesting prayer.

- RELATIONSHIPS: My recommendation to St. Luke's (and the church at large), born out of the dissertation project, is to honor the unique spiritual journeys of each parishioner by hearing their personal stories and giving them the opportunity to use their interests and gifts in building God's reign. This is especially important in keeping children and youth caring about God's church community in the future.

#### METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

We began this dissertation project with the thesis statement: In biblically rich Christian education programming at St. Luke's Episcopal Church/Denver, my act of ministry was to encourage

volunteer parishioners (who were ready) to enter into deeper intimacy with God engaging the *Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life*, (the Ignatian 19th Annual Retreat) from Sacred Heart Jesuit Retreat House in Sedalia, Colorado. The “intervention” indicated for this project, and the admittedly ambitious hypothesis being tested, was that it would be possible for St. Luke’s volunteers *to fall in love with God* during a five-week Advent Retreat offered to the parish. Group and individual settings were part of the curriculum that involved learning and practicing the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercise* process of *praying scripture with imagination*. What happened was a lot more *emergent redesign* of the process than was originally envisioned by the researcher/priest.

Narrative reports (verbal and written) of personal stories about relationship with God and service to God’s reign in the lived-experiences of volunteers during the retreat were collected by the researcher/priest from a fluctuating group of 9-15 volunteers who practiced *praying scripture with imagination*. Responses were collected via an anonymous questionnaire, and written and spoken narratives authorized for publication. Ministries and other experiences of the volunteers were measures of the effect of the project on volunteers’ lives. Responses were as varied as the individuals in the study. The researcher/priest began to notice the variety of spirituality styles enjoyed by retreatants.

Methodology began with the presence of the researcher/priest, the presence of the Holy Spirit and the presence of volunteers to the dissertation project. It was a process of listening and hearing volunteers (and the researcher/priest herself) in their particularity, and in the particularity of the circumstances of their lives. The researcher/priest heard, without preconceived hermeneutic, the experiences of volunteers.

And so, we asked *what* was going on in St. Luke’s/Denver parish. The answer for the retreat group was holy listening to each other, listening to scripture, and listening to the Spirit of God. What was going on was descriptive-empirical of a volunteer group with interest in spirituality. They are members of a parish that is highly educated, relatively affluent, white, and mainly retired from work, with a preference for studying *about* the faith over personal intimacy with God. This preference was indicated in the 2017 Parish Survey.

We asked *why* folks seemed to prefer studying about the faith over personal intimacy with God. The researcher/priest's interpretive speculation was psychological—about personality styles of parishioners as well as the personality style of the parish (Chapter 3). The psychological process of engaging the inner self/the unconscious was initially suspect to volunteers, and possibly suspect to the greater invited community as well. On the other hand, the researcher/priest must not assume that studying *about* spirituality and the faith is not a part of personal intimacy with God in the lives of the faithful at St. Luke's.

We asked *what ought to be* going on. If the researcher/priest had the audacity to make such an assumption, she would say experiential spirituality “ought” to be more normative at St. Luke's—just as study of the Word, outreach, and the love of music are normative.

We asked *how we might respond*. The researcher/priest, who is a lesser empowered “Assisting Priest” on staff at St. Luke's, has proposed offering experiential spirituality opportunities that add spiritual depth to the program-rich adult education environment in the parish. She is fully aware that the best-laid plans sometimes meet with indifference in Christian communities as busy as the St. Luke's community. Folks at St. Luke's, however, are not indifferent about the Eucharist and are not indifferent about incarnating Christ's body in their ministries in the world. This, in itself, can be seen as evidence of deepening relationships with God.

### *QUESTIONS FOR THE LARGER CHURCH*

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY FOR CHILDREN, TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS: Beyond St. Luke's, my hope and vision for the greater Episcopal church is to do a better job with our increasingly absent teens and young adults. I studied what is working at St. Luke's United Methodist Church (a 5000 member mega-church) in Houston, Texas. To my amazement during my visit on Sunday, September 16, 2018, over 150 teen agers converged on the teen center in that church. After some intense socializing and breakfast together, they broke into two groups (junior high and high school). Each group had its own praise band channeling the energy of the young audience singing and praising God. Then they broke into two bible-study groups. The high-school group was led by one of the teens who wrote her



own lesson (coached by a youth minister). My granddaughter, who is pianist in her praise band, spends most of her free time at the church. That's where her friends are. That's where she wants to be. They are doing something right at St. Luke's/Houston.

What makes church a magnet for teenagers and disaffected young adults? St. Luke's/Houston opens the doors of their youth center during the week for teens to hang out, socialize, snack and study. This brings hundreds of teens into the church all week. Teen families regularly host small group teen sleep-overs for boys or girls. Teens are given opportunities to lead worship and mission projects at home and abroad, which promotes leadership, greater life purpose and keeps teens involved in church.

In addition, at St. Luke's/Houston a strong undercurrent of study and prayer brings deeper purpose to teen presence there. Preparation for confirmation at St. Luke's/Houston is a three-year program culminating in the eighth grade. There are roughly 150 teens in each age group. One hundred and fifty eighth-grade teens got confirmed when I was with them three years ago. Parental and congregational commitment and staff dedication and vision make this program work.

St. Timothy's Episcopal Church in Centennial/Denver had a similar program on a smaller scale. A brand new after-school youth center at St. Tim's kept teens coming to church during the week. It was a model youth program in the Diocese of Colorado that drew teens from the nearby high school into the youth program at St. Tim's. This successful program was made possible by an imaginative youth director, supporting staff, and by parishioner and especially parental commitment. It also required a hefty capital commitment for this smaller church to create a welcoming space for teens.

St. Luke's/Houston has a similar program for disaffected un-churched young adults in their Houston neighborhood. They created an *un-Church* (in an unattached building) where young adults meet to talk about what is happening in their lives—like ethical issues at work, relationships, sex in the city, and the challenges of balancing work and young children. St. Luke's/Houston decided to get beyond typical church programming and offer life-giving answers to challenges and questions relevant to young adults. This program is successful beyond all expectations at St. Luke's/Houston.

I wonder if the experience at St. Luke's/Houston suggests a way of bringing new life to dying old Episcopal churches in gentrified young professional enclaves (loft apartment complexes) in Denver. The vision for this ministry at St. Luke's/Houston originated in a charismatic young professional minister who personally identified with largely unattached young adults adrift in the urban world. He had the "calling," the passion and the energy to bring these folks into community. He and his wife were the right people at the right time in the right place. And the established church backed them up. You might say that the success of this enterprise was that it was born out of the practical theology of pastoral presence and listening to young adults (including listening to himself) in the neighborhood. His was a "qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological" study of church-averse young people in the neighborhood who were looking for a community that shared their common concerns. You might say that their spirituality centered on deep need and yearning for community—for noticing and sharing their experiences in this community with imagination. Having attended one of their services in 2017, this community was manifesting in praise style worship—without what they saw as the burden of organized religion.

#### *QUESTIONS FOR THE WIDER CHURCH*

Episcopalians are used to thinking of themselves as a dying breed. Pew Research confirms what we observe—that is, that there are fewer and fewer of us as the years go by. As American Christians interact with a religiously pluralistic world, it isn't hard to see ourselves as remnants in a post-Christian era. The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, urged the Anglican Communion to look beyond a church that cannot answer all the questions that people have. Instead, he urged the faithful to find Jesus where the people are, and to observe what is happening in the contexts of where people are beyond organized worship in the church.

This is practical theology—being a listening presence in our fractured American culture—being a listening presence to Gen X and Gen I (the Smartphone generation) in my family, and to myself. What I am hearing is anxious anticipation about what could be a gloomy future. I am hearing angst about the dystopian reality that seems to be manifesting all around us.

In addition to the angst and shame about our divisive amoral political situation in America today, we live in a time of job insecurity, failed institutions and dubious presidential leadership. There is universal anxiety around being vulnerable to technology that seems to be running amok.

*s. blake, Chapter 7, page 128*

More and more our humanity feels compromised by relentless surveillance, and artificial intelligence with the most intimate details of our lives inevitably getting in the hands of the wrong people. Dystopian literature, like *Handmaid's Tale*, *Hunger Games*, and *Altered Carbon*, popular with the young, illustrate the issues and what the feared future is beginning to look like. In some ways we are living that future even now.

For example, there is the nightmare of diminished womens' rights, in the totalitarian theonomic Christian Reconstructionalist world of Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale*. In our present reality, two alleged sex offenders have risen to the Supreme Court with jurisdiction over womens' bodies in America. Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* is a believable warning about a powerful, ruthless, technologically advanced totalitarian government forcing its people to fight to the death—as a form of popular entertainment. In Richard K. Morgan's cyberpunk noir novel, *Altered Carbon*, technology is advanced to the point of digitally storing human personalities indefinitely in “cortical stacks” that can be transferred to interchangeable human bodies called “sleeves.”

Michael C. McCarthy, S.J., associate professor of theology at Fordham University, wrote in *America* magazine, “The commodification of human bodies [sleeves] eerily reminds us of human trafficking and the status of so many refugees throughout the world.”<sup>2</sup> He asks if being human is in danger of being passé in the digital future. Are we in danger of losing our souls? Those of us who came of age in the 1960s were familiar with the dystopic warnings of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and George Orwell's *1984*. We lived to see science fiction become reality before the end of the 20th Century. We have learned that what can be imagined is likely to be fact in the future.

McCarthy, writing in *America* about Fordham's post-millennial Smartphone Generation of students said, “In 2016...National College Health Assessment reported that nearly two-thirds of students surveyed complained of feeling overwhelming anxiety or hopelessness in the previous 12 months. That number was up 50 percent from what it was five years before.”<sup>3</sup>

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2. Michael C. McCarthy, “Reading Ignatius in Dystopia, Jesuit universities in an age of anxiety,” *America, Jesuit review of faith and culture*, October 1, 2018, Volume 219, No. 7, 22.

3. *Ibid.*, McCarthy, 21.

And so, given the undercurrent of malaise in our culture, and the dystopian dread in our psyches, the wider church—indeed, religious traditions the world over as well as secular institutions—have their work cut out for them if we want to move forward with confidence that humankind will remain human in the future. There is blessed evidence that some are stepping up to the challenge.

Among other futurist innovators there are what are called “social entrepreneurs” who with imagination and confidence are addressing problems like world-wide poverty. These social entrepreneurs include Elon Musk who is a renewable energy visionary; Bill and Melinda Gates, who focus on disease eradication and education; Nathan Schnider, a University of Colorado professor, who works to empower the marginalized in the world to solve their own problems; Muhammad Yunus, a microcredit, microfinance pioneer who also empowers the marginalized with loans to finance new business. These social engineers have large followings of inspired cohorts that aim to live for planetary causes bigger than themselves. They care about the future and about the people of the world. When asked what made him tick, what made him glad to get up in the morning, Elon Musk was heard to say, “I wanted to think about the future and not be sad.”

#### *FINAL REMARKS --- AN EPILOGUE*

Let us take off here “from the surly bonds earth” into “high flight.” Other than malaise at St. Luke’s about being routinely hacked on their computers and recovering from identity theft, this Christian community and especially volunteers for the dissertation project seem to be thinking about the future without being sad. They are “opening upwards,” as Karl Rahner would say, to the “self-communicating Mystery”<sup>4</sup> (God in scripture in the case of the project) and opening themselves to relationship with God in Jesus. Many of the volunteers made an effort to engage their God-given capacity as humans to go beyond themselves into communion with God (Chapter 4, page 2).

Rahner defines the human person as an aspect of God’s creation, as God’s self-expression. What I learned as researcher/priest in this project is that each of us is a “custom job”, a mystery in ourselves. Each has a unique lived-experience of the grace of God at work in our stories.

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4. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Crossroad, 1977), 120.

The uniqueness of volunteers' stories was the joy of this dissertation project. Rahner believes this uniqueness is the deepest reality of what makes us human (Chapter 4, page 3). Ignatian discernment leads us beyond the worlds we have constructed, and helps us to realize that God is at work even in places we may not choose (Chapter 4, page 4).<sup>5</sup> Ignatius of Loyola counseled seeing God in all things. This includes any dehumanizing future we may fear. But, we are not without power.

My unsubstantiated “take” on the upbeat personality of St. Luke’s is that through outreach (and in-reach within the community) the parish is engaging the future beyond being sad. Perhaps this work is one way we are being transformed into “the mind of Christ.” When enough outreach is going on, the parish is forming what Ilia Delio would call positive “morphogenic” fields that have the power to change our world for the better.

For those, like myself, who have a preference for “high flight” there is always the luxury of hoping for and envisioning that utopian future where the expanded Christ-consciousness of God’s human creatures will bring us in all our God-given diversity into unity with each other, and with the cosmic Christ—*à la théologie* of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

My most exciting discovery (perhaps even an original discovery) in researching *praying scripture with imagination* with the project’s volunteers was the revelation that the “desire” in the *Spiritual Exercises* can be an entrée into the dwelling place of God in the human soul (what Jung calls the unconscious). An artist volunteer for the project, who said she routinely sought out her unconscious muse, made this obvious to me. I will use her example coupled with Jung’s psychology in presenting Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises* to others in the future.

*We come into this world to align our souls with God: The relationship between God and soul is analogous to that being between the sun and its rays. We are the extension of God in time and space. How, then can we be misaligned with God? Misalignment is a state of mind that arises when we forget our true relationship with God and act as if God were other.*<sup>6</sup>

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5. Richard Lennan, “Graced Humanity,” *Karl Rahner: Theologian of Grace*, CD and Study Guide (Now You Know Media, 2014).

6. Rabbi Rami Shapiro, *Hasidic Tales: Annotated and Explained* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing: 2004, 2013), 4.

The prayers and poetry of the Anglican tradition, are reminders of closeness to the mystery of God. They were formational for this researcher/priest. In discernment for Holy Orders she was asked what attracted her to the Episcopal Church. In her naïveté she said, “It is the aesthetic of it.” The bishop in scorn replied, “That isn’t enough.” But being an artist and a musician in her core it was enough and is enough—it is who she is. She knows now that the beauty of God’s astonishing creativity, and the awe of the Holy Mystery as a perfectly legitimate way to connect to God, the lover and the energy behind all that is. And the Anglican tradition celebrates that for her. If space were not an issue in this paper, she would have luxuriated in quoting Canticles from *The Book of Common Prayer*—like *A Song of Creation—The Cosmic Order*, *The Earth and its Creatures*, and *The People of God*. As a parish priest, she used Canticles in *The Book of Common Prayer* liberally as Hymns of Praise beginning Sunday liturgies.

In her dissertation project she celebrated on several occasions salient Anglican thinkers of our times like past Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, who offered wisdom to this study about praying with imagination. And she celebrated one of the most audaciously creative theologians of our time, Anglican the Rev. Dr. Cynthia Bourgeault, who has given a lot of thought to contemplative prayer in her books for people of all traditions. Bourgeault’s up-to-date speculation on the Holy Trinity is found in Chapter 4 of the thesis.

Reaching into the Anglican past, the researcher/priest was delighted to find 17th Century Anglican, Francis Quarles’ poem about falling in love with the “Best Beloved” (inside front cover of the thesis). Nineteenth Century divine, Samuel Wilberforce, spoke to the dilemmas of human personality (Chapter 3). Seventeenth Century divine, Lancelot Andrewes, wrote about praying with imagination beginning with *desire* (Chapter 6).

Desire, a complicated, yet important concern in this paper, critical to praying scripture with imagination, gets beautifully addressed in Anglican poetry. For example, consider 20th Century Anglican Bishop and poet, Timothy Rees’ poem about desire, (verse 4) *Thirsting for God—A Hymn*:

*O Thou eternal loveliness  
What joy the sight of Thee must be!  
Yet ‘tis not joy I crave for, Lord—  
I thirst for Thee, for Thee. 7*

Finally, the Deacon’s ordination prayer from *The Book of Common Prayer* (in Chapter 7), prays with imagination for the future of God’s church, *that wonderful and sacred mystery*.

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7. Timothy Rees, *Edward Keble Talbot: His Community and His Friends*, compiled by G. P. H. Pawson, London, 1954, 93.

In the end, the researcher/priest was changed by this project. She began to see spirituality at St. Luke's as much more present and nuanced than she originally thought. And she began to appreciate variety of spiritual styles—God as Spirit and Mystery/God as Revealed in action/God of the Mind/God of the Heart—though with Corinne Ware she remained hopeful that folks would venture into spiritualities beyond their comfort zones to see what they might be missing!

The researcher/priest recognized a continuum of experiential spirituality at St. Luke's, and a continuum of experiential spirituality in the 2017 Advent Group. Some were ready for inner work, and some would likely never be ready (though she didn't assume the wisdom to judge). She became painfully aware of her own blindness to God's work in people's lives—revealing the need for better listening and better observation, and more celebration of God's work in their lives.

What didn't work was the condensed time frame during a busy time of the church year that aspired to introduce the Ignatian way of deepening relationship with God. There wasn't enough time to do justice to the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius.

The bottom line is that St. Luke's community works—and it works well together. And in this sense spiritual diversity is an asset. Even the alleged minority spirituality preferences of contemplatives and mystics contribute to the healthy whole at St. Luke's. The researcher/priest realized what opens up or blocks intimacy with God may be personality based, and based on life experiences that make intimacy with God (or anyone else) problematic and dangerous, or welcomed and celebrated. Building trust in God is a starting point.

In God's economy of personality, who is to say what God has in mind around deepening relationships with God? God seems to get served very well by people that do God's work in the world, whether they know they are doing it or not—whether they are interested in a deepened relationship with God or not.

The researcher/priest was surprised by the numbers of different parishioners in this alleged minority spiritual style that showed up for a prayer retreat the following year as they were given the opportunity for experiential spirituality in the 2018 Advent Retreat (Appendices I and J). And only 2-3 out of 14-22 participants (in each of 4 retreat meetings) the second year were from the original 2017 Advent Retreat group.

In the end, there was good reason to celebrate God's good work at St. Luke's--and by extension, God's good work in the world as we move into the future God has in mind for us--beyond our imagining.

*O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquillity the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*<sup>8</sup>

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8. Ibid., *The Book of Common Prayer*, 540.



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HANDOUT TO PARISHIONERS OF ST. LUKE'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, OCTOBER 29, 2017 Appendix A  
RESEARCH INTO DEEPENING  
OF THE INNER JOURNEY IN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Dear Friends at St. Luke's

I wonder if I could enlist volunteers from St. Luke's to help me with my Virginia Theological Seminary Doctor of Ministry in Christian Spirituality dissertation project. I have run into a snag with the Colorado Department of Corrections bringing this project research to the prison system as originally planned. The Rev. Dr. David Gortner, dean of my doctoral project, has encouraged me to take this research into my parish as an alternative plan to get my dissertation launched. My good fortune is that extensive quality contextual research has already completed for the Parish Profile at St. Luke's. I would otherwise have to do myself in changing venue from a correctional site to a parish site.

This project is titled ***Falling In Love With God, Praying Scripture With Imagination.*** It is about deepening our inner journeys using the process of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises (Jesuit retreat material). Contracted commitment for volunteers is roughly one hour prayer practice with journaling each day for a month. In addition an optional one hour one-on-one spiritual directed meeting with the project director each week, and one group meeting each week. The goal and research criteria is observation of how this prayer practice manifests (or not) in the daily life of the volunteer. Ideally from five to eight St. Luke's parishioners will volunteers for this study.

**What:** Praying Scripture With Imagination, Annotated Advent Retreat.  
**When:** Sundays 9 to 9:45 a.m., November and December, 2018. Participation can be flexible taking into consideration availability of participants.  
**Where:** The library, St. Luke's Episcopal Church.  
**Why:** To measure the deepening of our inner journeys.  
**How:** Prayer and journaling using the Bible, Common Lectionary and the process of *Ignatian Spiritual Exercises*.  
SIX CONSECUTIVE SUNDAYS NOVEMBER 5 - DECEMBER 17 (Sunday, December, 3 excepted): group meetings, and as requested one-on-one spiritual direction (accommodating calendars of volunteers).  
Permission of volunteers and confidentiality is guaranteed for the published dissertation.  
**Who:** the Rev. Sandy Blake, Assisting Priest/St. Luke's is project director, dissertation author and spiritual director.

Contact The Rev. Sandy Blake if you are interested in volunteering for this dissertation project. Sandy can be reached **sandyat6@comcast.net**, 303 364-7520 (h), **720 989-4293 (c)**, 645 Kittredge Street, Aurora, Colorado 80011.

Sincerely, and with gratitude

sandy

*s.blake, appendix, page 141*





# Advent Annotation Retreat

## Falling in Love With God

### *Praying Scripture With Imagination*



*The Annunciation*

Resource Booklet and Worship Guide  
for praying scripture with imagination  
using the process of the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* and others.

St. Luke's Episcopal Church/Denver, Colorado  
Advent, 2017, January, 2018

The Reverend Sandy Blake  
Dissertation Project for Doctor of Ministry program  
in Christian Spirituality  
Virginia Theological Seminary, Alexandria, Virginia

## PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH IMAGINATION

*More decisive than the origin of the Bible in God is the presence of God in the Bible. It is the sense for the presence that leads us to a belief in its origin... What we must ask is whether there is anything in the Bible that is beyond the reach of reason, beyond the scope of common sense; whether its teaching is compatible with our sense of the ineffable [Jehova/God], with the idea of unity, helping us to go beyond reason without denying reason, helping man [sic] to go beyond himself without losing himself. This is the distinction of the Bible on the highest level of radical amazement, where all expression ends, it gives us the word. Revelation is an issue that must be decided on the level of the ineffable [indescribable/indefinable]... It is not enough to read the Bible, we must pray the Bible to comprehend its claim.*

— Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 251.

**PRACTICE ---- PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH IMAGINATION:**

- 1) **Grace** that you would ask of the Lord today. What is on your mind today? What is your heart's desire?
- 2) **Text** Matthew 11:25: *"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*
- 3) **Insight** you get from this reading. (What is the Lord speaking to your heart, your mind, your gut in this text?)
- 4) **Colloquy** — Your **conversation** (journalled) with the Lord speaking to you through this passage of scripture. What do you say to the Lord? What does the Lord say to you?
- 5) **Remain/Be Still** in prayer.
- 6) **Insight** that came out of your stillness.
- 7) **Conversation** with the Lord about that insight.
- 8) **Concluding Prayer**



## Weekly Devotional Scriptures Annotated Advent Retreat

*Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in! Who is the King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory!*

– Psalm 24: 9-10

### Week of Sunday November 12, 2017

Begin the week with Psalm 90

Monday	Luke 12:35-59
Tuesday	Hebrews 11:32-12:2
Wednesday	1 Peter 1:3-9
Thursday	Acts 17:16-34
Friday	John 11:1-44
Saturday	1 Corinthians 15:51-58
Sunday	Amos 5:18-24; Psalm 50:7-15; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13

### Week of Sunday November 19, 2017

Begin the week with Psalm 16

Monday	Matthew 25:1-13
Tuesday	Colossians 4:2-18
Wednesday	1 Thessalonians 5
Thursday	2 Thessalonians 2
Friday	2 Thessalonians 3
Saturday	John 4:31-38
Sunday	Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18; Psalm 76; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30.

*Swimming requires a certain relaxation, a certain giving of yourself to the water, and similarly spiritual life demands a relaxation of the soul to God.*

– Alan Watts, *Behold The Spirit*, 70.

Suggested readings are from Rueben P. Job, Norman Shawchuck, *A Guide to Prayer, The Upper Room*, 1983.

Sunday readings are from the *New Common Lectionary*.

**Week of Sunday November 26, 2017**

Begin the week with Psalm 44

Monday	John 1:43-51
Tuesday	Luke 8:22-56
Wednesday	Acts 17:1-9
Thursday	Luke 19:28-40
Friday	1 Corinthians 15:1-28
Saturday	Matthew 26:1-29
Sunday	Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Psalm 23; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Matthew 25:31-46

**Week of Sunday December 3, 2017, FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT — YEAR B**

Begin the week with Psalm 95

Monday	Matthew 3
Tuesday	Colossians 1:9-23
Wednesday	John 18:33-37
Thursday	Isaiah 43:1-21
Friday	Hebrews 10:11-25
Saturday	Zephaniah 3:14-20
Sunday	Isaiah 63:16-64:8; Psalm 8:1-7; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:32-37

**HYMN: *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus***

*Come, thou long-expected Jesus,  
Born to set thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us;  
Let us find our rest in thee.  
Israel's strength and consolation,  
Hope of all the earth thou art;  
Dear Desire of every nation,  
Joy of every longing heart.*

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**Week of Sunday, December 10, 2017, SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

Begin the week with Psalm 138

Monday	Luke 1:5-25, 57-80
Tuesday	Matthew 4:1-6; 28:18-20
Wednesday	Matthew 3:1-12
Thursday	Isaiah 62
Friday	John 1:6-34
Saturday	Mark 1:1-8
Sunday	Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

**Week of Sunday, December 17, 2017 THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT**

Begin the week with Psalm 85

Monday	Mark 13:1-13, 24-37
Tuesday	Luke 21:25-36
Wednesday	Revelation 1:1-8
Thursday	Ezekiel 34:1-10
Friday	Luke 12:35-48
Saturday	Acts 1:1-11
Sunday	Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Luke 1:46b-55 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

*Yet in my flesh I shall see God.* Job 19:26

*The meaning [of Christianity] is God himself, the ultimate Reality, not as an idea conceived but as a reality experienced. When apprehended by man this meaning is a state of consciousness which might be called "the mind of Christ" in the sense of St. Paul's words, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."*

— Alan Watts, *Behold The Spirit*, xxv.

**Week of December 24, 2017, FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

Begin the week with Psalm 77

Monday	Isaiah 7:10-17
Tuesday	Matthew 1:18-25
Wednesday	Isaiah 40:1-11, 28-31
Thursday	Ezekiel 34:11-16
Friday	Isaiah 9:1-7
Saturday	Philippians 4:4-9
Sunday	2 Samuel 7:8-16; Psalm 89:1-4, 19-24; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38



The Spiritual *Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola*' draws from two kinds of freedom: freedom for deeper intimacy with God and freedom to participate in God's project – the kingdom of God. — Brian O. McDermott, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola*, NowYouKnowMedia 18 Lectures on 7 CDs. Disc 1.

*A spiritual discipline is necessary in order to move slowly from an absurd to an obedient life, from a life filled with noisy worries to a life in which there is some free inner space where we can listen to our God and follow his guidance.*  
— Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Making All Things New*, 67-68.

*Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life. Solitude begins with a time and place for God, and him alone. If we really believe not only that God exists but also that he is actively present in our lives—healing, teaching, and guiding—we need to set aside a time and space to give him our undivided attention. Jesus says, "Go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place." (Matthew 6:6).*

— Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Making All Things New*, 69.

## Journaling/Annotation/Writing It Down

---

1) **Grace** that you would you ask of the Lord today. What is on your mind today?  
What is your heart's desire?

2) **Text**

3) **Insight** you got from this reading

4) **Colloquy/Conversation** – using your imagination with this scripture.  
What do you say to the Lord. What does the Lord say to you?

5) **Remain/Be Still** in prayer

6) **Insight** that came out of your stillness

7) **Conversation** with the Lord about that insight

8) **Concluding Prayer**

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## Journaling/Annotation/Writing It Down

1) **Grace** that you would you ask of the Lord today. What is on your mind today?  
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## Spiritual Direction — what is that?

FIRST OF ALL – IT IS OPTIONAL.

Jesuit Raimon Panikkar describes spiritual direction/spiritual friendship as *“personal, and the experience of God is also personal. The way is unique for each pilgrim. Its kingdom is found in mysteries. In a word, there is no one how, no recipe, no broad highway to be followed. This is precisely the job of the master and the function of initiation. The experience of God which is the experience of true life.”*

— Raimon Panikkar, *The Experience of God, Icons of the Mystery*, 51.

And so, the director/spiritual friend initiates interviews with directee/friend by asking for reflection on how God has been lovingly at work in their lives. S/he invites the directee to ask God to guide in their thinking; to ask for fresh revelation; to ask for evidence of God sharing God’s love.

Directee/friends are invited to notice God’s love for humankind, and God’s love for themselves. The director asks the person to notice God’s grace. And if that isn’t so evident asks the directee to notice their experiences as well in waiting in hope for that grace – to be in conversation with the divine in each condition.

The spiritual director/spiritual friend is to be a listener who asks questions like the following from various sources like James Finney recalling his spiritual direction sessions with Thomas Merton:

1) *How is it going with you? What is it like being you these days? Be real with me. How is it going.* (Merton liked to ask Finney “how it was going feeding and cleaning up after the pigs today?”) Spiritual direction focuses on how God is present in everyday life.

2) *How is it going in your surrender to the Mystery that has intimately accessed your heart and has drawn you here that it might have its way with you and translate you into itself?*

3) *How is it going with you in discovering your surrender to the mystery welling up in the intimate details of how it is going with you? For example, how is it going with you when you cry and when you laugh?* — James Finney, *Following the Mystics Through the Narrow Gate* — *Seeing God in all Things*, quoting Thomas Merton in spiritual direction, (WWW/soundstrue.com, 2013).

And my Virginia Seminary dean/professor The Rev. Dr. David Gortner likes to ask: *What do you think Jesus desires most in his relationship with you?* (John 13-17). *Have you asked what God desires for you in your flourishing – regarding your desire?* —The Rev. Dr. David Gortner, Virginia Theological Seminary, Summer 2016.

ANONYMOUS FEEDBACK BEFORE AND AFTER THE RETREAT

This is a list of items that you may or may not experience. It is not important to check off every item on the list. Go with your basic truth about these things. References to "God" are really references to your "Higher Power" in life. It is OK to reference God in this way, or a way that is even more personal to your experience of the divine. Questions in **bold face** below are to be answered at the end of the prayer project. Note in **black pencil** where you are before the retreat and in **red pencil** where you are at the end of the retreat. Please clip on the dotted line and put this anonymous feedback in Rev. Sandy Blake's box in the library at the end of the retreat.

	Many times a day	Every day	Most days	Some days	Once in a while	Never or almost never
I feel the presence of God.						
I feel connected to all of life						
During worship or at other times when I connect with God, I feel a joy beyond my daily concerns.						
I get strength from my religion or spirituality.						
I get comfort in my religion or spirituality.						
I have a deep inner peace or harmony.						
I ask for God's help in my daily activities.						
I feel God's love for me personally.						
I feel God's love for me through others.						
I am spiritually inspired by the beauty of the created world.						
I am thankful for my blessings.						
I am selfless in caring for others.						
I accept others even when they do things that I think are wrong.						
I yearn to be closer to God or in union with God.						
<b>I experience God speaking God's word (in praying scripture with imagination) reoccur again during the day.*</b>						
<b>I discover myself being God's instrument in loving and caring for others since I have started praying scripture with imagination.*</b>						

	Not at all	Somewhat	Very close	As close as possible
Generally speaking, how close do you feel to God?				

This chart has been modified, but was influenced by Lynn G. Underwood: Underwood, L.G. (2006) Ordinary Spiritual Experience: Qualitative Research, Interpretive Guidelines, and Population Distribution for the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale. Archive for the Psychology of Religion 28:1, 181-218. \* The Rev. Sandy Blake.

APPENDIX B - THE 1000 MOST COMMON WORDS

The following table lists the 1000 most common words in English. The words are listed in order of frequency, from most common to least common. The words are listed in the order in which they appear in the text of the document.

Rank	Word	Frequency
1	the	1000000
2	and	800000
3	of	700000
4	a	600000
5	to	500000
6	in	400000
7	is	300000
8	it	250000
9	that	200000
10	he	150000
11	was	120000
12	on	100000
13	by	80000
14	with	70000
15	his	60000
16	and	50000
17	of	40000
18	a	30000
19	to	25000
20	in	20000
21	is	15000
22	it	10000
23	that	8000
24	he	6000
25	was	5000
26	on	4000
27	by	3000
28	with	2500
29	his	2000
30	and	1500
31	of	1000
32	a	800
33	to	600
34	in	500
35	is	400
36	it	300
37	that	250
38	he	200
39	was	150
40	on	100
41	by	80
42	with	60
43	his	50
44	and	40
45	of	30
46	a	25
47	to	20
48	in	15
49	is	10
50	it	8
51	that	6
52	he	5
53	was	4
54	on	3
55	by	2
56	with	2
57	his	1
58	and	1
59	of	1
60	a	1
61	to	1
62	in	1
63	is	1
64	it	1
65	that	1
66	he	1
67	was	1
68	on	1
69	by	1
70	with	1
71	his	1
72	and	1
73	of	1
74	a	1
75	to	1
76	in	1
77	is	1
78	it	1
79	that	1
80	he	1
81	was	1
82	on	1
83	by	1
84	with	1
85	his	1
86	and	1
87	of	1
88	a	1
89	to	1
90	in	1
91	is	1
92	it	1
93	that	1
94	he	1
95	was	1
96	on	1
97	by	1
98	with	1
99	his	1
100	and	1

Rank	Word	Frequency
101	of	1
102	a	1
103	to	1
104	in	1
105	is	1
106	it	1
107	that	1
108	he	1
109	was	1
110	on	1
111	by	1
112	with	1
113	his	1
114	and	1
115	of	1
116	a	1
117	to	1
118	in	1
119	is	1
120	it	1

The words are listed in the order in which they appear in the text of the document.

**GOD'S LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH HUMANKIND — SERMON ONE**

October 29, 2017 sermon preceding Advent Annotation Retreat, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, by Rev. Sandy Blake, Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18, Psalm 1, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8, Matthew 22:34-46.

***Texts for the morning: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" and the Song of Songs.***

***At announcements after the Liturgy of the Word, I invited the congregation to help me out with the dissertation project titled "Falling in Love with God/ Praying Scripture With Imagination."***

What do you say we talk about Love today. Jesus said, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.*" This is the greatest and first commandment. *And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" (This, among other things, is about discipleship.)

In our wonderful Wednesday evening gatherings with *Rodef Shalom* two weeks ago, Paul, from the Jewish community demonstrated the phylactery on his forehead that contains *The Shema* — that our very Jewish Jesus referenced in the text today. Phylactery on the forehead is there to remind the worshiper at morning prayer (and evening prayer) what is really important — what is essential to the faith as spelled out in Deuteronomy and Exodus 13:9 and by Jesus today in Matthew 22. *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.* Luke adds to that "*with all your strength.*"

How do we love God like that? This morning we will focus on the first and greatest commandment — "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind*" in spite of the fact that most commentaries fuse these two commandments together — then often extensively and exclusively dwell on love of neighbor. ("*And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*")

Ultimately love of God and love of neighbor manifests in the same thing. But let us focus on loving God today because unless we begin by experiencing the God relationship as love, we deprive ourselves of a deep well of living water when it comes to loving our neighbors.

I suggest this *living water* is the power of Eros love, the creative life energy of longing for a personal relationship with the divine. It is beyond sensual love — though sensual love is a metaphor to understanding this relationship.

I will tell you right off that some religious leaders are uneasy about the subject of eros love and God. During the various Inquisitions (maybe even today) one could get killed by the church for talking about that.

It is simply beyond the experience of some — as it is beyond the experience of most Americans still dog paddling in our Puritan American pond. And so, if you aren't wired for this kind of relationship with the divine, know — there is nothing wrong with you. It is simply new to you.

And there are many ways through which we approach the divine — and through which the divine approaches us. All of this is fine. But let me tell you about this one.

I want to go back into the richness of Christian tradition — to Origen, a most important Christian theologian (of the 3rd Century), or to African and European Medieval monastics (of the 4th Century), or to St. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila (of the 16th Century), or even further back to (possibly mid-10th Century BCE) to the Hebrew Bible and *Solomon's Song of Songs*.

The *Song of Songs* has been variously interpreted as a love affair between YHWH and Israel, between Christ and the Church, as a love affair between the Divine and the human soul – all via an allegory of two earthly lovers. Some think it a miracle that the *Song of Songs* (like the book of *Job*) made it into the Bible at all. But this is what is called “Wisdom” literature that goes beyond Torah and the Prophets into mature relationship with the Divine Mystery.

*Song of Songs* is ancient theatre, and it is the poetry of divine love. So don't be shocked. Most Americans – especially Protestants – don't know how to deal with the *Song of Songs* because we don't understand its eroticism. And our culture tends to cheapen eros love. It makes us nervous to talk about it – especially in church! But lets talk about it anyway. I am reading Solomon's poem – today we are reading the *Song of Songs* as a dialogue between the Divine and the human soul. And so, here are some excerpts (from the Message Bible) with my commentary thrown in. And so, if you dare, let go of some of your inhibitions! Close your eyes if you are comfortable doing that. Are you ready? Buckle your seat belts. Let's go.

The HUMAN says to the Divine in the *Song of Songs*: *We'll celebrate, we'll sing, we'll make great music. As an apricot tree stands out in the forest,...all I want is to sit in your shade...*” in other words – let's turn away from the world for awhile into the mystery of the heart! The human yearns to be with the Beloved and the Beloved yearns to be with the human. This is a love affair for the soul. The human and the Divine become the objects of each other's gaze – picture that.

The DIVINE SAYS to the human in the *Song of Songs*: *“Spring flowers are in blossom all over. The whole world's a choir – and singing! Spring warblers are filling the forest with sweet arpeggios.”* *“O get up dear friend, my fair and beautiful lover – come to me.”* The Divine is saying. – *“HEY! isn't it time we got together? It can be intoxicating and addictive. There may even be ecstasy.”*

The HUMAN says to the Divine in the *Song of Songs*: *“Restless in bed and sleepless through the night, I longed for my Lover. I wanted him desperately. His absence was painful.”* Ever yearn for God like that? Nothing is as painful as the sorrow of separation from a lover. But then – the human begins to count the cost of love.

The HUMAN gives it more thought in the *Song of Songs*: *“O, let me warn you, sisters in Jerusalem, by the gazelles, yes, by all the wild deer: don't excite love, don't stir it up, until the time is ripe – until you're ready.”*

That is because – one of the costs is that the ego is going to get consumed – are we ready for that? (Be careful what WE ask for.) Consider that WE are WOOD and the LORD is FIRE! We are on the verge of surrendering our life now for love's sake. Are we ready?

The DIVINE Responds from the *Song of Songs*: *“You've captured my heart, dear friend, You looked at me, and I fell in love... far more pleasing than a fine, rare wine,...you're a secret garden, a private and pure fountain. A garden fountain, sparkling and splashing, fed by spring waters from the Lebanon mountains.”* Do you hear the Divine yearning, the Divine wooing – the seduction – the inebriation?

The HUMAN says to the Divine in the *Song of Songs*: *Hang my locket around your neck, wear my ring on your finger. Love is invincible facing danger and death. Passion laughs at the terrors of hell. The fire of love stops at nothing – it sweeps everything before it. Flood waters can't drown love, torrents of rain can't put it out. Love can't be bought, love can't be sold – it's not to be found in the marketplace.”*

(Don't you suppose this HUMAN lover is most likely insane in the eyes of the world – but pleasing to God who has tested the heart?)

The DIVINE closes in – in the *Song of Songs*: “*My vineyard is all mine, and I am keeping it to myself... O, [lover in] the gardens, my friends are with me listening. Let me hear your voice.*” (The Divine is waiting – waiting – waiting for human consent.)

The HUMAN is helpless at this point in the *Song of Songs*: “*Run to me, dear lover. Come like a gazelle. Leap like a wild stag on the spice mountains.*” (I think the human consents.) There is surrender and there is union. The Human lover is ravished. The lover and the Divine Beloved become one. All sense of separation is burned away.

How does the story end? Well, then the Divine Beloved is seen by the human lover everywhere. The face of God is seen — especially now in the faces of the neighbor — even the face of the enemy — seen with unconditional love. This is the goal. This is what is called Agape love.

The Rev. Dr. Cynthia Bourgeault (a priest in the Colorado Diocese and a very adventurous theologian) came up with a formula that explains the relationship between Eros love that we encounter in the *Song of Songs* and Agape love the second great commandment that Jesus references in this text.

It goes like this: Eros (the communion of souls) + Kenosis (giving or emptying of self — like Jesus) = Agape (*love your neighbor as yourself*). Eros + Kenosis = Agape love. <sup>1</sup> In Agape love, we allow God to love others through us.

Remember when Jesus said to the rich young man — “*You lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me?*” Selling everything — the stakes of love affair with the Lord. We are counseled to count the cost. The Human lover surrenders everything on this altar of the heart (just like the Divine lover). Both lovers even die before they die. But the reward is a sneak preview of heaven. Thanks be to God. Amen.

1. Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene, Discovering the Woman at the Heart of Christianity*, (Boston, Massachusetts, Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2010), 121.

## THE IGNATIAN PRACTICE OF SEEING GOD IN THE WORLD — SERMON TWO

November 5, 2017 sermon preceding Advent Annotation Retreat, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, by Rev. Sandy Blake. Texts were Micah 3:5-12, Psalm 43, 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13, Matthew 23:1-12.

***God wants relationship with us. Notice God's presence in nature and the cosmos described in science humbly revealing God's majesty in Psalm 43 that celebrates humankind as a partnership with God in the world.***

And so, let's consider what can be preached in this preachy text in Matthew. One of my commentaries calls it "*a judgment discourse burdened with overly harsh polemics, but something for all of us as Christian community to consider to be at the heart of the Gospel.*"<sup>2</sup> And that is, "The last shall be first, and the first shall be last."

Matthew's ranting about pride and humility in the Gospel today is the context of the fall of the temple (70 CE) when the early Christians were trying to disassociate and differentiate themselves from the synagogue by pointing out hypocritical practices of the temple hierarchy like oppressive self-aggrandizing displays in alms giving, in prayer and fasting competing for status with ever more broad phylacteries on their foreheads and long fringes on their prayer shawls — satisfaction as they grabbed the choice seats in the synagogue and at banquets — all the while "abhorring justice by perverting equality among the people."

This reading is critical of religious establishments then and now for focusing on status, and too many rules, keeping things too complicated, and in the process missing the point! The point is to give honor to God to whom honor is due. The point is that relationship to God and to each other is what is important, not a pack of laws. Because the only law is the law of love.

Alas, we saints who came after Matthew's community still struggle with the prideful sins of the scribes and Pharisees. Sometimes I see myself in that parade as well. The Rev. Carol Meredith, recently retired rector at St. Stephen's/Aurora on Facebook a couple weeks ago suggested that her Facebook friends (both clergy and laity) pay attention to what we preach, that sometimes it is a dead giveaway what the preacher's personal struggles are; that we may be preaching to ourselves!

And we have known charismatic preachers who loudly excoriate homosexuality, corruption, infidelity, etc., only to be "outed" for their own personal battles along these lines. As a parent I recall the most aggravating traits I pointed out to my children were often what I most disliked about myself. This alone is cause for humility.

I ask — am I sufficiently in touch with my inner hypocrite? Do I practice what I preach? Ever hear this — Do what I say, not what I do? O Lord it's hard to be humble. But, on second thought, if we are all self-aware how can we not be humble?

I will call Psalm 8 an astrophysical Psalm. It offers a little reality therapy for the practice of humility. It points out where we actually stand in the grand scheme of things. This Psalm is humility with a twist. God humbly shares God's majesty with humankind in this Psalm.

*O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth. when I look to your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?*

2. Gregory Anderson Love, "Matthew 23:1-12," *Feasting on the Gospels, Matthew, Volume 2, Chapters 14-28*, Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds., (Louisville, Kentucky, Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 212.



*Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given humankind dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet...O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth.*” (I wonder, do you suppose God is likely to take notice of humankind’s approach to dominion over the works of God’s hands?)

The current passion over astrophysics reflected in the success of Neil deGrasse Tyson’s book, *Astrophysics for People in a Hurry*, and the new science of quantum physics has captured the imaginations of so many these days, including faith communities like our own. That is because this science is in cahoots with religion. It not only makes sense of our humble place in the cosmos – literally as cosmic dust – but it brings us to heightened consciousness of God in all of our realities that we might otherwise have a tendency to miss. Zen master Pai-Chang said about missing our God Reality, that “*it is very much like looking for an ox, when you are riding on one.*”<sup>3</sup> Because evidence of God is everywhere to be seen and experienced “There is...one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:6). Believing that to be so is seeing that it is so.

Quantum physics points out ways to see God everywhere. For example, this science recognizes our now obvious presence in the web of interdependent relations with each other as well as the web of interdependent relations with the vast and mysterious cosmos out there. Quantum physics points out how humankind is integral to God’s magnificent organic whole. [This invisible God] *in Him all things hold together* (Colossians 1:15).

As we are beginning to explore the mysteries of the wider universe, our humble niche in the cosmic mix becomes more and more obvious to us. But to our human minds equipped to be self-aware, this vast cosmic specter (in which God may even seem to be too big) has psychological and spiritual implications.

We wonder where we actually are on the scale of ultimate value in something so huge and incomprehensible. While we have good reason to be humble, we believe that our value as human persons is in God’s desire for relationship with us. Our value is in God’s yearning for us, God’s purpose for us, and in our response in return – yearning for God. Some call this yearning love. In fact, some theologians speculate that God is the energy of the cosmos manifesting in love.

And so, we see how shortsighted it is to keep on scrambling for status in our little synagogues of this world. The mind of Christ as revealed in this reading today tells us otherwise. Yet it is in our worldly synagogues where we are tasked to manifest this consciousness of Christ.

*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*” “*The first shall be last, and the last shall be first.*” This is the humble approach even when our internal devil’s advocate keeps asking if we dare be meek given all the malignant forces out there.

But pride is the cardinal sin against the law of love – not wholesome self-respect kind of pride, but excessive self-importance over others; un-teachability; playing to the gallery to the point of being immune to truth; enslavement by our own illusions. Pride can turn good church folks into Pharisees who point fingers at those other people.

3. Alan Watts, *Behold the Spirit, A Study in the Necessity of Mystical Religion*, quoting Pai-Chang, (New York, Random House/Vintage Books, 1971), 111.

We are counseled to remember who the humble Master is—who the Teacher is – who the Father is. Remember the example of Jesus in the gospel of John wrapping a towel around his waist, dropping to his knees on the ground and washing the road-worn calloused feet of his disciples. This is who God is. And it is the power and genius of the meek who bring peace to the earth — who inherit the earth.

For example there is a true story that is in common knowledge now. It is about the casting out of pride and the radical forgiveness of a Minneapolis woman, a devout Christian named Mary Johnson, whose twenty year old son was senselessly murdered in 1993 at an adult party over a trivial argument.<sup>4</sup>

The killer was a sixteen year old boy named Oshea. Mary was deeply grieved and filled with hatred for Oshea. But she knew as a Christian she had to bring reconciliation out of all that hate lest the hate destroy her. And so, after Oshea had been in prison Mary began thinking of ways she could forgive him. She visited him in prison. Oshea said Mary was one of the few people that cared about him all those years that he was in prison. Eventually Mary was even able to wrap her arms around Oshea and hug the one who had murdered her precious son.

From that point on Oshea became Mary's spiritual son. When Oshea was released from prison Mary invited friends to her home to celebrate his return. Mary even arranged for Oshea to find a home in her neighborhood. She never stopped caring about him.

Because of Mary, Oshea was able to make a fresh start on a new life. Folks asked Mary how she could possibly forgive Oshea for what he did to her son. Had she no pride? She told them that forgiveness and helping Oshea to thrive was as important for her own healing as it was for his.

The grace in Mary's life and Oshea's life was healing of her loss and grief, and healing of Oshea's life of anger, resentment and personal shame. Both came to wholeness by casting out pride, and by practicing radical forgiveness, humility, and love. Amen. Thanks be to God.

4. Mary Johnson, *Oshea Israel*, Google, accessed November 1, 2017.

**GOD RELATIONSHIP/GOD EXPERIENCE — SERMON THREE**

November 12, 2017 sermon the day of the Advent Annotation Retreat, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, by Rev. Sandy Blake. Texts were Amos 5:18-24, Psalm 70, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Matthew 25:1-13.

***If we make ourselves scarce in relationship/friendship with God, we may not recognize who God is — and according to scripture today, God may not recognize us either.***

*Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying 'Lord, Lord open to us.' But he replied: 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you. Keep awake therefore for you know neither the day nor the hour (Matthew 25:13).' And this is similar to Matthew 7:21 in the vernacular of the Message Bible: Jesus said, "Knowing the correct password — 'Lord, Lord' — isn't going to get you anywhere with me. What is required is serious obedience — doing what my Father wills. I can see it now at the Final Judgment thousands strutting up to me and saying, 'Lord we preached the message, we bashed the demons, our God-sponsored projects had everyone talking.' And Jesus said, "Do you know what I'm going to say? You missed the boat."*

These apocalyptic/End Times ranting of Matthew's community is not for sissies as they say. Maybe you are asking like I am asking — is the God of love really going to leave us out in the dark and the cold with our untrimmed lamps just because we are so foolish; just because we thought we had all the time in the world? What about Grace?

Everything in me wants to soften this text, to say it is going to be OK no matter what. But I think I must let this sense of urgency stand.

I read the Bible with a theology of love. And so, I project. Sometimes I assume that God is an old softy like my dad often was. But there were some things that were not negotiable with my dad. And I think we seem to be talking here about something not so negotiable with God.

Because God is love, God yearns to be in a love relationship with us right here in God's earthly kingdom. God wants for us our God-given potential. God wants for all of us abundant life through relationship with God. This is what the kingdom of God/God's reign is all about. And this is what is not negotiable.

Doesn't it make sense that God, the Bridegroom, will close the door on us if we have made ourselves so scarce that we didn't get to know each other? This is not God's choice. It is our personal choice. And eventually it can get to be too little/too late.

And so, why didn't the wise bridesmaids share their oil with the foolish ones? Well, it really wasn't possible for them to share their oil at this late date, because the oil in this parable can represent spiritual reserves that are built up through on-going relationship with the divine. Each one of us must stock our own oil. There is no way around that.

Then the question is — why didn't the foolish bridesmaids stock up on oil in the first place? Well, maybe they didn't want anything to do with God's kingdom, because for them God wasn't king.

Tom G. Long of the Chandler School of Theology in Atlanta wrote a compelling piece in *The Christian Century* several years ago about the difference in male versus female attendance in main-line churches in North America. In this piece, Long quoted journalist Frederica Green's survey of churches in which she found that Eastern Orthodoxy seemed to be an exception because males and females seemed to be attracted in equal numbers to that church. She asked male converts to Eastern Orthodoxy why that is so.

*s.blake, appendix c, page 161*

Male adult converts to Eastern Orthodoxy reported that the appeal for them was that Eastern Orthodoxy was challenging. One male convert said “*Orthodoxy is serious. It is difficult. It is demanding. It is about mercy, but it is also about overcoming myself.*”

Anglican philosopher/priest the late Alan Watts wrote in *Behold the Spirit* that “*It is all too clear that our age suffers from a vast hunger and impoverishment of the spirit which organized Christian religion, as we know it, rarely satisfies.*” He said, “*The truth, however, is that with some very few and scattered exceptions Church religion is spiritually dead, and the best minds of the church admit and deplore it openly.*”<sup>5</sup> Watts thought this could explain large scale indifference to the church in America today.

Watts insisted that “*Religion must relate to the root and ground of reality and life. Without this [humankind] cannot feel that life has any actual and objective meaning. Without this he feels that reality itself is an inane vacuum, a chaos, in which he creates purely artificial and make-believe meanings out of his own head.*”<sup>6</sup>

Watts continued, “*Beyond doctrines [precepts that are handed down to us through tradition], the real meaning is God – God’s self, the Ultimate Reality, not as an idea conceived but as a reality **experienced** (preacher’s emphasis). When apprehended by man this meaning is a state of consciousness which might be called ‘the mind of Christ’ in the sense of St. Paul’s words, ‘Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5).’*”<sup>7</sup>

Now each of us has a valid unique approach, and unique readiness to engaging the mind of Christ, and for me it was the Jesuit retreat experience of *praying scripture with imagination*. This is one way to be in conversation with the mind of Christ.

And it is one way we can take a hard look at the reality we are experiencing of what passes for Christianity in our culture these days. I wonder if we are missing the boat? Paying attention to the mind of Christ can become the reality of God that we get to experience in our lives today.

And so, if this seems right for you, or urgent for you, you are invited to the Advent Retreat engaging the mind of Christ in the manner and genius of Jesuit retreats beginning this Sunday, 9 a.m., November 12 through December 17 in the library.

I’ll tell you right off that it is challenging. It is serious. It can be difficult and demanding. Yet it is about mercy, it is also about overcoming ourselves. It can also be exhilarating!

Prayer in any form is one way we can keep awake during Advent at St. Luke’s, and not only being ready, but eager to welcome the Bridegroom into our hearts – and into our lives.

It is no accident that we have this text today as we approach Advent. For Advent is the time to trim our lamps and get ready to go and meet the Bridegroom and to accompany him to the marriage feast! Amen. Thanks be to God.

5. Ibid., Watts, 3.

6. Ibid., Watts, 4.

7. Ibid., Watts, xxv.

**GOD RELATIONSHIP/GOD EXPERIENCE —SERMON FOUR**

November 19, 2017 sermon morning of the Advent Annotation Retreat, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, by Rev. Sandy Blake. Texts were Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18, Psalm 90:1-8, (9-11), 12, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, Matthew 25:14-30.

***About pro-actively waiting for the Son of Man (realized eschatology); taking holy risks, putting our talents and our time to God's good use.***

Perhaps you noticed that this parable reads like a business plan. But it can be problematic as a characterization of God. While the Master, the King, the Slave Owner in these parables can usually be an allegory as God or Jesus, that is not always the case. This is one of the many ways that scripture on the surface can seem to argue against itself. And we need to be aware that metaphor can be taken only so far.

For example, is it really God's will that the rich man gets richer, while the poor man gets deprived of his last penny and cast into outer darkness? In spite of the way the world seems to be working these days, is God really glad that the top 1% receives (roughly) 42% of the financial wealth of the country – (and the financial wealth of the world for that matter)? The parable would seem to say so.

Is our return on investment (the way the world keeps score) the way God keeps score? Is Jesus saying he has no tolerance for fear, or weakness or caution or lack of ability? Is Jesus saying here that frugality in the face of scarcity is wicked and lazy? Is shrewd money management the god of this story?

This parable seems pay tribute to the cultural norm that is strangely advocated by our counter cultural Lord. There is obviously something subversive going on here. Because the purpose of parable is to make us think. And we can count on it — it is the purpose of the parable ultimately to subvert the ways of the world. And so, what is going on? and where might we locate ourselves in this story?

As usual, it helps to talk about context. Remember that Matthew's Gospel was written as a response to a temple-destructed world.

This was trauma of the magnitude of 9/11 for our world today. Financial, economic, political, religious and social institutions were turned upside down by the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, much like 9/11 has forced us to rethink these institutions in our world today.

And so in the midst of this cataclysm the Jewish community was thrust into a new era. And they looked for a divine plan that could nourish their hope, and they looked for a divine plan that could clean up the mess imposed upon them by the emperor Titus. And the prevailing question in Matthew's community (like the community in Thessalonica) was "when." When is the Lord coming? And what is the sign of his coming?

The divine plan they latched onto was apocalyptic thinking, like the passage from Zephaniah that brought the entire world to judgment and proper submission to God. Matthew talks a lot more about judgment and the fires of hell than all the other gospels combined.

Kind of like 9/11 brought about apocalyptic thinking in America: to rain down hell on anybody even remotely connected to that event. How about the apocalyptic thinking of the world right now – given the real possibility of thermonuclear war – raining down hell on us? I wonder if any of you have given thought to the End Times lately like I have?

And so, we have a lot in common with Matthew's community in this text. Their narratives and ours are a response — a making sense — a finding hope in what is present in the world around us.

The destruction of the temple opened creative flood gates for the Jews. It opened their eyes to see God revealing God's self to them in Jesus the Christ in the here and now and in the end times.

“Apocalypse” means unveiling what is hidden. What was revealed was the divine plan of God incarnate (made flesh) in Jesus. What is hidden and what is revealed is still the divine plan of God incarnate (made flesh) in Jesus.

At this juncture in Matthew's text today Jesus was leaving the Galilee — that enchanted place of family and friends “and lilies of the fields” to face his own high risk venture — his own end times in Jerusalem. And so, keep in mind, these End Time parables the divine plan is seen through the experiential lens of Matthew's community.

In Matthew's version, Jesus is leaving us with four End Times discourses (And His own parting discourse) about the divine plan — as guides for pro-actively awaiting the Son of Man in the end times. The *when* in their questioning is answered by the *now* of the Lord's presence among them — now and in the End Times. These parables were meant to be read together. They make more sense together.

The divine plan revealed in the parable of the faithful and wicked slave (Matt. 24:45) reminds us that the Master is ultimately aware of the way we are living our lives and how we are treating each other. While the Master seems to be out of sight and out of mind, the Master is there.

The divine plan revealed in the parable of the ten bridesmaids (Matt. 25:1) is that we are to seek relationship with the Master so as to recognize him, and to be recognized by him when we come into our own end times.

This is what it means to be prepared. Would we recognize Him? Would he recognize us? The divine plan (Matt. 25:31) gets summed up next week in the prophetic story of the End Times and the separation of the sheep from the goats. When the Son of Man comes in the last days, judgment will be made on how we care in the now for the least of our sisters and brothers in the human family. This parable tells us that the world where the rich get richer while the poor get poorer is destined to pass away.

And so now a reflection on our apocalyptic text today (Matt. 25:14): But first a story by a Jesuit mystic, the late Anthony de Mello, about a miser that hid his gold in the garden.

He liked to look at it, and so he dug it up from time to time. But when he wasn't paying attention, a thief slipped into his garden, dug up the gold and stole it.

The next time the miser went to enjoy his gold, he found an empty hole. You can imagine his horror. In fact he was so upset he let out a loud scream. His neighbors came rushing to his aid to find out what had happened. When they found out, one of them asked him, "Did you ever use any of the gold?" "No", said the miser. "I only looked at it." "Well then," said the neighbor, "for all the good the gold did you, you might just as well come every week and gaze upon the empty hole."

"What a waste – and a tragedy to respond timidly to God's blessings, whether they be gold in the bank, the gold in one another or the unique resources and abilities God gave us as individuals and as communities.

The divine plan in the parable of the talents today is that we recognize that the kingdom of heaven begins with divine generosity. But the Master limits himself and does not micro-manage what we do with these gifts. And we are granted gifts in proportion to what we can manage – some are given 10 talents – some just one.

In every case, the Master wants to be surprised by what our creative imaginations bring to these gifts. The Master expects that we will end up doing more than gazing into an empty hole. The Master wants us to know that it is a spiritual act to celebrate and to multiply our gifts with boldness and without fear.

In the same way, we can anticipate the Master's joy when the Master sees how we have embraced the opportunities and the possibilities our gifts present to us and to our communities. The Master rejoices when we have enough faith in the Master and faith in ourselves to take some holy risks.

Dare we take the holy risk of opening ourselves to the Lord who reportedly said to 13th Century Mystic, Angela of Foligno, "*Make yourself a capacity, and I will make myself a torrent?*" Let's pray about that: Lord God, we ask for courage to take holy risk with our blessings. You know what they are, and we know what they are. Help us take holy risks with the blessings that you have given each of us and our community of faith today.

Lord God, grant that we may please you, and even pleasantly surprise you. Amen.  
Thanks be to God. Amen.

### THE IGNATIAN PRACTICE OF SEEING GOD IN THE WORLD, SERMON FIVE

November 26, 2017 sermon morning of the Advent Annotation Retreat, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, by Rev. Sandy Blake. Texts were Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24, Psalm 95:1-7a, Ephesians 1:15-23, Matthew 25:31-46.

***Jesus in Matthew 25 is telling us about his bias for the vulnerable. He is asking for us to put "skin in the game" by caring for the marginalized in our midst.***

Canadian priest Ronald Rolheiser in his book on Christian spirituality, *The Holy Longing*, talks about "giving skin to God." He is speaking about the miraculous Incarnation of God in Jesus. This makes a great Christmas story because Rolheiser is talking about God's incarnation of Jesus through us.

He tells a story in *The Holy Longing*, about "...a four-year old child who awoke one night frightened, convinced that in the darkness around her there were all kinds of spooks and monsters. So she ran to her parents' bedroom. Her mother calmed her down and taking her by the hand led her back to her own room, where she put on a light and reassured the child with these words: "You don't need to be afraid, you are not alone here. God is in the room with you." The child replied: "I know that God is here, but I need someone in this room who has some skin!"

As usual, our children make some of the best theologians. Of course, all of us need God who has some skin. Just as God put God's skin in the game by showing up in flesh on our tiny planet suspended in cosmic darkness, we are invited to put God's skin in the game by being partners in the Reign of God/the Kingdom of God here on this tiny planet.

This means showing up for "*the Least of these*" in Matthew and putting our skin in the game. God in Christ gets pretty specific in this text. God has a bias for the hungry and the thirsty; for the homeless; the unclothed; for the sick and lonely; for the imprisoned and forgotten – for the overlooked and ignored.

A classmate of mine from Iliff and I noticed in 1999 a number of our fellow classmates dropping out of seminary. Some told us that they had lost their faith – they didn't know what they believed anymore — or if it even mattered. For sure, Iliff was very much a "head trip" – and a social action trip, but some of us missed a spiritual connection and an ***experience of the Lord*** trip at Iliff. And so, the two of us decided we were going to have to seek Jesus in the faces of the folks Jesus cared about in this text in Matthew lest we find ourselves dropping out of school as well.

So we began doing jail ministry on the week ends in Pueblo, and Cañon City and Denver — twelve different institutions in Colorado. And the more faithful we were during those years — the stronger our faith became. We fell in love with Jesus in the faces of offenders in these institutions. And we realized how essential it was for us to come face to face with these folks to experience the Lord in those places. And offenders had to see us face-to-face to take seriously the Lord's presence in our presence.



This reminds me of another of Rolheiser's stories in *The Holy Longing*. This is a parable that Rolheiser borrowed from G. K. Chesterton (and I paraphrase) "A man who was entirely careless of spiritual affairs died and went to hell. And he was missed on earth by his friends. And so, some went down to hell's gates to see if there was any chance of bringing him back. But though they pleaded for the gates to be opened, the stubborn iron bars of hell would not yield. His priest even went to hell and argued: —'He was not really a bad fellow, given time he would have matured. Come on, let him go!' But the gates remained shut against all their voices. Finally, his mother came, she did not beg for his release. Quietly and with a catch in her voice she said to Satan: 'Let me in.' Immediately the doors swung open on their hinges. For love goes down through the gates of hell and there redeems the dead."

And so, we can ask — who the dead are among us — in our human family. I think we are asked to enter the gates of hell in this text in Matthew — with friends and enemies and family and strangers; to be a redeeming presence with those among us that are in some level of hell — the scattered, the lost, the strayed, the injured, the weak — the refugee and his family running for their very lives! Some of you with ministries to these folks already know what it is like to care for Jesus in the least of these. Some of you see Jesus in their faces. And in your faithfulness your faith comes alive.

But now, I can't get by without addressing the existential question here. That is are we supposed to be in fear and trepidation at yet another apocalyptic text — which this text in Matthew most certainly is? Is this text couched in God's love?

I think on this Reign of Christ Sunday — that if we believe that Christ is *King of kings and Lord of lords*, we are lovingly challenged as community — as a nation to take seriously our complicity with evil on a planetary scale. This is serious business for the *King of kings and the Lord of lords* and for the Reign of God.

These texts tell us that we are forewarned. We know better. We can live or die by our communal behavior. We are urged not to bring about our own apocalypse. These texts tell us that God in Christ, the true shepherd, deeply cares for humankind, especially the vulnerable among us and expects faithfulness and obedience in sharing this care. We are not to forget that God in Christ REIGNS as the King above all gods over the entire cosmos. And God in Christ is seated at the right hand of God the Father.

The best I can make of the *eschaton* (the last days) and the *parousia* (the second coming of Christ) is by the admittedly speculative evolutionary theology of Teilhard de Chardin and others. What we are dealing with in Matthew's account is a *mélange* of John the Baptist's apocalyptic, and the Hebrew prophet's ethic — the social gospel.

But most of the commentaries I consulted this week skirted the uncomfortable subject of the separation of the sheep from the goats in the last days. The universal interest of liberal Christianity today instead is the Kingdom of God right here/right now, and the Kingdom of God seems to have been the preacher, Jesus of Nazareth's, primary concern.

And so, 2000 years later we are thinking theologically about the evolution of our species and evolution of Christ and Christ consciousness. Paul hinted at that in his Epistles.

The premise of evolutionary theology is that when our species finally evolves out of its adolescence into a mature Christ consciousness, we will all be united (regardless of religious tradition) with the Holy Spirit in the holy others (in all their diversity) – the Hindu, the Buddhist, the Taoist, — brothers and sisters in the Abrahamic traditions, agnostic humanists, and so on.

Paul said in Colossians – “*In Christ all things hold together.*” And we as members of the Body of Christ – are all evolving to the “Omega Point” – (the *parousia*) – “*into God and Father of all who is above all and in all and through all*” (Ephesians 4:6). The whole universe – matter and spirit – is in the process of evolving into Christ consciousness.

To quote a remarkable theologian, Ilia Delio, that I had the privilege of meeting and hearing at the Virginia Theological Seminary last year: “*The final destiny of the world is not only promised, but already begun. The risen Christ is the pledge and beginning of the perfect fulfillment of the world. [The risen Christ] is the representative of the new cosmos. And heaven is the place of unlimited potentiality [of each of us in our diversity].*”

Heaven (the second coming – the *parousia* – the *eschaton* – the last days) right here in the world – *is the place of unlimited potentiality.* Amen. Thanks be to God.

8. Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing, The Search for A Christian Spirituality*, (New York, Doubleday, 1999), 77.

9. Ibid, Rolheiser, 90.

10. Ibid., Ilia Delio, class notes, The Virginia Seminary.

**Sunday, November 12, 2017**

**PRACTICE --- PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH IMAGINATION:**

1) **Grace** that you would ask of the Lord today. What is on your mind today?  
What is your heart's desire?

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2) **Text** Exodus 19:3-6: *Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called him from the mountain and said, 'This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.*

3) **Insight** you get from this reading. (What is the Lord speaking to your heart, your mind, your gut in this text?)

4) **Colloquy/Conversation** (journalled) with the Lord speaking to you through this passage of scripture. What do you say to the Lord? What does the Lord say to you?

5) **Remain/Be Still** in prayer.

6) **Insight** that came out of the stillness.

7) **Conversation** with the Lord about that insight.

8) **Concluding Prayer**

**Sunday, November 19, 2017**  
**PRACTICE ---- PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH IMAGINATION:**

1) **Grace** that you would ask of the Lord today. What is on your mind today?  
What is your heart's desire?

2) **Text** Matthew 11:25: *'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'*

3) **Insight** you get from this reading. (What the Lord is speaking to your heart, your mind, your gut in this text.)

4) **Colloquy** – Your **conversation** (journalled) with the Lord speaking to you through this passage of scripture. What do you say to the Lord. What does the Lord say to you?

5) **Remain/Be Still** in prayer. *For there is not a word in my tongue, But, Lo, O Lord, thou knowest it all.* (Psalm 139:4).

6) **Insight** that came out of your stillness.

7) **Conversation** with the Lord about that insight.

8) **Concluding Prayer**

Psalm 63:2-5

*O God, Thou art my God, earnestly will I seek Thee;  
My soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh faints for Thee,  
In a dry and weary land, where no water is.  
So have I looked for Thee in the sanctuary,  
To see Thy power and Thy glory.  
For Thy loving kindness is better than life;  
My lips shall praise Thee.  
So will I bless Thee as long as I live;  
I will lift up my hands and call on Thy name.*

*IN PRAYER THE ICE BREAKS*

*Every one of us bears a vast accumulation of unuttered sorrows,  
scruples, hopes, and yearnings, frozen in the muteness of our natures.  
In prayer, the ice breaks, our feelings begin to move our mind,  
striving for an outlet. Empathy generates expression.*

*The text must never be more important than kavanah, than inner devotion.  
The life of prayer depends not so much upon loyalty to custom as upon inner  
participation; not so much upon the length as upon the depth of the service.*

— Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, (Santa Fe, New Mexico, Aurora Press, 1998), 32, 34.

*GOD IS IN LOVE WITH GOD'S PEOPLE*

*I will betroth you unto Me forever; I will betroth you unto Me in righteousness  
and in justice, in kindness and in mercy. I will betroth you unto Me in faithfulness;  
and you shall know the Lord (Hosea 2:21-22, NRSV).*

*But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel:  
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.  
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers,  
they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel  
your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.  
Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people  
in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life (Isaiah 43:1-4, NRSV).*



**Sunday, November 26, 2017**

**PRACTICE --- PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH IMAGINATION:**

1) **Grace** that you would ask of the Lord today. What is on your mind today?  
What is your heart's desire?

2) **Text** John 15:15: *I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.*

3) **Insight** you get from this reading. (What the Lord is speaking to your heart, your mind, your gut in this text?)

4) **Colloquy** — your **conversation** (journalled) with the Lord speaking to you through this passage of scripture. What do you say to the Lord. What does the Lord say to you?

5) **Remain/Be Still** in prayer. *Be still and know that I am God* (Psalm 46:10).

6) **Insight** that came out of your stillness.

7) **Conversation** with the Lord about that insight.

8) **Concluding Prayer**

Psalm 24:7-10

*Lift up your heads, O gates!  
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!  
that the King of glory may come in.*

*Who is the King of glory?*

*The Lord, strong and mighty,  
the Lord, mighty in battle!*

*Lift up your heads, O gates!  
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!  
that the King of glory may come in!*

*Who is the King of glory?*

*The Lord of hosts,  
He is the King of glory!*

*TO KNOW THE RISEN LORD HIMSELF*

*Our object is not to learn about Jesus, **but rather to learn Jesus himself.**\* Granted, a background in Scripture is important for us as Jesuits and can help any Christian to know the Lord. But the intent of the Exercises in general, and of a relationship with Christ in particular, is not only to know about the risen Lord, but also to know the risen Lord himself.*

*READING IN THE FIRST PERSON SINGULAR*

*Reading Scripture aloud makes us put more into the words in order to give the proper tone and emphasis, which in turn provides more meaning to us in the very act of reading. Furthermore, to get an even more intimate experience of Jesus from Scripture, try reading the gospels, whether aloud or silently, **in the first person singular; in other words, read them as if you were Jesus telling you his own story. And why not? After all, the risen Jesus is in you.**\* Keep in mind too that Scripture is his divinely inspired story, and we believe that his word, whether historically accurate in the details, can lead us to the truth of who he is and what he is like.*

E. Edward Kinerk, S.J., "Personal Encounters With Jesus Christ," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, (Washington, D.C., Jesuit Conference, Inc., 48/3 Autumn 2016).

\* Emphasis, Sandy Blake



**Sunday, December 10, 2017**  
**PRACTICE --- PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH IMAGINATION:**

1) **Grace** that you would ask of the Lord today. What is on your mind today?  
What is your heart's desire?

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2) **Text** Luke 13:10 *Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.*

3) **Insight** you get from this reading. (What the Lord is speaking to your heart, your mind, your gut in this text?)

4) **Colloquy** — your **conversation** (journalled) with the Lord speaking to you through this passage of scripture. What do you say to the Lord. What does the Lord say to you?

5) **Remain/Be Still** in prayer (*Be still and know that I am God.* Psalm 46:10)

6) **Insight** that came out of your stillness.

7) **Conversation** with the Lord about that insight.

8) **Concluding Prayer**



*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:5, NRSV).*

*“Putting on the mind of Christ” [is] what we are actually supposed to be doing on this path: not just admiring Jesus, but acquiring his consciousness.*

Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Jesus: Transforming Heart and Mind*  
— *a New Perspective on Christ and His Message*, (Boston, Massachusetts, Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2008), 29.

### *THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE HOLY OTHER*

*During prayer, God lifts the veils and opens the gates of the invisible, so that His servant is standing in front of Him. The prayer creates a secret connection between the one praying and the One prayed to. Prayer is a threshold at the entrance to God's reality.*

— Mohammad, *Essential Sufism*, James Fadiman and Robert Frager, eds.,  
with Foreword by Huston Smith, (San Francisco, California, Harper, 1997), 204.

*True, what Christians are after is different from what Buddhists are after. For Christians, it's identification with the Christ-Spirit. For Buddhists, it's realizing their Buddha-nature. And yet, both of these very different experiences have something in common: they are unitive, non-dualistic, mystical experiences in which we find that our own identity is somehow joined with that which is both more than, and at the same time one with, our identity.*

—Paul F. Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian*, (London, Oneworld, 2009), 155.

*“Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ The wind blows where it chooses and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:7,8, NRSV).*



**Sunday, December 17, 2017 — Wrap Up**  
**PRACTICE --- PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH IMAGINATION:**

1) **Grace** that you would ask of the Lord today. What is on your mind today?  
What is your heart's desire?

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2) **Text** John 5:39, 40: *You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*

3) **Insight** you get from this reading. (What the Lord is speaking to your heart, your mind, your gut in this text?)

4) **Colloquy** — your **conversation** (journalled) with the Lord speaking to you through this passage of scripture. What do you say to the Lord. What does the Lord say to you?

5) **Remain/Be Still** in prayer (Psalm 46:10: *Be still and know that I am God.*)

6) **Insight** that came out of your stillness



7) **Conversation** with the Lord about that insight

8) **Concluding Prayer**

TAKE, LORD, AND RECEIVE

*Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me. To Thee, O Lord, I return it. All is Thine dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is sufficient for me.*

— Ignatius of Loyola

*Soul of Christ, sanctify me.  
Body of Christ, save me.  
Blood of Christ, inebriate me.  
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.  
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.  
O Good Jesus, hear me.  
Within Thy wounds hide me.  
Permit me not to be separated from Thee.  
From the wicked foe defend me.  
At the hour of my death call me.  
And bid me come to Thee  
that with thy saints I may praise Thee  
for ever and ever. Amen.*

— Ignatius of Loyola

Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, Based On Studies in the Language of The Autograph*, Louis J. Puhl, S.J., ed., (Chicago, Illinois, Loyola Press, 1951), 102.





## WRAP UP QUESTIONS FOR POST-PROJECT NARRATIVES BY ADVENT RETREAT VOLUNTEERS

*Thank you so much for volunteering for my dissertation project in Christian Spirituality for the DMin program at The Virginia Theological Seminary. It couldn't be done without you!*

What we have talked about is confidential. Quotes used in the body of this dissertation will be presented anonymously. Names will be changed and details may be changed to make identity less obvious.

### HOW DID IT GO FOR YOU?

**ANONYMOUS FEEDBACK BEFORE AND AFTER RETREAT:** With a **red pencil** do final anonymous feedback on page 11 of your booklet. Put it **unsigned** in my box in the library.

**WRITTEN FEEDBACK:** In addition, you are invited to offer a written description about your experience *praying scripture with imagination*. Let me know if it can be quoted in the published dissertation by signing your **full name, listing phone number and email address** at the bottom of the narrative as permission to publish your narrative. Names will be changed and in some cases details altered.

Please put written feedback in my box in the library, email **sandyat6@comcast.net**, or mail it to **Rev. Sandy Blake, 645 Kittredge Street, Aurora, CO 80011**. Call if you want to talk or want to have a one-on-one opportunity to explore your spiritual experience with this project call **cell 720 989 4293**.

### SAMPLE FEEDBACK QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

*Methodology for this dissertation project is "Qualitative," so your narrative is essential to this kind of research. Write about what is meaningful for you. You don't have to answer all of these questions.*

- Why did you volunteer for this prayer project? What did you want to get out of this experience?
- Do you already have a daily/weekly prayer practice (*Day by Day* for example)? How is that for you?
- Do you have a special **place/time** at home/work/play where you do your prayer practice?
- What worked well in praying scripture with imagination? What made it easy/a pleasure?
- What didn't work so well? What were the obstacles for you? What would make it better?
- Was journaling your conversation with God a new experience for you?
- How was that experience? Is journaling prayer in conversation with Jesus in your future?
- Did you follow the process in the *Advent Annotation Retreat* booklet? Was there a better process for you?
- Is there another prayer practice that works better for you? Can you tell about that?
- What did it feel like to participate in this project?
- Was it hard to get serious about this prayer in the group setting? How did that compare with solo setting?
- Did you feel closer – friendship – to the risen Jesus in this experience?
- Did you "*fall in love with God*," experience deeper intimacy with/trust in God in this prayer experience?
- Did your feelings change as you got more involved in praying scripture with imagination?
- If you are comfortable describe a particular prayer situation – what was going on with you?
- Did praying scripture with imagination impact your relationships – your home/work/play?
- Did your conversation with God show up more often during your day? Can you tell about that?
- How do you think praying in this way influenced your faith, your spirituality, your ministry?
- Do you expect to pray scripture with imagination in the future?
- What helps you to get started/keep it going? Is it worth the effort for you? What hinders the process?
- Are there other spiritual/prayer practices that you would like to explore at St. Luke's?
- Are you interested in a one-on-one spiritual friendship with a spiritual director?
- Would you be interested in a prayer retreat at St. Luke's or at a Jesuit or Benedictine retreat house in the future?



## NARRATIVES AND FEEDBACK FOR THE ADVENT ANNOTATION PRAYER RETREAT

Appendix F

**PHENOMENOLOGY:** freely offered narratives of the thoughts and feelings (the lived experiences) of the Advent Retreat, *Falling in Love with God, Praying Scripture with Imagination*, at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Denver, Colorado, November 12, November 19, November 26, December 3, December 17, 2017.

Statements were written and verbal in class and verbal on the phone and in person.

**PARTICIPANTS:** — **12 women and 3 men** — Six to fifteen parishioners participated at five Sunday Advent Prayer Retreat meetings and contributed to dialogue in class. Two women joined the project (but didn't participate with the group) from Tuesday Contemplative Prayer class at St. Luke's. 12 women and 3 men volunteered for the project. Nine responded to anonymous questions. Ten responded with written (or oral telephone) narratives. None of the men wrote narratives. One man offered input in the class. Another man was present but didn't offer narrative verbal or written. One man dropped out of class but participated behind the scenes. Three volunteers dropped out of the class after the second session. Names were fictionalized prior to publication of the dissertation project.

Participants in the St. Luke's/Denver Advent Prayer Retreat — *Falling in love with God/Praying Scripture with Imagination* were Andrea, Eva, Devon, Doris, Rylee, Gary, Brianna, Meriam, Willow. From the Tuesday Contemplative Prayer Class were Terra and Ariana. Sporadic Attendees and drop outs were Debra, Joel, Maddie, and Nova.

**MEANING UNITS (meaning clusters):** There were eight meaning units that included narrative, textual, and interpretive descriptions.

- 1) MEANING UNIT: HOPES FOR ADVENT PRAYER RETREAT
- 2) MEANING UNIT: SETTINGS FOR PRAYER
- 3) MEANING UNIT: TIMES OF PRAYER
- 4) MEANING UNIT: THE GRACE (DESIRE OF THE HEART), SCRIPTURE AND GOD
- 5) MEANING UNIT: PRAYER, JOURNALING AND GOD
- 6) MEANING UNIT: SYNCHRONICITY/PRAYER IN MINISTRY, CHANGE/GROWTH IN FAITH
- 7) MEANING UNIT: FEELING PEACE/CLOSENESS TO GOD (or not)
- 8) MEANING UNIT: TO CONTINUE IN THE FUTURE PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH IMAGINATION

Participant	Significant Statement Organized into Meaning Units MEANING UNIT: HOPE FOR ADVENT PRAYER RETREAT	Textual Description: "What Happened" HOPE FOR PRAYER RETREAT	Interpretive Description "Experience Interpreted" HOPE FOR PRAYER RETREAT
Eva	"I volunteered for the retreat because I was interested in the opportunity to explore a new spiritual practice for Advent and I wanted to see more of your spirituality."	a) (Advent Retreat 2017 was offered at St. Luke's with a guide booklet entitled <i>Annotated Advent Retreat – Falling in Love With God</i> . Volunteers were invited to participate in this retreat that was a dissertation project for the researcher/priest. The retreat began Sunday, November 12 with homilies at both services, and the following five Sundays (two services each Sunday). Homilies were about deeper relationship with God pointing to the Sacred Heart process of Ignatian <i>Spiritual Exercises</i> .	a) October 29, after the first homily, "God's Love Relationship With Humankind" was given, an announcement of the dissertation project and invitation to volunteer for the project was made (both services). An (uncounted) number of parishioners expressed interest in the Advent Retreat during 9:00 coffee hour on October 29. Thirteen volunteers attended the first meeting on November 12. Given the numbers who actually came to the retreat it is possible that engaging deeper spirituality is secondary to social life and more head-centered classes like church history and archaeology. Social life keeps people coming back every Sunday.
Terra	"I volunteered for this prayer project because I thought it would be interesting and fun and wanted to help Reverend Sandy with her dissertation."	b) Thirteen attended the initial Advent Retreat gathering on November 12 (ten women and three men). Two more women joined the project later from the Tuesday Contemplative Prayer class.	b) The first two volunteers were young adult women with small children. In both cases it was difficult for them to participate fully because of family responsibilities. But it was a revelation that it was young adults who were the first to sign up for deeper prayer practice, spirituality, and intimacy with God. The retreat brought another volunteer back to church after a "hiatus."
Doris	"I thought possibly it would bring me closer to God, as I was having a dry spell."	c) The guide booklet to the Ignatian <i>Spiritual Exercises</i> provided process, content and coaching for <i>falling in love with God/praying scripture with imagination</i> . The researcher/priest was the interpretive guide to deeper relationship with God through the inner work of this retreat.	
Andrea	"I struggle with focus in general and naturally this effects my quiet time with God as well. I wanted to participate in this project because I liked the idea of having a process and hoped that it would help keep my attention in this prayer time. In addition, I hoped it would help to solidify the routine."		
Brianna	"I am very interested in volunteering for your study. I read daily prayer and journal [my thoughts] and was in! This is something I need in my life right now."  The Sunday group was excellent for me. I was a Roman Catholic that had catechism, but this group felt like a place to learn about the faith – and a different way to think about things."		
Meriam	"I only volunteered for this prayer project at my husband's request. I had been on a fairly lengthy 'hiatus' from church attendance, and honestly, my relationship with God. But Joel asked me to come, and so I did for him. Thank God! I grabbed onto the process in the Advent Annotation Retreat booklet as if it was a life line...which it was, and is."		



Participant	Significant Statement Organized into Meaning Units MEANING UNIT: SETTING FOR PRAYER -- TIME AND PLACE	Textual Description: "What Happened" SETTING FOR PRAYER TIME AND PLACE	Interpretive Description "Experience Interpreted" SETTING FOR PRAYER TIME AND PLACE
Devon	"Prayer at home with Doris early in the morning before leaving for work."	a) Early morning was the primary time, and home (corner of the bedroom, den, dining room, deck) was the most common setting for prayer practice in this group. Home was also mentioned as the place for meeting with a neighbor for prayer practice.	a) In conversation with the larger group inner work (prayer) takes place mostly indoors at home. Most often prayer practice is in the early morning.
Doris	"Prayer at home with Devon first thing early morning, followed by prayer using <i>Forward Day by Day</i> with neighbor."	b) Nature (flowing-through from other duties in a busy life) was also a valued setting for practicing prayer and deepening of the inner life.	b) The young mothers make special effort to maintain prayer practices and are sometimes critical of themselves for not managing their inner work better.
Eva	"I am an early riser. My usual practice is to get up early, make coffee, and take a cup back to bed with me while I read and reflect on the daily readings."	c) Volunteers for the project spoke of special sanctuaries (little altars) in their homes.	c) <i>Forward Day-by-Day</i> was mentioned several times as prayer habit already practiced in this group. The <i>Forward Day-by-Day</i> experience accounted for the interest of some volunteers in this group.
Andrea	"I try to begin and end each day by briefly checking in with God and acknowledging his presence. And I engage in short prayers throughout the day as well."	d) Young adult volunteers (mothers) expressed real need for inner work and prayer practice. They grab time for prayer when they can after their families are cared for.	
Brianna	"When the weather permits, I always prefer to be outside. I love to sit on our deck with the flowers and bees all around me. And when I walk my son to school, we go through the park by our house. On the way home there is a bench which sits on a hill overlooking the park. It is shady and peaceful, and the light is beautiful. This time of day is magical for me and I love to pray on this spot. Otherwise I usually sit in a big chair near the fireplace which can be pretty nice as well, although I rarely engage as easily as I do when I am outside."		
Brianna	"During this project, I choose the den in our basement as the "bench." It is more secluded and therefore less distracting spot in our house. I kept my usual time of day for the practice."		
Brianna	"Mostly after the kids go to bed at the end of the day, but I think early morning would be better, because I'm often too tired at the end of the day. But in the evening I can reflect on the day to come, how scripture might help the next day."		

\*Scott Gunn, Executive Director, *Forward Day by Day*, (Cincinnati, Ohio, Forward Movement), Quarterly Manuals.

Participant	Significant Statement Organized into Meaning Units MEANING UNIT: SETTING FOR PRAYER — TIME AND PLACE	Textual Description: “What Happened” SETTING FOR PRAYER — TIME AND PLACE	Interpretive Description “Experience Interpreted” SETTING FOR PRAYER — TIME AND PLACE
Andrea	<p>“I try to begin and end each day by briefly checking in with God and acknowledging His presence. And I engage in short prayers throughout the day as well. Depending on the day and my state of mind, these may be few or many. In addition, I attempt to set aside quiet time each day to read the bible and pray although there are certainly days when this does not happen. Quiet time is never the very first thing I do as getting ready for school is usually pressing when I get up. Typically I try to have my quiet time right after I get my son to school. I find that the more involved I get in the day, the less likely I will be to put everything down later to settle my mind. I also find that making this time (or not) sets the tone for my day.”</p>	<p>e) Praying without ceasing in every time and place was a common prayer practice with this Episcopalian group.</p>	<p>d) Structured prayer practice or not, meeting God in prayer any time and in any place — and in other faith traditions — was described by folks in the (spiritually focused) Advent Retreat group.</p>
Terra	<p>“In the morning, I sit quietly at my dining room table.”</p>		
Devon	<p>“I pray early each morning — 5 days a week 5-5:30 a.m. with Doris before I leave for work. We share things we haven’t thought about with [our neighbor]. This [practice] is deeper than the past — out of the closet. The Holy Spirit brings things to me.”</p>		
Ariana	<p>“God and I have conversations all day long.”</p>		
Willow	<p>Willow spoke about the power of prayer in her Osage Native American ceremonial heritage — as she was leaving to attend a traditional tribe celebration around her cousin’s death.</p>		

Participant	Significant Statement Organized into Meaning Units MEANING UNIT:  THE GRACE (DESIRE OF THE HEART), SCRIPTURE AND GOD	Textual Description: "What Happened" REFERENCE TO THE GRACE SCRIPTURE, AND GOD	Interpretive Description "Experience Interpreted" REFERENCE TO THE GRACE SCRIPTURE AND GOD
Doris	<p>"There have been times I have felt so close to God. I fight with him, and of course he always wins in the end. When I have been able to give my problems completely over to God I have seen miracles happen in my life."</p> <p>"Sometimes scripture helps, other times not so much. It depends on the day and the scripture, but it always gives me fruit for thought."</p> <p>"There is no certainty and no control in what we are doing here (<i>praying scripture with imagination</i>)."</p>	<p>a) The Advent Retreat was kicked off with a sermon in church (two services) on the <i>Song of Songs</i>, pointing out in scripture the possibility of intimate love between God and humankind (<i>falling in love with God</i>).</p> <p>b) We had five Sunday group meetings starting in November 12, followed by individual practice using suggested texts for each day of the week to end December 23. (Some of the feedback in these narratives is from group meetings, as well as written at the end of the retreat).</p> <p>c) In the group as well as for individual practice, naming the "grace" (the heart's desire) is to precede engaging the text. This was emphasized. Then follow the text and insight about the text with journaling conversation with Jesus in the text — praying the text with imagination. Returning to the text during the conversation was emphasized in order to keep it a two-way conversation.</p>	<p>a) Finding time for group and individual meetings five weeks into Advent was a stretch for some and a commitment that not all were able to make. Meeting every day for structured prayer process was an impossible commitment of time and attention for others.</p> <p>b) Praying scripture with imagination was an alien — not always trusted — practice to some volunteers.</p> <p>c) It was presumptuous to expect significant commitment by volunteers from such a short time frame, especially approaching the busy Christmas season.</p>
Terra	<p>"I was looking forward to checking out the readings from the Bible and having a few conversations with God about my 'heart's desires.' This would be a new experience for me in that it was devoted time rather than random bedtime thoughts."</p> <p>"I focused on the scriptures and what it was saying to me. With Rev. Sandy's written guidance, which was very clear, I made this task easy for me... I really appreciated having the readings listed so I could have direction and would be exposed to different parts of the Bible."</p>	<p>d) Praying the heart's desire with impunity was a surprise and a welcomed experience for some.</p>	<p>d) Some came to the Advent prayer retreat plagued by doubt and suspicion; not everyone felt comfortable enough to "let go and let God" speak to them.</p>
Nova	<p>"This [process] is too hard. I am not used to praying in this way." <i>FROM GROUP 11/26 (Nova dropped out 3rd week).</i></p>		

Participant	Significant Statement Organized into Meaning Units MEANING UNIT:	Textual Description: "What Happened" THE GRACE	Interpretive Description "Experience Interpreted" THE GRACE
Eva	<p>THE GRACE (DESIRE OF THE HEART), SCRIPTURE AND GOD</p> <p>"I was unable to keep up with all the (scripture) readings from it as I do the <i>Forward Day by Day</i> and felt this time of year was hard as so much is going on."</p> <p>"Looking for what was on our minds in these readings — naming the grace [in advance] helps."</p> <p>"I was encouraged in reading aloud by myself. Silently, I am more likely to process it. Aloud I hear it, then reflect on it."</p> <p>I'm thinking of the Sufis — '<i>happiness is submission to God.</i>' <i>FROM GROUP 12/10</i></p>	<p>e) In the 12/17 Group I used Jesuit Ed Kinerk's* suggestion (for a change of pace) to try reading Jesus' words in scripture aloud.</p> <p>f) Praying the text was too esoteric for some that even admitted to being intimidated by reading the bible. The <i>Forward Day by Day</i> guided process was a common and favored prayer practice for some in the group.</p> <p>g) Rote prayers from the <i>Book of Common Prayer</i> were a fall-back that clarified "authentic" prayer for two women.</p>	<p>e) Not all of the scripture readings made for easy conversation. Selected texts could have been more goal oriented— as was Ignatius' aim in the original <i>Spiritual Exercises</i>. The goal here was — relationship — "<i>falling in love with God</i>" to see if that could happen in praying the <i>Lectioary</i>. In some cases it seemed to work — in other cases drawing "conversation" out of the text was more difficult.</p> <p>f) Reading Jesus' voice in the text aloud helped some to focus of attention and better hear what God was saying in the text.</p> <p>g) It was a common concern that the one praying was mulling over one's own issues, not trusting what the text was offering from God's point of view. This group was familiar with critical reading of text. And so, in some cases, questioning the text may have been a healthy sign. In other cases "mulling over one's issues" may have signaled a wound offering the opportunity for healing.</p>
Debra	<p>"Praying in this way is about trust. And sometimes there are things you don't want to hear." <i>FROM GROUP 11/26,</i></p> <p>Some days I didn't get to it. Sometimes I struggled with the text." <i>FROM GROUP 12/10</i> My life is frantic. Work isn't in a good place. I just want to find peace.</p> <p>"Sometimes in two way conversation in prayer, I wonder why I am thinking that? Then rote prayers come up. When I read aloud I [notice] if I am hearing a question or a suggestion. There is a different feel in the delivery: [I hear] '<i>Are you going to follow me.</i>' [And] dialogue can be hit or miss.</p>	<p>* E. Edward Kinerk, S.J., <i>Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits, Personal Encounters With Jesus Christ, 48/3</i>, (Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, Autumn 2016), 14.</p>	
Brianna			
Willow			

Participant	Significant Statement Organized into Meaning Units MEANING UNIT: THE GRACE (DESIRE OF THE HEART) SCRIPTURE AND GOD (continued)	Textual Description: "What Happened" THE GRACE SCRIPTURE, AND GOD (cont.)	Interpretive Description "Experience Interpreted" THE GRACE SCRIPTURE AND GOD (cont.)
Andrea	<p>"There were times when the scripture seemed to speak pretty directly to the grace for which I was asking and, of course, other times when it didn't at all — at least not initially. I did follow the steps in the retreat booklet. At the beginning of the project, the process from start to finish took me quite a while but began to move much quicker as time went on. I found the process challenging in a group setting both because of my slower pace in moving through the steps and also because of my built in distractibility. What I did enjoy very much about the group was hearing from the others about their experience, and simply coming together to share in this experience."</p> <p>"I got hung up in trying to understand the text from time to time. When insight didn't jump out at me, I probably over thought everything."</p> <p>"I question — is this me or am I interfering in what I am hearing? And sometimes what I am hearing is addressed on a broader and deeper level, but comes back to what really matters." "Sometimes I get important information and solve problems in dreams."</p> <p>"I liked that I could spend 10 or 30 minutes, and come away having had a meaningful conversation with God and insight and inspiration for whatever was on my heart that morning."</p>	<p>h) Scripture spoke directly to the "grace" (heart's desire) for some, though not for all.</p> <p>i) There was honest sharing about the prayer experience in the five Advent Retreat group meetings.</p> <p>j) What looked like a controlled, directed, and artificial approach to prayer began to flow and make sense by the second group meeting — for some the parameters of the process were liberating because they offered a structure for proceeding.</p> <p>k) Several expressed gratitude for having a designated time for themselves.</p>	<p>h) Jesuit spiritual directors sometimes claim that one's heart desire is God's desire put in one's heart — to pay attention to heart's desire. (Even envy and jealousy may point to desire yet to be realized.)</p> <p>i) Some struggled to stay focused on what the text was saying to them ("monkey mind"). And the text didn't always speak to everyone all of the time.</p> <p>j) Group experience was essential to launching this dissertation project because these Ignatian spiritual exercises were new to all in the group. The exercise's similarity to <i>lectio divina</i>, which was familiar to some at St. Luke's, kept them from being an alien experience.</p> <p>k) As in contemplation, some participants were able to relax and surrender to the process — not struggle with it — but let it flow. And welcomed surprises were reported in doing that.</p>
Meriam	<p>"My concerns and thoughts fit the scripture. I always know that He is my best friend. 'I choose you', He says. FROM GROUP 11/26</p>		
Devon			

Participant	Significant Statements Organized into Meaning Units MEANING UNIT: PRAYER, JOURNALING AND GOD	Textual Description: "What Happened" PRAYER, JOURNALING AND GOD	Interpretive Description "Experience Interpreted" PRAYER, JOURNALING AND GOD
Terra	<p>"I decided that God was the goodness in all of us, including myself and s/he would speak to me from that perspective." While all of it wasn't relevant to my desires, it all gave me insight and made me think."</p> <p>"Instead of worrying about articulating profound insights I might get from the readings, I jotted down phrases that spoke to me....this whole reading spurred these conversation with God: My conversations with God...were short, to the point, and very encouraging...I'm often the skeptic in the conversation but the good of God persists." (<i>Terra is a creative writer that gave two journal examples of her conversations with God.</i>)</p>	<p>a) We did journaling in every class session to demonstrate and practice the process of praying scripture with imagination in the group, and then to enhance venturing out doing interior work alone during the week. Workbook pages 7-9 in the Advent booklet were published as prompts to remind (and simplify) the process – make it less daunting –during the week.</p> <p>b) Some were self-conscious about writing, and others doubted their ability to approach scripture at all.</p>	<p>a) For some, journaling was a new experience, a demanding discipline.</p> <p>b) Proficient writers took easily to journaling. Volunteers that weren't used to writing their thoughts down on paper may have been among the drop-outs.</p> <p>c) One volunteer combined praying scripture with imagination with dream analysis and other meditative disciplines. Another felt aware of working with her unconscious in the process. She was a comfortable with journaling and welcomed writing dialogue with imagination.</p>
	<p>"I'm not sure that journaling this way is in my future for every day. I'm not feeling that dedicated. Though, I bet I could get motivated for it during a specific time frame like Christmas or lent...It is a good reminder and really gave me a spiritual boost—it made me feel close to God."</p>		
	<p>"Right now, I am pursuing <i>The Artist's Way</i> and three pages of writing in the morning. I expect God and I will have conversations then. I love having her on my side."</p>		
	<p>"I really enjoy the process. It is creative like writing my book. It brings things forward from the unconscious."</p>		
	<p>The structure [of the spiritual exercises] worked well and brought my subconscious into what I was reading. And that intention made the conversation possible.</p>		

Participant

Significant Statement  
Organized into Meaning Units  
MEANING UNIT:

PRAYER, JOURNALING AND GOD (continued)

Textual Description:  
"What Happened"

PRAYER,

JOURNALING AND GOD (cont.)

Interpretive Description  
"Experience Interpreted"

PRAYER,

JOURNALING AND GOD, (cont.)

Eva

"I was very comfortable working through all eight steps in *Praying Scripture with Imagination* and, each time, gained some new insights from doing so. However, in my daily practice I have not followed through beyond the first three steps. At home, I seem to be easily distracted by the trivia of daily life. While I had no problem writing my answers to the questions in the group setting, I could not get myself to set pen to paper even once at home! I received a fancy, bound blank journal as a Christmas gift and am wondering if that will be a catalyst for me to try journaling. I don't understand my reluctance, other than it seems a burdensome demand on my time at this point."

"God's mind is different, so I am sometimes suspicious of what I think I am hearing."

Andrea

"Journaling my conversation with God was completely new to me. While I fully believe that God speaks to me often, one of the most significant benefits of this practice was that it held a space for me to stop and listen. For all the praying and talking I do, I am much less skilled at listening. This process served to guide me into a two-way conversation. I think what I probably struggled with most was questioning whether I was actually having a two-way conversation with myself, hearing my own thoughts, and finding what I was specifically looking for. I concede the possibility of this but if I was leading, I didn't always know where I was going; and ended up with some pretty distinct insight at times. As I mentioned in one of the group meetings, I didn't expect to hear a booming voice in the room with me. Rather I feel that God sparks those light bulb moments and that when I seek Him in genuine faith, He gives me clarity in my thinking."

c) There are eight steps in the process. However the last four are repetition of the preceding --- and aren't always necessary.

d) There were distinct insights and "light bulb moments" along with clarity of thinking for Andrea as she got deeper into the process.

e) Listening to God in scripture and in silence isn't always a natural or customary process for volunteers. Talking to God comes more naturally for most. And so, "monkey mind" is a common struggle in prayers of listening.

d) Staying with the first three or four steps in the spiritual exercise was adequate to cover the territory for busy folks.

e) Busyness, distraction, and motivation plagued this prayer practice.

f) Elking out a space in one's life already full of demands on time was a major challenge for some volunteers. Others welcomed the opportunity to open a space for conversation with God.

g) Again, trusting the conversation to get beyond talking to oneself in dialogue with God in scripture was a concern expressed by several volunteers. This made C.G. Jung's take on God within speaking through the unconscious especially helpful in trusting and enjoying the *Spiritual Exercise* process. (See Chapter 3).

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s. blake, Appendix F, page 189

Participant	Significant Statement Organized into Meaning Units MEANING UNIT: PRAYER, JOURNALING AND GOD (continued)	Textual Description: "What Happened" PRAYER, JOURNALING AND GOD (cont.)	Textual Description: "Experience Interpreted" PRAYER, JOURNALING AND GOD (cont.)
Devon	<p>"I have to give myself time to think about it. I get stubborn sometimes. God says <i>'you've got your answer'</i>. And sometimes the answer is 'no'."</p>	<p>f) Journaling was sometimes used to sort out problems. For others, it was a process of getting to other deeper meaning.</p>	<p>h) Some took easily to praying scripture with imagination – praying and journaling. To others journaling was anathema for one reason or another.</p>
Doris	<p>"With [my neighbor] so much of our prayer life is [with] repetitious prayers out of the prayer book. I like more spontaneous prayers and I talk to God daily throughout the day...I like writing down things. It helps me to purge problems and get off my chest what may help or hinder me in my prayer life."</p>	<p>g) Journaling was for some was a stretch that wasn't a natural, customary or trusted process for them. For others it was a familiar way of expressing their inner lives.</p>	<p>i) Personality preferences may account for some lack of interest. Some aren't "wired" for dialogue in prayer. (See Chapter 3 on personality). And receptivity to inner work is about being <i>ready</i>.</p>
Maddie	<p>"I come from a family of lawyers and judges. There are some things that we don't write down. Conversation with scripture is beyond my ability."</p>	<p>h) Some volunteers who stayed with the group did not journal at all.</p>	<p>j) Anger about life and God and lack of trust in God may be a hindrance for some.</p>
Ariana	<p>I don't really think about God, although God and I have conversations all day long. If I'm talking out loud, I'm talking to God. I'm not talking to myself. I talk to God about simple things. I don't ask for favors, except when it comes to my dog Shauni. Do you know how many people ask God for stuff (rhetorical question)? ...I have a conversation most every day – "thank you for this beautiful day." And sometimes [I say] "how about no killings today"...that's about it."</p>	<p>k) Writing didn't come easily for all of the volunteers. It was not a natural, a customary or trusted process for all.</p>	<p>k) Writing didn't come easily for all of the volunteers. It was not a natural, a customary or trusted process for all.</p>
Meriam	<p>"I love the structure of this process. The outline – Grace, Text, Insight, Colloquy, Be Still, Insight, Colloquy, Prayer – provides a framework within which I can be free to be led by the Spirit, yet remain on task. My relationship with God has been renewed, and this process allows me to stay in conversation with God throughout the day, throughout my life."</p>		



Participant

Significant Statement  
Organized into Meaning Units  
MEANING UNIT:  
SYNCHRONICITY/PRAYER IN MINISTRY,  
CHANGE/GROWTH IN FAITH,

Textual Description:  
"What Happened"  
REFERENCE TO SYNCHRONICITY  
CHANGE/GROWTH IN FAITH

Interpretive Description  
"Experience Interpreted"  
REFERENCE TO SYNCHRONICITY  
CHANGE, GROWTH IN FAITH

Eva

One of those synchronicities brought me another enhancement to my daily spiritual practice, this one from *Forward Day by Day*. On December 11, in reading from Revelation, the commentator spoke of the blessing of reading scripture aloud and recommended the practice. I tried it and found that reading the passages aloud, after first pausing to reflect on what I wanted to ask of the Lord, helped me even more to focus on what the scripture was saying to me about distraction.

a) Four volunteers shared their "conversations with Jesus sitting on a park bench." In these cases there was a certain thrill about the synchronicity (coincidence) of their prayer, and how that manifested in their experiences that followed, as well as manifesting in their ministries.

a) The test of praying scripture with imagination really is how it manifests in daily life, and in ministries. Coincidences (synchronicities) were shared in several cases.

Following the steps of *praying scripture with imagination* over the past six weeks has led me to feel greater intimacy with God and to come back in my mind to my morning prayer time later in the day. Sometimes I have reflected on what transpired in prayer when I am involved in other activities during the day and, I think, that has influenced my behavior towards others an on the tasks I am performing.

I expect to continue the prayer practice I have learned so far and hope to build on it in the future. I do have an interest in some or all of exploring other spiritual practices, forging a relationship with a spiritual director, an participating in a prayer retreat at St. Luke's or at a Jesuit or Benedictine retreat house.

Brianna

"The cadence [of my prayer] was 'Lord help me to find peace.' (This may have been my own judgmental tone.) [Then] I realized Jesus doesn't talk like that. This is not a fire and brimstone Lord. I ended in a more kind, nurturing and loving place. The best thing [for me] about synchronicity was finding and giving peace to others in my life."

"The nice part of the exercise is having time for myself. *This is for you.*"

Participant

Significant Statement  
Organized into Meaning Units  
MEANING UNIT:  
SYNCHRONICITY/PRAYER IN MINISTRY,  
CHANGE/GROWTH IN FAITH

Textual Description:  
"What Happened"  
REFERENCE TO SYNCHRONICITY  
CHANGE, GROWTH

Interpretive Description  
"Experience Interpreted"  
REFERENCE TO SYNCHRONICITY  
CHANGE, GROWTH

Doris

"Over the years I have tried to use my talents not so much in the Church but out in the world. I had my own ministry when I worked in retail. But when I retired I have been left to taking care of people and over the years have done so much of that I am worn out on it though I still do some....though I think [God] has used me in places along the path. Some of them have brought me joy. I am not sure it has brought me closer to God. I do think we should use our gifts for the world regardless. I think the bible reminds us these are our duties as Christians to use our talents and abilities to build up His kingdom."

b) Two of the respondents about synchronicity (meaningful coincidence) between praying scripture and life experiences are vestry members deeply giving of themselves as their actions are born in prayer.

b) "Contemplation and Action" is the process of bringing synchronicity in prayer meaningfully into ministry in the world. Incarnation of the Word is the aim of Ignatian Spirituality, and of this dissertation project.

"If we could always believe what we pray and give all to God we could move mountains. Sometime it is hard to hold on to that closeness. And that is where I am at this point....I am hoping to gain that closeness again."

c) Though some prayerful souls in the Advent prayer group spoke of dry spells and doubt in prayer, they also expressed an assurance that they are engaged as best they could be in the "kingdom of God" in their work at St. Luke's and beyond.

c) There was a yearning to be closer to God (who seems at times to be playing "hide and seek"). For others God was very present and intimately involved and in conversation about their lives.

Meriam

"One particular morning, I had a very difficult decision to make; one that would, potentially, negatively impact one party, while positively impacting another party, and many others. I was unsure how it would impact me. The text that morning was Joshua 2:2-9. Initially I thought this would be a 'got nothing' morning, but insight led me to conversation regarding my strong will, that it has been both a trouble and a help throughout my life. Rahab made a decision to hide these men and not tell the whole truth to the king. She believed that God had given the land to Israel and that God's will was for her to help them. After stillness, my insight was that sometimes hard decisions have to be made, and don't seem 'fair' to all parties involved, but the decision needs to be in the light and will of God. In further conversation, God reminded me to be still and listen before acting, and that we would need to do this together. This led me to spend time "listening" to the whole situation, making a tough decision, and acting on it in the light of God's will. God helped me to acknowledge the difficulty this would cause one party, having compassion, but a firm boundary with my decision."

Participant	Significant Statement Organized into Meaning Units MEANING UNIT: SYNCHRONICITY/PRAYER AND MINISTRY, CHANGE/GROWTH IN FAITH,	Textual Description: "What Happened" REFERENCE TO SYNCHRONICITY CHANGE, GROWTH IN FAITH	Interpretive Description "Experience Interpreted" REFERENCE TO SYNCHRONICITY CHANGE, GROWTH IN FAITH
Andrea	<p>"I think the practice of deliberately listening for God's voice in a conversation instead of merely talking has indeed added a dimension to my relationship with Him. Participating in this research has caused me to consider the essential role listening plays in any relationship. Getting to know another requires time together and an exchange of information.</p> <p>The insight coming out of these conversations has come back to me on many occasions. I find that most, if not all, of what I seem to hear God saying can be applied throughout all areas of my life.</p> <p>Much of what I felt I was hearing during the prayer sessions addressed the grace requested but on a much broader and deeper level than I think I was expecting.</p> <p>"More and more I find that as I peel back the layers and get closer to the essence of a matter, it is quite universal at its core. I also noticed a recurring theme throughout the course of the project which was that I have been trying to put the cart before the horse and need to go back and work on the basics. One day in particular I asked for grace in understanding what it is to truly follow God. I often wonder whether I am living the life God intends for me, if I am living for Him and following His will or if I am living for myself. After a very round about dialog (with Ezekiel 34:1-10) what I ended with was that following God means looking to Him first rather than seeking Him through living and doing. Living and doing His will comes as a result of allowing Him to lead and use me, not the other way around."</p>	<p>d) Andrea realized the importance of being a good listener (to God in scripture) in getting to know God in relationship. For her what she heard got beyond her heart's desire (the "grace") into deeper meaning — hearing "the basics" of God's will for us.</p> <p>e) She realized time together in relationship with the divine spilled over into her daily life (as "synchronicity" — coincidence).</p>	<p>d) One of the fundamental propositions of Ignatian Spirituality is meeting God in day-to-day life — everywhere and in everything. It is all sacred. This means not discounting God's voice in our realities — hearing God in the good, as well as what God in the bad, and the ugly is saying to us.</p>

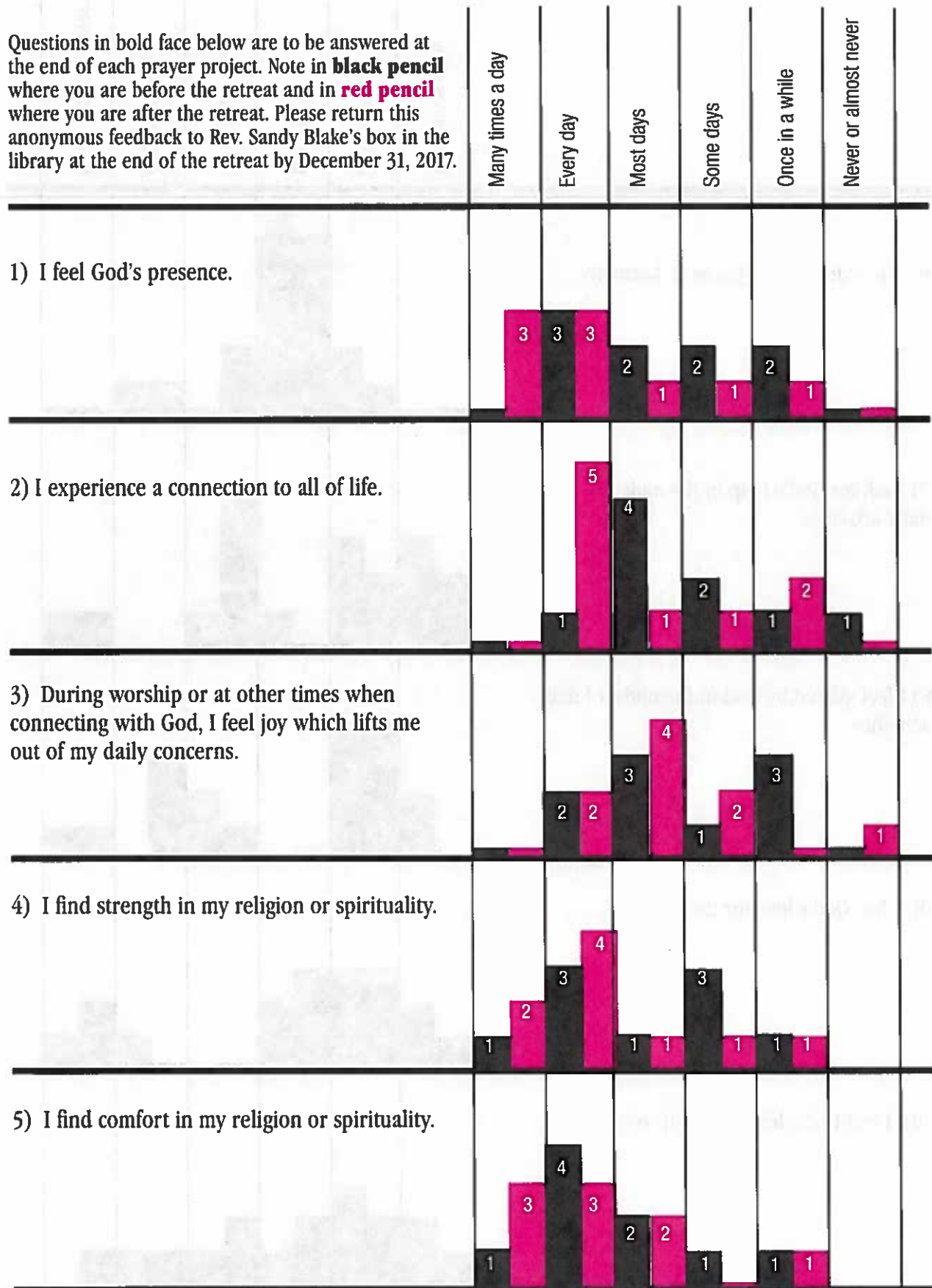
Participant	Significant Statement Organized into Meaning Units MEANING UNIT: FEELING PEACE/CLOSENESS TO GOD (or not)	Textual Description: "What Happened" REFERENCE TO FEELING PEACE/CLOSE- NESS TO GOD	Interpretive Description "Experience Interpreted" REFERENCE TO FEELING PEACE/CLOSE- NESS TO GOD
Doris	"The experience was very beneficial. I really did remain happier, calmer, and more focused during the holiday season. It simplified my life and kept my priorities straight during a potentially crazy time."	a) Four volunteers felt deeper relationship/intimacy with God. Others felt communication with God was difficult. Some felt a distance, even estrangement in relationship with God.	a) Ariana believes God is "indifferent" to the often heartbreaking consequences of human "free will." God is not going to interfere.
Eva	"Following the steps of <i>praying scripture with imagination</i> over the past six weeks has led me to feel greater intimacy with God..."	b) Five requested and three received one-on-one spiritual direction during the Advent Retreat.	b) Greater wisdom about one-on-one spiritual direction, is that there be referrals beyond this kind of relationship with clergy and cohorts in the parish.
Rylee	"Sometimes I just crawl up in God's lap – 'Abba Father.' He heard what I had to say and spoke back."	c) Several indicated interest in experiencing other prayer practices, and in programs about spiritual life at St. Luke's in the future.	
Andrea	"At 5 a.m. when there is clarity, for the last two days nothing came to me. <i>Forward Day by Day</i> today told me who God is."		
Meriam	"I think the practice of deliberately listening for God's voice in conversation instead of merely talking has indeed added a dimension to my relationship with Him."		
Meriam	"As my relationship with God has been refreshed, I am definitely interested in one-on-one spiritual direction, and very interested in a prayer retreat. Thank you again for the gift of praying scripture with imagination."		
Ariana	"I think God is indifferent. Not only is God indifferent (because he gave everybody free will), he is also impartial. He does not interfere with outcome – it is up to you whether you want to take care of yourself."		

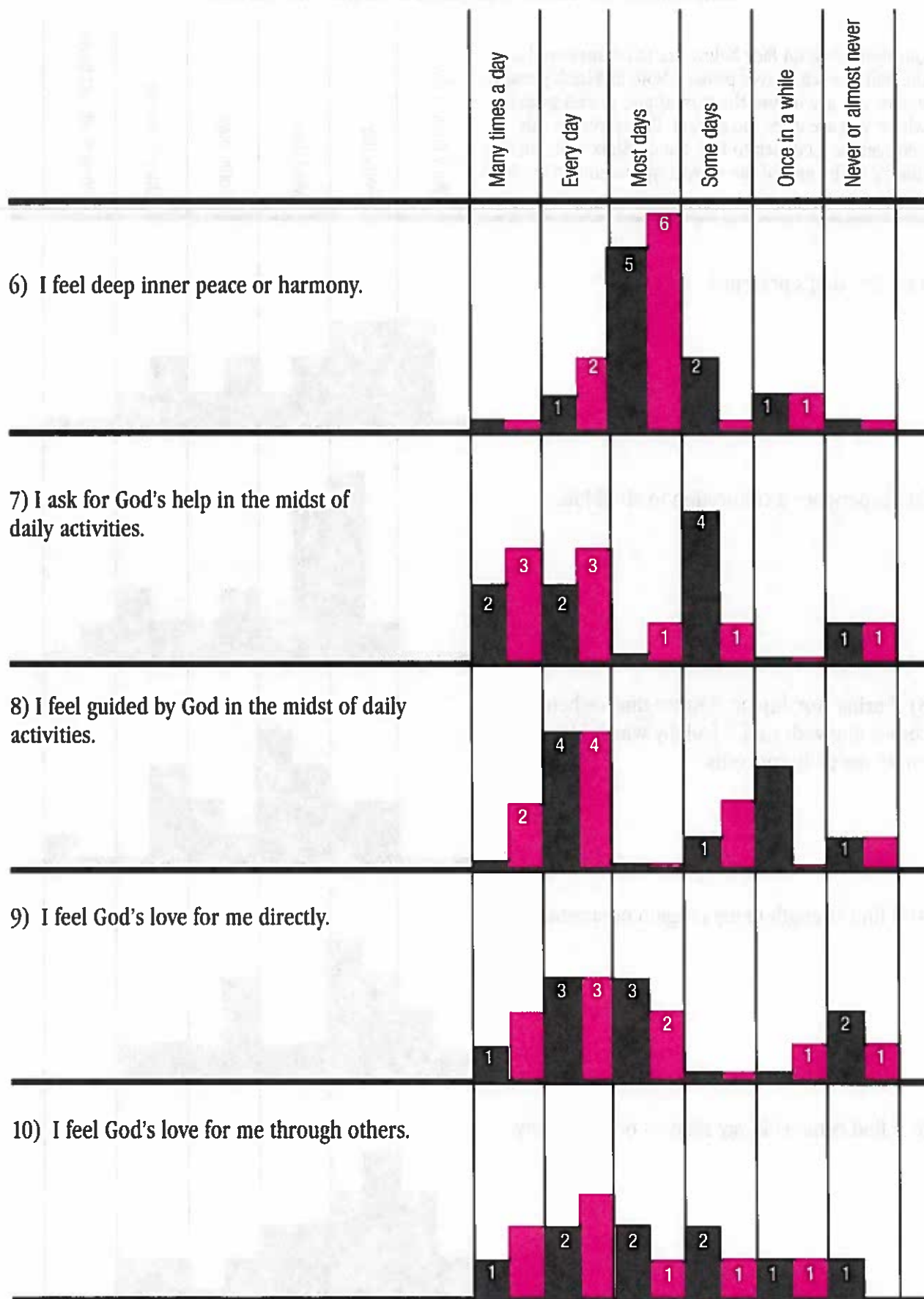
Participant	Significant Statement Organized into Meaning Units MEANING UNIT:	Textual Description: “What Happened” TO CONTINUE IN THE FUTURE	Interpretive Description “Experience Interpreted” TO CONTINUE IN THE FUTURE
Eva	<p>I expect to continue the prayer practice I have learned so far and hope to build on it in the future. I do have an interest in some or all of exploring other spiritual practices, forging a relationship with a spiritual director, an participating in a prayer retreat at St. Luke’s or at a Jesuit or Benedictine retreat house.</p>	<p>a) Four volunteers indicated that praying scripture with imagination would be a part of their future prayer practices.</p> <p>b) Three volunteers requested and received spiritual direction during the Advent Retreat.</p> <p>c) Two volunteers that indicated future involvement with praying scripture with imagination also indicated interest in exploring other prayer practices.</p> <p>d) There is openness to exploration of prayer practices (ie contemplation and <i>lectio divina</i>) in St. Luke’s contemplative prayer group.</p>	<p>a) Two volunteers indicated desire to engage spiritual programming at St. Luke’s in the future, exploring other prayer practices.</p> <p>b) My sense is that interest in and commitment to mystical piety and spirituality at St. Luke’s is minimal and superficial. (For example, contemplative prayer best not exceed four minutes at a sitting!)</p> <p>c) Social interaction and social action (outreach) and head-centered (academic) spirituality prevails at St. Luke’s, particularly among the men of the parish.</p>
Andrea	<p>I would very much like to continue using this process. I don’t know that I will use it daily in place of my regular prayer time but I think I will use it at least once a week if not more. Beyond the duration of the project, I can’t say that the practice has thus far helped me to be more diligent in finding quiet time each day. This was the first guided process I have ever used for prayer and I feel that it has been beneficial. I would be very interested in other practices, and prayer retreats. I would also welcome time with a spiritual director.</p>		
Terra	<p>“I’m not sure that journaling this way is in my future for every day. I’m not feeling that dedicated. Though, I bet I could get motivated for it during a specific time frame like Christmas or lent...It is a good reminder and really gave me a spiritual boost—it made me feel close to God.”</p>		
Meriam	<p>“I wanted to thank you for introducing me to praying scripture with imagination. I love this practice! I’ve continued using it daily, and it has truly been a blessing in my life. I’m amazed that whatever is on my mind, the selected text speaks to it, and prompts conversation with God. In the last few months there have been only a couple of occasions, where the conversation was, ‘Sorry, God, I’ve got nothing here.’ Other than these couple of occasions, every prayer session has been extremely fruitful.”</p>		



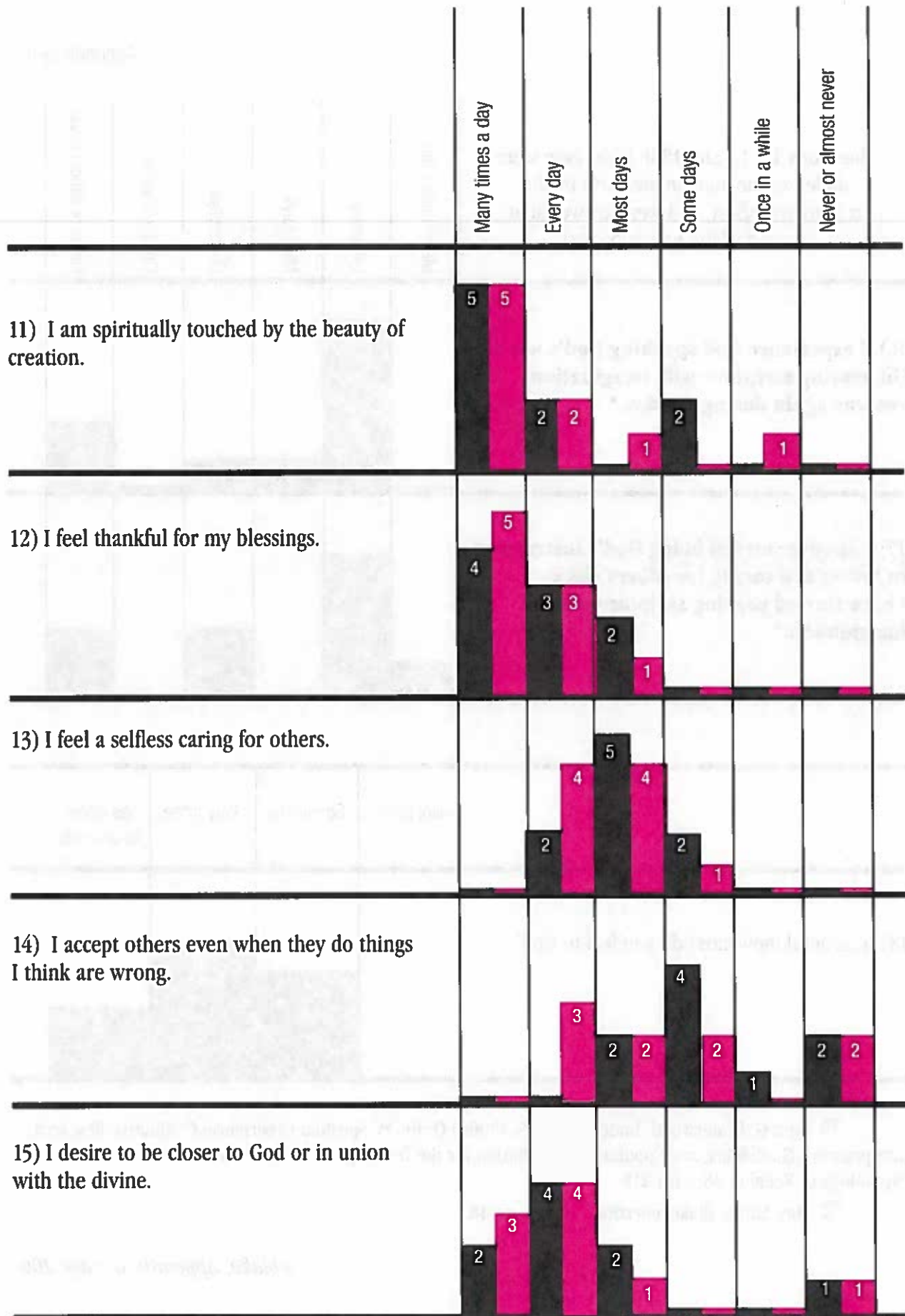
ANONYMOUS FEEDBACK BEFORE AND AFTER THE RETREAT

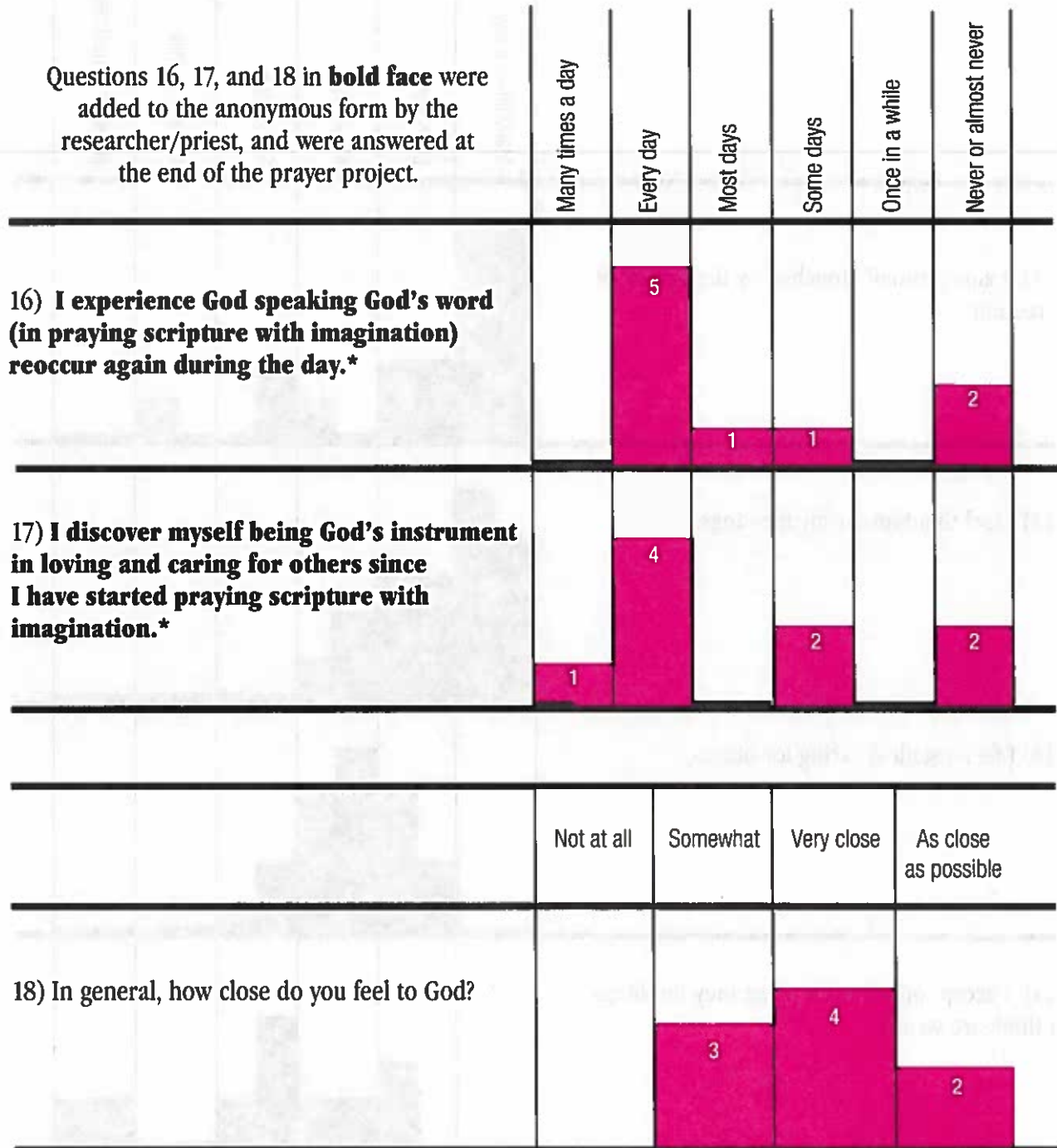
Questions in bold face below are to be answered at the end of each prayer project. Note in **black pencil** where you are before the retreat and in **red pencil** where you are after the retreat. Please return this anonymous feedback to Rev. Sandy Blake's box in the library at the end of the retreat by December 31, 2017.











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© Rev. Sandy Blake, questions 16, 17, and 18.

*The table of bread and wine has now been made ready. It is the table of company with Jesus and with those who love him. It is the table of sharing with the poor of the world, with whom Jesus identified himself. It is the table communion with the earth in which Christ became incarnate. So come to this table, you who have much faith, and you who would like to have more; you who have been to this sacrament often, and you who have not been for a long time; you who have tried to follow Jesus, and you who have failed. Come it is Christ who invites us to meet him here.*



## A N I N V I T A T I O N

hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people

check-in, contemplation  
lectio divina, eucharist



Tuesday mornings 9:30 (without fail!) in the library at St. Luke's, we meet for friendship with God and friendship with each other. There is opportunity to share our own stories (check-in); contemplation (inviting the Spirit to join us); *Lectio Divina* (what's that?) conversation with God in Scripture; Eucharist (taking Christ into our bodies, so we can be the body of Christ in the world).

A new parishioner in our group said we are about more than friendship; that this group is a "Royal Priesthood". And that is true. Each participant is a "Royal Priest" offering prayer, in hearing and sharing what God is saying to him/her, and what s/he is saying to God in return. And each has a part in praying the Eucharist.

SO JOIN US.

TAKE YOUR INTERIOR LIFE TO A NEW DEPTH AND TO A NEW HEIGHT.

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# Advent

*contemplative interludes*  
with Taizé chant

**Advent Sundays, December, 2, 9, 16 and 23**  
**Prayer with Mind, Body and Spirit in four Contemplative Interludes**  
**with Taizé chant, icons, candles, songs and Psalms**  
9 a.m. to 10 a.m. at St. Luke's in the church library

December 2, prayer with the **mind** (praying scripture with imagination – the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*); (*Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus, Veni Sancte Spiritus*);

December 9, prayer with the **body** (with liturgical dance and the body in motion); (*Veni Sancte Spiritus, Jesus Remember Me, Ubi Caritas, Dona Nobis Pacem, Alleluia*)

December 16, prayer in the **spirit** (Centering Prayer); (*Veni Sancte Spiritus, Alleluia*)

December 23, praying **Psalms and songs**.  
(*Veni Sancte Spiritus, Jesus Remember Me, Ubi Caritas, Dona Nobis Pacem (sung in round), Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus*)

# Advent

*contemplative interludes*  
with Taizé chant

**DECEMBER 2, 2018, PRAYING WITH THE MIND**  
praying scripture with imagination — the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*

CHANT: *Campanas de Taizé, O come, O come, Emmanuel*

- 1) GRACE — Name the grace — what is your heart's desire today? (This is a door to the unconscious.)
- 2) TEXT — *Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.* — Luke 12:35-38, NRSV
- 3) INSIGHT — you get from this reading. What is the Lord saying to your heart, your mind, your gut in this text?)
- 4) COLLOQUY — CONVERSATION — with the Lord speaking WITH you in this passage of scripture. What do you say to the Lord? What does the Lord say to you? Write down the conversation.
- 5) REMAIN/BE STILL in prayer.
- 6) INSIGHT that came out of the stillness.
- 7) CONVERSATION with the Lord about that insight:
- 8) CONCLUDING PRAYER

ENDING CANTICLE: *The Song of Zechariah (Benedictus Dominus Deus)* p. 50 - 51, BCP.

**DECEMBER 9, 2018, PRAYING WITH THE BODY**  
liturgical dance and the body in motion

*Campanas de Taizé 1*

PSALM: *Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints.  
Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King.  
Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with [guitar]  
tambourine and harp. For the Lord takes delight in his people;  
he crowns the humble with salvation (Psalm 149:1-4 NIV).  
And so, let us praise the Lord this morning with Psalm, with song and with dance!*

CHANT WITH DANCE: *Veni Sancte Spiritus: 28. Come Holy Spirit 2*

*Ve – ni – San – cte Spi – ri tus. (repeated)  
Ho – ly – Spir – it, come to us.*

CHANT WITH DANCE: *Ubi Caritas: Live in charity and love, live in charity; God will dwell with you. 3*

*U – bi – ca – ri – tas et a – mor,  
U – bi – ca – ri – tas De – us – i – bi est. (repeated)*

PSALM: *Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other (Psalm 85:10, NRSV). May the Lord bless his people with peace (Psalm 29:11b, NRSV).*

CHANT WITH DANCE: *Dona Nobis Pacem; Give us peace. 4*

*Do – na no – bis pa – cem, pa – cem.  
Do – na no – bis pa – cem*

*Do – na no – bis pa – cem, Do – na no – bis pa – cem,  
Do – na no – bis pa – cem Do – na no – bis pa – cem*

SCRIPTURE: *Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.  
He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.' (Luke 23:42-43).*

CHANT WITH DANCE: 11, Jesus, Remember me 2

*Je – sus, re – mem – ber me when you come in – to your king – dom.  
Je – sus, re – mem – ber me when you come in – to your king – dom.*

SCRIPTURE: *After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! (Revelation 19:1, NRSV).*

CHANT WITH DANCE: Alleluia 15 2

*Al – le – lu – ia, al – le – lu – ia, (repeated)*

*(see credits 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 at the end of Appendix J)*

*s.blake, Appendix J, page 206*



**DECEMBER 16, 2018, PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT**  
Christian Meditation — Centering Prayer

From *Open Mind, Open Heart* by Thomas Keating:

“The Spirit prays in us and we consent.” “The more one lets go, the stronger the presence of the Spirit becomes.” “Have no expectation in this prayer.”

“God’s first language is silence.” “Centering Prayer is an exercise in letting go. That’s all it is.” “To receive God is the chief work in contemplative prayer.” “This prayer is a journey into the unknown.”

“We accept God as who He is, without trying to possess Him.”

“This dynamism is a kind of divine psychotherapy....to empty out our unconscious and free us from the obstacles to the free flow of grace in our minds, emotions, and bodies.”

- GUIDELINES:** 1) Choose a **sacred word** as a symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence and action within. *Abba, Mother Mary, Father, Love, Peace, Mercy, Let Go, Trust, Yes.*  
2) **Sitting comfortably** with eyes closed, settle briefly, and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God’s presence and action within.  
3) When you become aware of thoughts, **return ever-so-gently** to the sacred word.  
4) At the end of the prayer period, **remain in silence** with eyes closed for a couple of minutes. <sup>5</sup>

*Campanas de Taizé*

**SCRIPTURE:** *Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.* (Matthew 6:6, NRSV).

**CHANT:** *Veni Sancte Spiritus: 28. Come Holy Spirit<sup>2</sup>*  
*Ve – ni – San – cte Spi – ri tus. (repeat)*

**SCRIPTURE:** *Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts; all your waves and your billows have gone over me. By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.* (Psalm 42, 7, 8).  
*Be still and know that I am God.* (Psalm 46:10, NRSV).

**MEDITATION:** (15 minutes)

**SOUNDING BELL:**

**PRAYER:** The Lord’s Prayer

**GROUP REFLECTION:** How was that with you? What are we waiting for in Advent this year?

## ADVENT CONTEMPLATIVE INTERLUDE, December 23, PSALMS AND SONGS (handout)

**DECEMBER 23, 2018, PSALMS AND SONGS****Lo! he comes with clouds descending** (the apocalyptic theme of advent)

SCRIPTURE: *Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near. John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. — Revelation 1: 3-8.*

HYMN: *Lo! he comes with clouds descending (58) or Come, thou long expected Jesus (66)***You came, but not in splendor bright, not as a monarch, but the child of Mary**

SCRIPTURE: *"Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves." — Luke 12:35-38*

HYMN: *Creator of the stars of night (60)***O come, O come, Emmanuel**

SCRIPTURE: *"When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those inside the city must leave it, and those out in the country must not enter it; for these are days of vengeance, as a fulfillment of all that is written. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress on the earth and wrath against this people; they will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your hands, because your redemption is drawing near." — Luke 21:20-28*

HYMN: *O come, O come, Emmanuel (56)*

**The angel Gabriel from heaven came**

**SCRIPTURE:** *In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now,, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her. — Luke 1:26-38*

**HYMN:** *The angel Gabriel from heaven came (265)*

**PRAYER:** *God of day and night, keep us vigilant in faith and patient in praise until that great day when Christ returns in clouds of glory to lift us to your heavenly throne. Amen.*<sup>6</sup>

*(text for Sunday, December 23 is Luke 1: 39-45, 46-55 – Mary Visits Elizabeth and the Magnificat)*

1. Gonzalo Santiago, *Campanas de Taizé*, YouTube, 2012.
2. *Taizé: Songs for Prayer*, (Chicago, Illinois, GIA Publications, Inc., 1968), 22, 15, 28.
3. Jacques Berthier and the Community of Taizé, "Live in Charity (Ubi Caritas)," *The Faith We Sing*, (Nashville, Tennessee, Abingdon Press, 2000), 2179.
4. "Dona nobis pacem", *The United Methodist Hymnal*, (Nashville, Tennessee, The United Methodist Publishing House, 2001), 376.
5. Thomas Keating, *Open Mind Open Heart*, (New York, New York, Continuum, 1992), 13, 17, 40, 57, 74, 71, 72, 86, 93, 139.
6. Gordon Giles, *O Come Emmanuel*, (Brewster, Massachusetts, Paraclete Press, 2006), 19.

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