Hungry Soul
A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of Worship and Spiritual Formation

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Abstract

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In a large, stable, suburban parish, Sunday formation programming was declining rapidly. Parents expressed concern that their children could not participate in Sunday School classes due to other family commitments. As a missional experiment during a transitional period, the interim rector introduced Hungry Soul, an innovative eucharistic service designed to provide spiritual formation for young families. Using a contemporary format of *lectio divina*, the group explored the Gospel and shared communion, which was followed by a potluck supper.

The Hungry Soul project aimed to support spiritual formation in a context of worship in a post-Christian context. The thesis developed within the broader context of current social scientific research and demographic trends, which paint a dismal picture for parish engagement among people under the age of 40. The thesis was also influenced by the missional conversation in theology, which contends that the role of the Church is to go out, in apostolic tradition, to seek and share the Gospel with the people of God.

As a phenomenological study, the project examined the lived experience of participants, utilizing Karin Dahlberg's practice of bridling to keep the focus on the emergence of meaning. Examined through the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology of Karin Dahlberg, Peter John Hobbs, and Mark Vagle, the research revealed the power of community in the spiritual life of participants.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1 Introduction

We sat on the floor in the family room of a parishioner's home. There were seven young children running around, playing and giggling. The adults drank bottled mineral water. Lisa was smart, poised, and moderately frantic. "By Sunday mornings, I have wrestled with my kids just about as much as I can manage. I cannot do it on my own. Since [my spouse and I] separated, and I have do it all on my own, the Sunday morning process just is not working. I am exhausted after the week at work, and I have cooking to do, and my little guy has been sick this summer. I love God and I even like church - and I can NOT do Sunday School after the service! And there is no way I can teach my kids on my own."
Alyce was a little more easygoing. She patted her friend's shoulder and nodded in agreement. "With the practice schedule for the ice hockey team, I am usually at the rink on Sunday morning. The two older children play games twice a week, and I bring the other two along unless the team is traveling, but getting to church is just impossible. We used to go as a family before we had the fourth baby. Now it just takes everything I have just to get them fed on time! We haven't even baptized our little one. Isn't there any other way to do this?"
Out of this gathering, Hungry Soul was born.

The Context

I began the work of Interim Rector at St. Paul's in Fairfield, Connecticut, in February 2016. Three parents came to visit in the office almost as soon as I was in place. After its many years of enthusiastic success, they complained that the Sunday School program was not working. They referred me to their friends, whose thoughts echoed their complaint. Exhausted white-collar professionals had difficulty getting to church at all on the one day they didn't have to commute to the office. For the families who made it to church, it was a struggle to stay for formation classes after the main service. Community athletic programs, which parents believed were necessary for the full development of a young person, used Sundays for competitions and compelled attendance. After Easter and Confirmation in April, I observed that many families simply melted away, leaving formation teachers alone in their classroom spaces.

By the autumn, the prospects for Christian formation classes were bleak. The assistant rector labored to find adults willing to serve as teachers. Participation on all levels of formation had dropped off over the last year. Although church attendance was stable at about 170, the families with children disappeared after the service. Only four children were registered for the elementary classes. At the same time, youth group participation was fairly steady on two Sunday evenings a month.[1] The confirmation preparation class had seventeen participants. It was the younger children who were increasingly invisible. I suspected that this was going to be more difficult and would demand more creativity than I had expected.

The Problem at Hand

What was going on here? This experience of decline and even implosion of Sunday spiritual formation programming is not unique to parishes in the Connecticut suburbs. It is an emerging trend in many parishes in the United States, where overall attendance and participation among church members have diminished significantly and rapidly over the last decade (Murrow). Levels of religious disaffiliation are growing among all age groups (Lipka, “A Closer Look”). The parents who visited me in the office, however, were not unaffiliated (although they were somewhat disaffected). They wanted to be part of the parish and they wanted religious formation for their children. They just couldn’t manage it according to the established schedule.

With a long-established, sophisticated and extensive program of intentional spiritual formation, which included a four-tiered (age 7 to adult) choral program, vestry leaders at St. Paul's were surprised to learn that participation in the Sunday morning Christian formation classes had become sporadic. The parish was a transitional-sized community (2015 ASA 175), historically family-focused, in an affluent suburban university town. There were two Sunday morning Eucharistic services, an 8 o'clock spoken service and a 9:30 service with choir and organ music. A third service, at 11 o'clock, had been eliminated two years prior to my arrival, due to declining attendance.[2]

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[1] This changed toward the end of the interim period, and a general decline in youth activities developed following the departure of the assistant rector in charge of the programming.

Parochial reports from 2007 to 2015 indicated that registration for Christian formation classes had been robust in the past, with a high of 152 to a low of 60 children registered.[3] A multi-tiered program of formation classes, organized and coordinated by the popular assistant rector, aimed to meet the needs of all the young people of the parish. Yet by the spring of 2016, Sunday School, Godly Play, and Children's Chapel, once bustling and very popular, were increasingly poorly and sporadically attended. Benefiting from a gifted professional staff, the parish did seem to suffer from a surprising shortage of adult leaders with a strong sense of their own faith. Finding teachers, lay eucharistic ministers, and mentors for confirmands was always a struggle. Registration for classes, scheduled to follow the main (9:30 a.m.) choral service so as not to conflict with participation in the youth choir, had begun to wane in the two years before the interim period began, dropping by one-third each year in parochial report statistics.

I was certain that the unraveling of the formation programs was not a welcome development for these church families. The parents who spoke with me wanted, with varying levels of desperation, to raise their children with some sort of Christian faith. At the same time, they felt that they could not entirely reject or separate themselves from their surrounding culture. These parents, largely mothers, were not "brand" driven and none would identify themselves as "cradle Episcopalians." They valued the Episcopal Church for a variety of reasons: because of their own open and inclusive understanding of God, or because of our welcome for their LGBT family members, or because they wandered in and decided they like seeing women at the altar, or because they felt disenchanted in another denomination and were seeking refuge here, or they appreciated the classical music in Sunday services when they could get here. More often than not, staying at church beyond 90 minutes (service plus a cup of coffee) felt burdensome. The kids were tired after multiple school and extra-curricular activities. The spouse (or the single parent, or the mother attending without her husband) was frazzled and wanted to go home and finish chores or errands or just rest.

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[2] That little bit of data did not escape me. I wondered if it was a sign of something deeper than simple Sunday School malaise.

[3] Registration is not identical to attendance, but it is a useful indicator.

Complicating the situation at St. Paul's was an apparent vacuum in spiritual formation. I wondered about the reason the parents had such a serious case of religious anxiety. Some of the best-educated parishioners I have ever served felt that they were not prepared to teach their children the basics of their Christian faith. This was one clue in the struggle to populate the roster of teachers in the Sunday School: many of our adults were deeply insecure concerning their own religious formation. They articulated a faith in God, they said they knew something about Jesus, and they were so fearful of teaching the wrong material to their children that they insisted they were not capable. Most had stopped attending formation classes after their confirmation. One had grown up entirely un-churched and was raising the children in the Episcopal tradition of her husband (who never came to church but who served on the finance committee). Although the parents historically had resisted any sort of adult formational opportunities, saying that they had no time, here they were demanding some type of intervention so their children would be included in formation. I pondered whether the unexpected insecurity of the parents in spiritual formation might be a hindrance more significant than the children's lack of access to classes. These were high achievers in all the other arenas of their lives. What had they learned from their own attendance in Sunday School or in church when they used to come? I wondered where the opportunity lay in this mingling of spiritual hunger and fear, complicated by a local culture of high achievement and busyness.

This was puzzling. Successful, competent adults, who were often absent from church services, were seeking more accessible formation opportunities in the Episcopal tradition to serve their children. They did not feel adequate to the task on their own, and stated repeatedly that Sunday mornings were not a good time. I noted privately the surprising success of the parish's demanding music program for young people, which compelled both two weekly practices and a significant time commitment from parents, who drove the choristers to church on weeknights and Sunday mornings. Was this merely a reflection of a consumer mentality in church, or local appreciation of musical training, or was there a deeper longing?

As an interim minister, I do several things really well. The most important is to listen closely for the story of the parish. Most people cannot help but tell their story, and because I am inquisitive, I enjoy the process of learning the stories of parishioners. There is an art to holy listening as a pastor. I attend to them deeply and without judgment, which both validates the person telling the story and honors their perspective. The process also gathers important information, sometimes through listening to silences as well as narrative, which may influence a transition for the better. Some clergy are wary of the locals who come running to meet them at the beginning of their tenure. I tend to welcome the information they bring with them, listening for anxieties expressed and sorting out quickly. It's all useful data. I take notes, and I categorize as we go along.

As I met with parents, the image that came to my mind was one of a spiritual famine that was rooted not in a scarcity of spiritual substance but in difficulty in accessing the eucharistic table: they could not take and eat of spiritual formation or sacraments if they weren't there. Allowing for the probability that at least some of the parents were sincere in their reports of struggle to be in church on Sunday mornings, I thought about spiritual formation in other time frames, suitable for both parents and children. Ideally, spiritual formation is a flexible and lifelong process. Remembering a well-documented study of the positive correlation between parental religious formation and the development of faith in their children, I reasoned that the children would benefit from the spiritual development of their parents (Bengston et al.). How could I connect these smart, thoughtful, spiritually under-nourished people with the resources they needed at a time they could or would participate? What would that sort of formation look like?

The Thesis Statement

The thesis statement of this experiment is that we need to explore using our worship as a primary means of forming and nurturing Christian faith, as the Sunday morning "class" is not working. Recognizing that Sunday morning programs, which Christian communities have used to pass down the tradition of Jesus Christ, seem to be disintegrating, the process of providing an appropriate means for the Christian spiritual formation of children and their parents is critical. In the parish I served, a circumstantial invitation led me to want to identify a worship experience that would fulfill this need.

This project offers practical spiritual formation in the context of a service of worship, using *lectio divina* of the Gospel and Holy Communion, and fosters the development of relationship with a community supper, with the intention of recovering the capacity of ordinary people to listen for and attend to the story of Jesus Christ in the midst of their busy and regular life. My prediction (which intersects with my hope) is that after participation in this project, both the adults and children will be able to discuss what they heard in the Gospel stories of Jesus and will feel more empowered to engage in conversation about what these stories mean in their lives.

By way of explanation, I am certain of the need for this because the current state of declining participation in Sunday morning church services demands a transformation of church programming as we have known it. An intervention, moving worship and spiritual formation into a time and format different from the "traditional" Sunday morning church school setting, will invite new groups into a more active life of faith. This is culturally appropriate in a post-Christian era when the aging membership is dwindling, participation is declining, and Sunday is no longer reserved for church services. It is spiritually, psychologically, and sociologically appropriate to pursue spiritual formation in an inter-generational context.

The foundational question of the project is this: what is the phenomenological (lived) experience of those who participate in the worship project we called Hungry Soul? I am a priest. Cultivating an encounter with God in worship is the cornerstone of my ministry. For my entire ordained life I have been passionate about sharing the tremendous power of God's love in the story of Jesus. While I have enjoyed the expansive intellectual stimulation of the academic study of theology, my experience in parish life has led me to conclude that for many Christians, an engagement with the story of Jesus is where they learn and begin to articulate their theology, as it intersects with their own lives. The experience of worship can be a source of personal and spiritual transformation, leading the internal life to connect with our embodiment (Niebuhr "The Story of Our Life" 43). The intersection of theology and personal narrative can be where we encounter God (Hauerwas and Jones 5). When individuals reflect on the story of God through the life of Jesus, they cannot help but place the greater story of salvation history within the context of their personal narrative, in order to understand its meaning (Niebuhr "The Story of Our Life" 26).

I contend that this intervention will produce positive results in this and similar situations. I expect that participants will be more ready to explore a relationship with God through participating in a simple worship that derives from engagement with scripture, sacrament, and community, which are the three foundational elements of Episcopal worship. I expect that participants will begin to think about faith in new ways, as they experience this worship. The little community that gathers for Eucharist and supper will grow in relationship with one another and with God. They will understand the scripture in a different context through the exercise of *lectio divina*. They will experience the sacrament as a transforming encounter with God. They will feel more comfortable discussing faith with others: adults with adults, parents with children.

The Act of Ministry

As the basis for designing an act of ministry focused on the groups unable or unwilling to participate in Sunday morning worship and formation, I invited a group of concerned mothers to help choose a completely different time and format for worship. The intention was to sidestep the Sunday morning crush of activity and work and to include all age groups in the experience. Together, the group and I planned the act of ministry to cultivate the formation of a more engaged faith through active theological reflection on the Gospel during a worship service. We christened the project Hungry Soul, because it was developed to feed those who were hungering for an experience of and with God.

An interim season is the perfect time to consider doing some things differently in a parish. As a priest and as a mother, I have some experience in dealing with ministry and young families. Because the Eucharist is one of the foundational elements of one's spiritual formation in the Episcopal tradition, I am passionate about worship with children that is both genuine and developmentally appropriate, and in the past I labored hard to cultivate a Children's Chapel program for Sunday mornings. Mindful of the necessity of developing a project that would be suitable for completing the Doctor of Ministry program at Virginia Theological Seminary, and mindful also of the limited tenure of this call, I wanted the experiment to begin to address the dilemma of people who could not "do church" on Sunday mornings. In what way could we share the good news of Jesus Christ in a format that would support the spiritual growth of adults as well as children? What would it look like to offer worship that would encompass formation?

Ultimately, the experiment emerged as an alternative eucharistic service celebrated for eighteen Sunday afternoons over nine months, built around the Gospel of the week in *God's Word, My Voice,* a youth-friendly paraphrase of the lectionary (Briggs). Central to the design of the project was the adaptation of a group process of *lectio divina* with the Gospel reading, which anchored the service within a context of spiritual discernment. The Communion that completed the service utilized the Eucharistic prayer of the Anglican Church in South Africa, which was both pedagogical in format and interactive (Rundell 33-34). A potluck supper followed the worship, and we finished everything within an hour.

In responding to the problem in the parish, I was articulating my foundational vocational longing: how shall we share the story of Jesus in the Gospel? We have shared this story for many years through Sunday School. When that Sunday morning program seems not to be effective - and I have an intuition that its overall efficacy may have been sub-optimal when adults who have experienced it lack the knowledge to teach their children about Jesus - how can we adapt to a new context?

As the act of ministry continued for nine months and was interspersed with many others ministries for which I was responsible, I kept a Hungry Soul journal. There were too many details of each worship experience to remember. This allowed me to experience each session with maximal independence from the other sessions. What began as a simple administrative exercise emerged as a practice of bridling, as I embraced Karin Dahlberg's methodological discipline in her articulation of phenomenological research (Dahlberg et al. 129-130). Quickly summarized, bridling consists of not allowing one's own experience or context to influence the project or the process of analysis, by restraining any pre-understanding as well as allowing the phenomena to emerge on their own before seeking to identify meaning (Dahlberg et al. 130). I could not pretend that I knew nothing beforehand, but I did not have to hold every detail in my mind from week to week.

Chapters and Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized around addressing a central question: what is the phenomenological (lived) experience of those who participated in the worship project we called Hungry Soul?

Chapter 2 examines trends in demography and contemporary culture, which have influenced the need to develop this intervention. In addition to understanding the best practices of spiritual formation for children and adults, it was necessary to consider the unique needs of an intergenerational program. The phenomenological practice of bridling emerges as an element in this theoretical context: the researcher had to harness expectations about the nature of family life and the process of scriptural study while the project was moving forward and the experiences were unfolding.

Chapter 3 places the thesis within its theological context. Worship embodies what we understand about God, the nature of the church, the sacraments, and the community of the faithful. A missional understanding of ecclesiology and sacramental theology can influence how we identify the emerging role of the Church and the Eucharist, and how we can hear the Word of God in a post-modern context. This project has led me to reconsider my role as a pastoral leader, evoking themes of the practical theology of

Richard Osmer, who expands on the role of the pastoral leader in contexts of discernment, and how a leader can influence a community to respond faithfully to change (loc. 2279). Although I am inclined toward including theological reflection in the writing of the thesis, the phenomenological practice of bridling demanded that I restrain my inclination to analyze the emergence of any particular theological insight until the completion of the project.

Chapter 4 discusses the methodology that influenced the project and my evaluation of the project. After several months of research and discernment, I understood that the significance of this project was not in its growth or numerical or economic impact, but in the ongoing process of individuals finding meaning in the experience. Additionally, I wanted the role of the researcher-priest in the unfolding experience to be supportive of the adults in the ongoing spiritual formation of children. Examination of varieties of qualitative analysis of lived experience led me to Karin Dahlberg's phenomenology and the practice of bridling as a methodology (Dahlberg et al. 2008; Vagle 2016). This hermeneutic in turn had an impact on the exercise of writing the thesis.

Chapter 5 outlines in detail the act of ministry called Hungry Soul and the timeline of the experiment. The design of the project emerged from a focus group, using a practical synthesis of Eucharistic liturgy and *lectio divina.* What happened as the ministry proceeded through eighteen gatherings over nine months, including unanticipated developments, was recorded in a journal. The experiences of each of the multiple services were unique to themselves, and accommodated the methodology of bridling, or allowing the meaning to emerge as the phenomena moved forward.

Chapter 6 examines and analyzes Hungry Soul and the foundational question that undergirds the experiment. Participants articulated their lived experience as they participated in the project through an interview format, which was recorded and transcribed for each participant at the end of the project. Dahlberg's phenomenology and the practice of bridling during the process focused the interpretation of the experience.

Chapter 7 reflects on the conclusions generated by this project and possible future directions. What does this tell us about worship? Does practice have an effect on our confidence in our faith? How do the roles of family, professional clergy, and church intersect in the process of spiritual formation? What does it mean to be a community?

Each chapter will begin with a brief vignette pertinent to the focus of the chapter, to keep the material grounded in the lived experience of the parish. Alongside the formally researched material, I have included my own observations and anecdotes from the project, which are reflective of the human engagement in the ongoing development of the Hungry Soul experience.

A Sign of Death or New Life?

All around us, the old forms and structures of mainline Protestant churches seem to be contracting. It is not an easy time to be a parishioner, never mind the pastor and priest. We can focus on what is dying, and on many days over the last decade I have felt as if we are tending to an extended vigil over what used to be and is no more. Even church growth and leadership gurus like Thom Rainer spend a surprising amount of time examining ways in which churches are losing their influence and vitality ("Eight Signs").[4]

At the same time, there are surprising signs of new life. Hendrickson illustrates the positive impact and attractiveness of intentional community and prayer with young adults in New Haven, Connecticut: "[T]he goal is not institutional maintenance but the welcoming of all into the way of Christ" (loc. 1509). Emily Scott built Saint Lydia's in Brooklyn based on the premise that the small size of a community centered on the Gospel and dinner was conducive to the development of genuine intimacy with God and other members. Her theological insight is that being known and connected is sacred. "To know the other always takes place on the smallest level possible: one human sitting down with another. But in doing so, we encounter something huge: the limitless presence of God." The little church has thrived in a time when many others are closing (McEntee).

Where can we see new life? This is one of the focusing questions I usually ask during an interim pastorate, because this is one way to invite the parish to look toward a new pastor and not just to gaze backward with sentimentality. What is bubbling up in the parish at a time when ordained leadership is in transition? What new things are we called to explore? As St. Paul's was confronting the decline of the formational programs that the parish knew, I invited some of the members to join me in looking for new life in unexpected places, not really knowing what we would find together.

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[4] Even if this is a marketing ploy, it is growing out of the church leader's anxiety around a culture that is increasingly secularized.

Chapter 2 Social Science Undergirding the Thesis

Glynnis's Story: I have to tell you: I was not raised in a church-going family. My parents just were not at all spiritual. When I married Duo, we decided to be part of the Episcopal Church because he was raised in that tradition. I am not really "religious" – I mean I believe in God, but I am not sure about the details of the church - but I like the tradition. And I like the community here – the people are nice, and the music is beautiful. But lately, with [my husband's] business commitments, and my older son's athletics, and my daughter's ski school on the weekend, I am really tired. I want [my daughter] to be part of the tradition, I think it is good for her. But until the spring, we can't do Sunday – we don't get back from Vermont until too late.

The thesis developed within the broader context of current social scientific research and demographic trends, which paint a dismal picture of the future of the Episcopal Church, especially in New England, the least religious region in the United States (Lipka and Wormwald). This is a challenging place to serve as a rector of a parish. The rising value of spirituality in popular culture, however, is an encouraging trend. The history of the Church offers some precedent for those who seek to cultivate new ministries: the powerful role of contemporary social practices in the development of the Sunday School movement suggests that a deep understanding of local culture can have a positive impact on local response. Insights from sociology and psychology into the role of multiple age groups in the development of a healthy spiritual life support an intergenerational model for an intervention.

The Decline in Institutional Religion

Research into religious observance indicates that the Church in its many institutional incarnations is in serious (and possibly irreversible) decline. This significant transformation in culture is a stressor in the parochial context. Researchers have pinpointed several sources of this decline that are particularly applicable to the Sunday morning challenges in an Episcopal parish.

Although is difficult to state definitively whether it is a result of our own internal conflicts or external cultural influences, many churches have dramatically fewer people in the pews. A substantial number of Americans (22%) report that their participation in Sunday worship is less regular than it was five years ago (Pew Research Center 2016). Jeffrey Walton's analysis of the statistical research performed by the Episcopal Church Office of Research reveals that Sunday attendance in Episcopal churches has decreased 26% since 2005 (2016). Episcopal marriages have decreased 75% since 2000, and child baptisms have decreased by 50% (Goodhew). Walton additionally notes that following a respite from the turbulence in the earlier part of the century, the Episcopal Church in Connecticut appears to have posted the largest loss in attendance in 2015 among dioceses in the United States, a decline of 7.6%.

As a denomination, the Episcopal Church is aging. Episcopal parishioners are older than the population at large. Demographic data compiled by the Pew Research Center indicate that the median age of an Episcopal parishioner in 2016 was 58, while the average American is 38, and 35% of parishioners are over the age of 65 (Lipka, "Which U.S. religious groups"). Diocesan data gathered by the Episcopal Church indicate that in the United States, more than 67% of active clergy are over the age of 55 and only 13% are under the age of 35. In Connecticut, the mean age of active priests is 60, and 72% are over 55 (The Episcopal Church 2015). Only 26% of Episcopal parishioners are of prime child-raising age, between the ages of 30 and 49 (Lipka, "Which U.S. religious groups"). It is not surprising that there are fewer children and youth in formation programs.

Growing any church program should be easier in an area with a growing population. As one of three New England states with shrinking populations, Connecticut demographics in general do not favor growth or even stability, and overall across the state there is a smaller pool from which to draw members (Lee 2016). Fairfield, however, has long been recognized as an affluent "family town" with good schools and many desirable amenities. Census data in 2015 indicate that while the population of the town has increased nearly 8% between 2000 and 2015, families are not expansive. The average household has 3.19 people. While this is somewhat larger than the mean U.S. household of 2.68 people, it will neither fill a church nor populate a Sunday School (U.S. Census, 2015). As a large town, Fairfield suffers from a sense of insecurity. Hit hard by the Great Recession of 2008, the area has lagged behind in restoration of employment levels and actually lost jobs from 2016-2017 (Turmelle 2017). The recent loss of a major local employer has led to a loss of jobs and has had some negative impact on the local real estate market (Hussey 2016). The sale of the large business property to a university has led to anxiety over the impending increase in property taxes in 2017 (Reilly 2016).

There has been a shift in North American religious culture, which has been particularly significant in the New England region. Even those who identify as "committed Christians" attend church less frequently now than even fifteen years ago (Murrow). Twenty-first century New England is the least religious region and Connecticut is the fifth least religious state in the United States (Lipka and Wormald). In Connecticut, only 25% of the population confesses to attending religious services weekly (Busemeyer and Glista). The Episcopal Church in Connecticut has closed a dozen churches and lost nearly 18,000 members in the last decade.[5] There are now 165 congregations where there used to be 177, and fewer than 50,000 members where there used to be over 68,000. Fewer than half the parishes in this affluent diocese can support one full time priest (Tolzmann). The Episcopal Church in Connecticut has the distinctly discomforting feel of being an aging remnant church.

This pattern of persistent decline is not likely to change. The impending retirement and death of the Baby Boom generation will continue to reduce church membership as well as parish income dramatically over the next two decades (Weems). The younger generations are not waiting to step into the place to be vacated by the Boomers. Although 58% of Millennials (aged 18-33) say they believe in God, as a group they are low on social trust, are inclined to be detached from institutions, and 29% are religiously unaffiliated (Pew Research Center 2014).

I have observed that these statistical data are reflected in the lived experience of the local parish. The Fairfield County expectation of constant activity also mitigates against traditional church schedules: high achievement demands high levels of activity. Cultural changes have eroded the reservation of Sunday for religious observance, even in the fairly traditional communities in Fairfield County (Nieuwhof). High school athletics and regional traveling teams regularly schedule competitions on Sunday mornings. Many adult parishioners have weekend and Sunday morning commitments (work, athletics, travel, rest), which make participation in church at best difficult (Murrow). I was surprised at the number of white-collar members who needed to work on Sunday. Sabbath as a concept seemed to be nearly extinct. In an area without reliable public transportation, where children do not even play outside without supervision, suburban youngsters who do not drive only very rarely travel anywhere without adults, and so they are absent from church when their parents are absent.

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[5] Unfortunately this is not well documented. The divergence between the older data of the online directory of dioceses (www.episcopalchurch.org/diocese/connecticut), the parochial report data (pr.dfms.org/studyyourcongregation/exports/8871-7533_20171111_01401788.pdf) , the diocesan website statistics (www.ctepiscopal.org) and wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Episcopal_Diocese_of_Connecticut) are illustrative of the decline that I have observed.

During a coffee hour in Fairfield, an elderly parishioner once asked me if I thought their parish would survive after her generation was gone. Hesitating to give any sort of response until I knew the broader context of her question, I asked what she meant. Since her daughter and grandchildren did not attend church, although they lived quite close to the parish, and neither did most of their friends and neighbors, this pillar of the altar guild was acutely aware of the number of parents and youngsters who were not part of parish life. She was worried. She knew that the missing generations would mean there would be an enormous void when she and her age cohort died. Her hope, as she expressed it, was that the new rector would be a "younger married man," who could "attract new families" into the church.

It is not difficult to ponder the possibility that the Episcopal Church as an institution is a generation away from extinction, as retired Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey worried aloud in 2013 during a keynote speech to a church conference in Shropshire, England (Valpy, Riley-Smith). Since the 1960s, trends in American religion have moved away from denominational identification and have moved progressively toward a non-denominational "spiritual" identification (Gerns). As the late twentieth-century culture wars over ecclesial postures on moral issues have faded, the trend toward secularism has accelerated, and increasing numbers of Americans have stepped away from organized religion altogether (Beinart). The Pew Research Center's exhaustive 2014 report on religious affiliation reveals that the fastest-growing group in the United States has no religious affiliation at all (Lipka, "5 key findings"). Although this trend is most concentrated in young adults (35% unaffiliated), it is growing rapidly among all age, gender, racial, and ethnic groups (total 23% unaffiliated). The increase is significant. In the 2007 survey of the American religious landscape, only 17% of the adult population claimed to be unaffiliated. By 2014, those identifying as Christian decreased by nearly 10%, from 78% of the population to 71% (Lipka, "A Closer Look").

For the clergy, this pattern can be disheartening. A colleague in Connecticut, returning for the annual diocesan convention from non-parochial work in another state, commented that the visible depression of clergy colleagues led to an atmosphere that was dispirited and soul-eroding at best, driving her to seek the comfort of prayer when she departed (Hodara). The diocesan clergy association disbanded in 2017, after two years of decreasing energy for collaborative ministry (Powell). Identified by my bishops as a priest who can lead change, I have labored for a decade in congregations struggling to reinvent themselves as they confront enormous financial difficulty, and have wondered how it was possible that parish life had changed so dramatically in just a few years. Occasionally I have pondered whether I would need to seek secular employment in order to ensure my economic survival. When I had asked to serve as the interim rector in this upscale parish, it was with the hope that a resourced location would offer a slightly less stressful environment and some modicum of success. Although it was less extensive in Fairfield due to the level of affluence, the diminution of the Episcopal Church in New England has had a broad impact on parish life here also, and the unraveling has unsettled the lay people nearly as much as it has affected the priest.

Contraction and Expansion

As churches have slid into decline, programming for Christian spiritual formation has followed suit (Streever). Sunday Schools seem to be imploding everywhere, capturing the attention of the secular media, who have pronounced them failed or dead (Pandika). Unwilling to surrender spiritual formation entirely, even Episcopal spiritual formation expert Sharon Pearson asserts "if we continue to develop our programs for children, youth, and adults on the pedagogy of the 19th and 20th century, we are dooming ourselves" ("Rows of Sharon," Part Five). There is no universally applicable solution to this dilemma. In a five part blog series on Sunday formation programs, Pearson encourages local leadership to look closely at what still works in their context, and to build on that, citing children's chorister programs, adult scripture study, vibrant liturgy, and challenging preaching as vital ingredients for an environment of effective spiritual formation for all ("Rows of Sharon," Parts One-Five).

At the same time, there is growth in the arena of spiritual inquiry. Even in an increasingly secular, un-churched, post-modern context, still there is increasing consensus concerning the significance of spiritual development. The quest to find the meaning of life and the means of making ethical decisions leads academic philosophers to advocate reading classic literature (some religious, much not) as a source of sacred wisdom and an antidote to nihilistic indecision (Dreyfus and Kell). The philosophy of science has led a lifelong unbeliever Nancy Abrams to propose that the concept of "God" is an emergent philosophical phenomenon and not an eternal person (Abrams 29). Although she rejects "religion" as a force that divides humanity and leads to conflict, Abrams finds that her development of a spiritual life is rooted in tapping into the collective wisdom that gives meaning to the universe (110). Talking to God, after she has concluded that there is no Being to listen, means that she is participating in the collective consciousness of the Universe (152). Sam Harris's new atheism does not preclude his embrace of spirituality without divinity, which he identifies as a consciousness, "the light by which the contours of mind and body are known" (204). Building on the meditative practice of Dzogchen Buddhists, Harris perceives that a "middle path exists between making religion out of spiritual life and having no spiritual life at all" (205).

Abundant anecdotal and academic evidence suggests that many parents who are not engaged in ecclesial life at all are laboring to ensure that they connect their families with the spiritual sphere. Some express deep faith in God or in Jesus, invite their children to pray, say they are "spiritual but not religious," and reject the politics and structure of organized religion in favor of cultivating an appreciation of mystery and awe (Mercadanate 235; Manning 39-42). Others have an entirely secular philosophy of life and teach their children to have faith in humanity, nature, or themselves (Manning 35). The most significant dimension of the new non-denominational spirituality is that many who identify as having no particular religion (the "Nones") embrace the affirmation of personal choice, selecting spiritual elements from among various traditions that appeal to them (Manning 138). They want their children to be able to form their own ideas about spirituality and are comfortable with the tension of multiple options and the influence of their own worldview about religion (Manning 139-140). Their decision is intended to avoid indoctrination, which was often their own childhood experience (Manning 162). Parents who decline to participate in churches often cite the negative social and psychological effects of extreme religious views that they believe put children at risk (Manning 172-74).

Lisa Miller's spiritual child is part of a nurturing spiritual-but-not-religious family, and Miller offers exercises to cultivate the innate spiritual nature of a child without locating spirituality within a particular faith tradition (loc. 3106). In fact, she advocates active parental pursuit of a spiritual "multilingualism," because she perceives that experience as rich in opportunities for transcendence, more respectful than denominationalist chauvinism (loc. 3069). Miller's definition of spirituality is "an inner sense of relationship to a higher power that is loving and guiding," which could be God, nature, humanity, or any other representation of the divine presence (loc. 363). I have observed with fascination the popularity of this text among Connecticut clergy, as they hope to inspire parents to continue participating in the life of a church community following the obligatory grandparent-appeasing baptismal rites.[6] Although Miller has been accused of misrepresenting solid science and relying on pseudo-scientific resources (Schulsen), she is in touch with two powerful forces in our time: the inclination to spirituality that is not denominational, and the generalized anxiety around successful parenthood.

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[6] I cannot imagine that there is any more measurable "success" in this sort of approach than there is in other normative remedies, such as administering shame, guilt, or phone invitation.

Miller also perceives that the spiritual growth of parents can progress in tandem with the spiritual development of their children (loc. 4887). More than one parent commented to me during the interview process that they felt that the adults and their children “were learning about God together.” As they witnessed the curiosity and interest of the children, the adults were willing to return for more Hungry Soul. And one actually asked for baptism for her youngest child, bringing her large Roman Catholic family to the service.

These are interesting data for a Christian priest who longs to teach about the life and meaning of Jesus Christ in what seems to be an emerging post-Christian context. Serving as a parish priest in New England demands deep faith in God, plus tenacity and creativity. It has been very helpful to be able to cultivate a missionary mindset to counteract the inevitable distress I have experienced in presiding over what occasionally has felt like a protracted recitation of the Burial Office with diminishing numbers of congregants. There is God somewhere in this. We are working with God, not necessarily “saving” the Church. I continue to wonder what I can do that addresses the spiritual hunger that the parents have articulated, while evading the barriers put up by the local and regional culture that seem to be undermining the Sunday School we have labored to organize.

Social and Cultural Roots of Sunday Formation Programs

The Sunday School movement developed within the culture particular to the eighteenth century British industrial revolution and prior to compulsory state-provided education. The chief concern among the founders of Sunday Schools was to solve social concerns that were arising from the unruly behavior of undisciplined children when the children had time away from their work responsibilities, which was only on Sunday (Boylan 6). Christian philanthropists addressed the illiteracy of child laborers by offering free reading instruction on Sundays during church services. The Bible was a textbook as well as a religious resource. The children learned to read using the Bible and to write by copying out passages. Ladies of the church taught a basic catechism, spiritual practices such as prayer, and hymns. The social culture of the era influenced the development of the program, which aimed to civilize through cultivation of religious sensibility:

> The earliest goal of evangelical Sunday school workers was simply to bring religious knowledge, and the behavior associated with it, to lower-class youth. By teaching children to read the Bible, these workers believed, they would do more than impart "the truths of the Gospel" to ignorant youngsters. (Boylan 133)

Sunday Schools in the United States developed first in the East and spread westward as a missionary endeavor during the expansion of the nineteenth century. Their success was at least partially due to a lack of alternative sources of education, especially for the poor and in rural areas (Boylan 24). After the Civil War, Sunday Schools remained a critical outreach ministry of local churches, and were the primary program for evangelism of the unchurched and recruitment of new members (Boylan 94). Even after the advent of mandated public education in the 1870s, many parents embraced the Sunday School as an essential experience of childhood (Larsen).

Although the Sunday School has been part of American church culture for nearly two centuries, we can ask whether spiritual formation demands more than the enculturation it offers. Ideally, spiritual formation reflects God's mission among and with the faithful, at least as much as it reflects contemporary social culture. By definition, mission does not start with the Church: it always starts with God. What if formation-as-enculturation gave way to mission? What would it look like to reframe Christian spiritual formation not as an educational institution of Sunday mornings, or as a social institution to raise up children's behavior into middle-class deportment, but as a dimension of our worship?

Intentional Intergenerational Formation

Although I am hardly a developmental psychologist, parish ministry has taught me something about the blessing and challenge of working with children and adults in the same group. Although separation by age or tenure seems to be the norm in most larger institutions (for example, school, work, athletics), the parish is one of very few places where several generations can come together regularly. This is the first time in history that six different demographic cohorts have the opportunity to interact in the religious arena (Sheppard and Dilliplane loc. 70). John Mabry points out that the unique cultural distinctions of different age groups demands that we adopt the posture of spiritual anthropologists in order to facilitate communication (loc. 97). This is true if we want to avoid conflict. I find that the diversity of an intergenerational group can also lead to a real richness in ministry, when a community is intentional and open to incorporating the gifts and perspectives of diverse members.

Many years ago, I was inspired, in a very different context, by a short and unpretentious book on family-centered intergenerational religious education. I came across this again while doing research for this thesis. Writing her own dissertation during the Roman Catholic Decade of the Family, Kathleen Chesto concluded that faith is best served inter-generationally, family-style. If families are to be the locus of religious formation, so that the faith of committed Christians influences the lives of children as they grow up, then adults need to have access to knowledge and the skills to fulfill their obligation. Chesto designed a supportive community experience of formation, to help participants develop a religious language in order to express the truths they possess within them. In a previous vocational context, Chesto's work encouraged me to develop a children's chapel program by teaching parents to lead the liturgy.

Other scholars' research confirms many of Chesto's conclusions about the crucial importance of family in religious formation. Marie Cornwall's studies of teens indicate that parents are the primary agents in religious formation, although peers and church also play an influential secondary role ('The Determinants" 582). Long-term religious practice is dependent on the extent to which an individual is integrated into a religious community. Personal relationships indirectly influence religious behavior, by helping the individual to develop and maintain a religious worldview, and support a commitment to the norms and expectations of the religious group (Cornwall, "The Determinants" 588). Bengtson et al. identify the family as the key in religious formation, although the configuration of "family" is flexible and grandparents can be more influential than previously considered (186). The most crucial elements are the warmth of parental relationship, particularly with the father (185), and the modeling of religious practice

(193). Martin et al. conclude that parents, and in particular mothers, are consistently the most important influence on the development of young people's religious lives, while peers and church are secondary channels for long-lasting religious beliefs (179). This seems to conflict with Bengtson et al. in the internal details of specific parental roles, but not in its general conclusion.

Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross cite Gerhard Lenski's early work in the sociology of religion. Religious socialization within a small community (a network of informal primary relationships that is distinct from the larger religious institution/association) is an essential part of a strong and sustainable spiritual commitment. It is within these smaller communities that cross-generational relationships foster key understandings and beliefs (123). This is supported by Christian Smith's more recent research with young adults. Religious socialization takes place in two spheres: individual family households and multigenerational religious congregations (286). If formation doesn't happen there, it isn't happening. Although Smith concludes that while parents have the most powerful influence on the spiritual lives of older teens and young adults, non-parental adults who have built meaningful relationships with them are also important (289). Especially when young adults are separated from family, an intentional community can play an important role. In the end, emerging adults who have a well-established sense of religious socialization are consistently doing better in measures of life outcomes (260-275).

Finally, although the spiritual development of children is connected to their cognitive development, James Riley Estep, Jr., contends that spiritual development is neither determined by cognition nor self-generative (186). The context of a supportive community is critical. Using a neo-Piagetian perspective, he insists that just as the context of experience adds or detracts from cognitive development, there is an experiential context to faith development (187). Early faith formation is as developmentally critical as pre-school (Estep 189). For faith formation, it is necessary to move beyond memorization or indoctrination and toward problem-solving using the scripture and theology as a lens (188). Chris J. Boyatzis asserts that ordinary conversations between parents and children can be rich context for spiritual development (191).

I felt quite secure embracing an intergenerational model for a worship-shaped intervention, largely due to my own experience with groups incorporating a diversity of age groupings. With this research supporting the role of parents and families in the development of the spiritual formation of children, I was grateful to also find guidelines for moving toward a worship experience that would support different age groups. Without providing a specific rubric for designing worship, Allen and Ross offer numerous recommendations (which I adapted) for engaging participants across generational lines in music, reading the scriptures, story sharing, and other activities (273-284). Children have a natural sense of storytelling, and will find God if they can develop the eyes of faith with the support and guidance of their parents (Allen and Ross 158-159). Ben Irwin, describing himself as a failed Sunday School teacher, provided an inspiring reflection on the power of sharing simple, unedited Bible stories with his children. This supports the capacity of children to understand, in their own way, the teaching of the scripture (Irwin). Sam Donoghue's blog post, derived from his experience as a children's missioner in the Church of England, supported the development of a regular ritual, such as communion and recurring spiritual practices, in order to engage the spiritual imaginations of children (Donoghue).

Bridling the Expectations of Research

There is a particular challenge to reflection on the learning from research in the social sciences when I have embraced a phenomenological methodology, which is identified and clarified in Chapter 4. Phenomenological methodology usually declines to predict a certain outcome. Instead of delving deep into research in order to predict the results of the project or to identify the meaning that would develop, I used this social scientific research as a tool to frame the context and to assist in the design of the project, and then I had to let the experiences develop as they developed. Additional research, performed after the completion of the project, led to multiple epiphanies as to what had been developing during its unfolding, and confirmed my intuition about the importance of parental modeling of spiritual practices for their children.

Circumstances ensured that I could not disregard the chosen methodology. I cannot claim complete academic amnesia, but I can say honestly that during the nine months of the Hungry Soul project I was quite busy with administration of the parish transition and then my own professional transition, and I had minimal time or energy for much deep reflection. A fortuitous summer relocation, when I accepted a new call in May 2017, led to the packing away of books and surprising chaos/distraction, enabling me to put aside most of this active research until after the completion of the project and the initiation of writing. The time for reflection on what had emerged was at least as fruitful as research in the social sciences.

Chapter 3 Theology Undergirding the Thesis

From my Hungry Soul Journal: We finished the Hungry Soul Christmas pageant and were talking about the gospel passage that group had just acted out. The parents were joyful and taking pictures. For the sermon process, I stood in the center of a crowded circle of 16 kids and did this popcorn style - and we were all close together and just kind of talking and hovering in place.
Amy: What did you think about that story? Kids: Fun. Pretty. Yay!! [some positive words and murmurings]
Amy: Why did God choose to be born as a human child? Kids: Wow, that is hard – I dunno - God is kind of an old dude. [giggles and I am smiling at that]
Well, Jesus is the son of God, and he is God, and he was born as a baby. Think about what it is like to be a baby. [multiple voices] Babies are helpless. Babies are innocent. They are little. *So God chose to be helpless and even vulnerable.* How can God be helpless? *Good question. Can anyone think of a time when Jesus was helpless?* Child: What about on the cross when he died? [other voices: he died?] Older girl: Yes, he died because mean people killed him. *Yes, Jesus was murdered. It was a very sad day.* And he had nails in his hands and feet. And someone stabbed him in the side with a sword. *Remember that three days later, he was alive again, and that people were surprised, because that never happens.* His friends saw him, and he still had the marks from the nails. *(Note to self: I love this kid) Yes, and because Jesus was alive again, that means that when we die, when we grow old and our health fails, we can believe that we will also be alive again, forever in heaven.* Child: Then maybe I can see my sister. She died. *(There is silence and audible intake of breath. I am shaken.) Yes, all the people we love and cannot see now, we will see again in heaven.* Child*:* Because God came as a baby. *Yes, because Jesus was God who was born as a baby. (There is a pause). Let's have communion together to celebrate that.*
And then we all moved as a group to the communion table. The adults joined us quietly.

A Quotidian Theology

We are all theologians. Even the very young, the unchurched, and the unbeliever know what they think about God and about what construes holiness. In a fairly simple, hastily-organized Christmas pageant on a Sunday afternoon, I was surprised by the dramatic depth of theological discussion among youngsters who did not usually come to church. Laboring to make sense of something that seems to defy logic (The "Old Dude" God being born as a baby), confronting a tragedy that many of them did not know about (the death of an infant sister several years before), the children were theologians. I may have led that conversation, but I did not direct its outcome.

A shift in social culture has led to something of a crisis in church programming for spiritual formation. Influenced by my own theological understanding of the importance of engagement in the world, this project developed as an experiment in worship, framing a focused response to a particular dilemma in a specific parish in Connecticut. The goal was to invite those who were outside the regular system of Sunday spiritual formation to come into an experience of worship of God, whom we know through Word and sacrament.

Although missional theology has multiple expressions and perspectives, several concerns are central. First is the nature of God and what we can know. Second is ecclesiology: the nature and role of the Church. And third is a theology of ministry: the nature and role of what the Church does. This thesis embraces the distinctive spirit of missional theology, in particular an articulation of ecclesiology and sacramental theology as influenced by the slightly different perspectives of theologians Lesslie Newbigin, Alan Roxburgh, and Dwight Zscheile, who have written about the mission of God in different eras and contexts.

The Hungry Soul project is informed by a distinct theology of worship. As I understand it, worship of God is fundamental in the Episcopal tradition, and includes three essential elements: the community of the faithful, scripture, and sacraments. These are the foundations of worship in church, yet these foundations need to be in dialogue with our culture. The history of the Church reveals that the worship of the Triune God has been influenced by the culture surrounding it; the theology of eucharistic worship developed within a specific cultural framework in the very early Church. From a missional perspective, worship must speak to the work of God in a particular context. This informs the possibility of adapting the timing and structure of our worship in a new culture in the twenty-first century.

Further, the persuasive hermeneutic of mission shapes my approach to liturgy and the reading of scripture. If liturgy is the work of the people for the glory of God, it may be more fully expressed when it is not centered on the work of the priest. Reading and reflecting on scripture as the Word of God, especially in the experience of worship, may be most effective if practiced by the people of God and not left in the domain of ordained experts who deliver a monologue.

The thesis also reflects the impact of the project on my own theology of ordained ministry. Who I am as pastor and priest has been clarified through this experience. Osmer's practical theological method identifies the primary nature of congregational leadership as discerning not directive (loc. 1637 and 1657). In challenging situations that demand some sort of change, the pastoral leader can respond not with definitive answers but with clarifying questions, which may illuminate necessary tasks.

A Perichoretic God on Mission

Much of missional theology reflects on the self-understanding of Christians and the Church as a community, whose identity and work are derivative of God's mission. Who is this God and what is the mission? The missional conversation seems intent on recovering the understanding of God as an active agent in the world (Roxburgh, "Practices of a Missional People"). As much as missional theologians seem to doubt the necessity of maintaining the Church as an institution, which Wilbert Shenk attributes to the ethical bankruptcy of Christendom ecclesiology (62), they embrace wholeheartedly the meaning of relationship with the active Trinitarian God. When he returned to England to retire, Newbigin's shock at the hopeless disengagement of the Church of England in the 1970s led to his late life work of renewing the commitment of Christians as active witnesses to the Gospel. The work of missional theologians such as Roxburgh and Zscheile focuses on discerning the movement of God not within the churches but out in the world. Newbigin identifies the root of the failure of the Church of Christendom as its loss of the vision of identity as instrument of salvation for the *whole* world (Newbigin, *Household of God* 167).

Echoing Newbigin's observation in *The Household of God* (164-166)*,* Roxburgh explicitly insists that the Church cannot be separated from the mission of God in the world, and must face outward (*Joining God* 43*)*. God has come among us, and God's mission is to redeem and reconcile the world, to offer a salvation "whose very essence is . . . corporate and cosmic, the restoration of the broken harmony between all men *[sic]* and between man and God and man and nature" (*Household of God* 161).

Roxburgh speaks of the perichoretic God, who dances through and across our neighborhoods in relationship with Godself and humans ("Practices of a Missional People"). This God is active, engaged, and even playful, perceivable in the vibrant lives of ordinary people. In order to engage with this living and active God, the community of faith needs to look for what the Holy Spirit is "up to" in our neighborhoods (*Joining God* 45). Zscheile speaks of following an itinerant Messiah, who relies on the hospitality of others on the journey. He goes among the people in many places and does not expect them to come to him (*People of the Way* 76). The missional conversation is located out among the people who want to be with God in daily life. God is both stranger and guest (*People of the Way* 98).

Mission has little to do with life as usual. This mission is not easy. Newbigin also locates God in suffering:

> Disciples will share in [Jesus'] mission as they share in his passion, as they follow him in challenging and unmasking the powers of evil. There is no other way to be with him. At the heart of mission is simply the desire to be with him and to give him the service of our lives. At the heart of mission is thanksgiving and praise. (*The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* 127)

This mission will be costly. Clearly Jesus favored sharing sacrificially with others. At the same time, the promise of new life is what beckons us onward. Two generations after Newbigin, Zscheile confirms that "attending to the Spirit in a posture of wonder and expectation changes things" (*People of the Way 99*).

How do we know where to go on this mission when we have not gone this way before? Echoing Jesus' admonition to pay attention to the signs that inform us of redemption (Luke 21.27-30), Roxburgh suggests that there are three elements that begin the journey: listening to one another, to God, and to the neighborhood (*Joining God* 67). We will hear God in the voices of others, in the Word and in the world, when we are careful to observe.

A Missional Ecclesiology

Newbigin, Roxburgh, Zscheile, and other participants in the ongoing missionary conversation identify the Church as the people of God. They emphatically summon

Christians to their vocation of working with God in their local context. Hope-filled missional theologians proclaim the immanence of God in the world, a God whose work can be seen, if one is willing to look for it (Roxburgh, *Missional* 51). Along with them I sense that God engages actively with the world and beckons us to join in: "the triune God is already present, dwelling, participating, loving, suffering, imagining in the materiality of the everyday life of ordinary people," who can respond to and interact with the divine presence (Roxburgh, "Practices of Missional People").

Although our programs for children seem to be failing, I have not been nearly as invested in maintaining the Sunday School venture as I am in the pastoring of the people of God and finding the energy to lead meaningful worship. In the missional perspective, the God who made heaven and earth does not necessarily need the parish or its Sunday School to accomplish the divine mission of restoring and reconciling the world. The missional truism is that the Church does not have a mission so much as God's mission has a Church to fulfill it (Guder 4-5). To identify the Church as an institution or a building diminishes the ecclesial nature; the Church is an organic gathering of the faithful people of God who are on mission. As friends and lovers of God, the role of the Church must be to work alongside God-in-mission and to engage with people out in the world in their contexts.

Identified by Alan Roxburgh as the "great unraveling of Euro-tribal churches," the pattern of extraordinary growth and optimism in the first half of the twentieth century has been reversed in the twenty-first century (*Joining God* 3). Cultural Christendom, the long-established tradition of the centrality of mainline Christian faith as a cornerstone of North American identity (which many have understood as The Church), seems to be coming undone. Missional theologians honor the historical contribution of churches in history, and still they consider the fragmentation of ecclesial structures less as a tragedy and more as an invitation to people to participate in life with God in a new way (*Joining God* 7). I want to honor the grief and sense of loss among my congregants as they watch a season of decline of the parish they have helped to build up. At the same time, I want to offer them a broad context of hope for a future in which we can rebuild. The life of the Church as the people of God is changing, not ending. This may be a season to remember Ecclesiastes 3.3: there is a time to build up and a time to break down.

Although Roxburgh identifies divine action through the Holy Spirit as the source of the current transformation of church systems (*Joining God* 40), I am not entirely convinced that God is “in charge” of the decline of Sunday formational programming or of any other particular institutional shortcoming. It is honest to acknowledge that a local parish community may have demonstrated an inability to adapt and connect with twenty-first century culture and families. The disruption of parish culture’s *status quo,* however, does not mean that we are doomed to spiritual ignorance, or that there is no way to connect with or discern the presence and movement of God in our life. In fact, this offers the parish an excellent opportunity to practice some intentional discernment with respect to the way we teach about the action of and hear the voice of the living God.

In a missional context, it may be theologically disingenuous to presume that an educational format in the church building is the most suitable practice for the cultivation of a mature spiritual life. It is through scripture and community, and not primarily in the classroom, that we encounter the perichoretic God who is on mission, who walks and dances around the neighborhood, even if the lesson is brilliantly interactive and teaches the answers to the catechism questions (Roxburgh, “Practices of Missional People;” Zscheile, *Agile Church* 51). Faithful people can encounter God everywhere, and the Church must form souls so that they may experience this encounter: by the opening of ears to hear, eyes to see, and intuition to perceive. Spiritual formation is not identical to Christian education, although they may and should intersect. Christian education provides information to develop the mind. Formation imparts information, but the goal is to shape the whole person into their full stature in Christ, so the Christian can practice with faith in the world (Butler-Bass 5).

As I am committed to developing the faith of adults in the parish as well as offering formation for children, the foundation of any intervention demands a powerful experience of connection with God that they can bring home with them. If we want to form mature Christians to participate in God’s mission in the world, we may need to consider alternatives to our Sunday morning ecclesiocentic programs. With varying degrees of emphasis according to personal perspective, missional theologians locate the path to a transformative encounter with the perichoretic God in three places: the sacraments, the scriptures, and the world.

A Missional Sacramental Theology

Along with Lesslie Newbigin, I perceive the sacraments are indispensible in any intervention respecting Episcopal worship. Newbigin has a distinctly sacramental focus, stating outright that the sacraments are the very nature of the Church, which he consistently identifies as a divinely-ordained missionary community of the people of God (Wainwright 286). While Roxburgh and Zscheile are far less explicit, Newbigin’s

Household of God offers a very clear articulation of a missional baptismal theology, stating that the sacrament incorporates the individual into the Body of Christ, not merely for cleansing but for the purpose of being sent out into the world as a pilgrim, to bring God's message of reconciliation and redemption to all (*Household of God* 18-30). Newbigin's wording about incorporation seems to reference a reality that is both spiritual and incarnational, as the union with Christ brings the person forward into the resurrected life, which ultimately is for the sake of the broader human community (Wainwright 287). This is a mystical union with very worldly implications. In his later writings, Newbigin is critical of those who portray baptism as an experience of personal conversion within the insular context of Christendom*,* without considering the missionary task attached to it. The great sign of the sacrament is for the world and not merely for the pastoral care of an individual or the church community (Wainwright 292).

Newbigin considers baptism and Eucharist inseparable, as the nourishment of the latter sustains the former, renewing the incorporation of humanity into life with God again and again (Wainwright 292). Referencing Jesus' prayer of consecration in John 17, Newbigin affirms that the Eucharist is the very "heart of the life of the Church . . . where the glory of God actually abides among us" and where all may be lifted up to God (Newbigin, *Open Secret* 54). Eucharist is also foundationally a missional sacrament, because it rearticulates the story of Christian faith, feeding the community on the Body and Blood of Christ and reaffirming its identity. All this is in anticipation of the community going out into the world as the Body, in witness to the truth of the nearness of God's reign in Christ.

Zscheile focuses on the Episcopal tradition of a weekly celebration of the

Eucharist as the source of nurturance and healing, which empowers the Christian to maintain the energy necessary for engagement in the world. From Zscheile's perspective, the Eucharist is a central practice and a pivotal experience, which inspires lives that have been turned inward to open outward. The renewal that flows from participation in the Eucharist promises restoration in and through a blessed community (*People of the Way* 44-45). The holiness of Communion transcends the moment in the service; it marks the ongoing fraction and reconciliation of the human community with the eternal nature of God, as we become a people no longer for ourselves (*People of the Way* 57). The new beginning, which we come to know through baptism and the Eucharist, marks our belonging to God and to others, and ultimately sends us out into the world to effect a transformation in its orientation (*People of the Way* 58).

This missional focusing of sacramental experience reinforced my commitment to planning a worship experience that prepares and sustains the participants for the rest of their ordinary life in the world. The Eucharist which we celebrate weekly has the potential to be a service that transcends our enjoyment alone. It could be a service which allows us to experience the presence of God, so we can return to the world strengthened and finish the work we have to complete. It could empower us to live with an awareness of the mark of our baptism, remembering whose we are so we can share what we have come to know deeply when we are out and about in the world.

Eucharist and Culture

A missional sacramental theology does not exist divorced from its cultural context. In its incarnational reality, the Church in the world interacts with the culture of the surrounding society. Depending on perspective, leaders perceive that this interaction can be positive and benign, prophetic and critical, or negative and intentionally divergent. H. Richard Niebuhr's influential book *Christ and Culture* presents five models in an historical overview of the interface between Church and culture. Perhaps influenced by his own understanding of culture in the United States after the Second World War, Niebuhr seems to presume that there can be a sort of influential partnership or compromise between the two, even if the relationship is paradoxical at times (*Christ and Culture*). Following Paul of Tarsus, evangelical professor D.A. Carson envisions the interaction more as prophetic statement articulated by the Christian faithful, reflecting a distinctive system of values and behavior that contrast and even conflict with a surrounding and predominantly non-Christian culture (2008). Through his post-Christendom Anabaptist perspective, Craig Carter perceives that the work of Christian culture is to sidestep the influence of the world, insisting that the Church must work to live as Jesus commanded and needs to separate itself from the politics of social coercion. He concludes that any transformation of culture is a secondary effect of the mission to live out the Gospel of peace (loc. 1327).

One significant (and apparently problematic) marker of the Christian community in our time is the tradition of Christian worship on Sundays. It is significant for our understanding that the Holy Eucharist developed within the prevailing culture of its time. The eucharistic banquet originated as a dinner party in the first century. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (c. 53-54 CE) indicates that within a generation after Jesus' resurrection, Christians in Corinth identified an established practice as the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11.17-34). The *Didache* (c. 60-100 CE) provides the earliest example of an early eucharistic prayer, clearly derived from prayers of Jewish origin, and gives some instruction for the eucharistic celebration (McGowan 48). Paul Bradshaw reconstructs this early Christian worship within the context of first century Greco-Roman social tradition, in which leading members of local society would invite dependent clients to dine with them (8-10). Early Christians ate together when they gathered as a community (Dennis Smith 13-46). The first Eucharists were banquets “where the actions of singing, prayer, and inspired speech or sacred story often filled the expected place [of secular discourse] after eating” (McGowan 34). It is likely that prominent leaders in early Christian communities invited fellow believers to share in a eucharistic meal, considering themselves to be one extensive family in Christ (Bradshaw 21). This was not a merely symbolic expression of mutual affection, but a practical expression of love, particularly exercised through feeding the poor of a community (Bradshaw 23). Although Edward Adams uses extensive written and archeological evidence to postulate that early eucharistic gatherings (from the late first to early third century) may not have occurred exclusively in private homes, he does explicitly point out that the alternative sites all provided space for dining and may have been re-purposed restaurants (82).

Christian worship on Sunday has its roots in this communal meal. It is significant for our purposes to note that the timing of Christian worship was malleable as Christian identity became more distinct. There is no record that Christians would gather to celebrate this special meal on Fridays at the opening of the Jewish Sabbath (Gonzalez 19). Gonzalez places the first celebrations of the Eucharist later on Saturday evening or early Sunday morning (20). At an uncertain date prior to the early second century, Christians decided to gather on Sunday, distinguishing their practice from the Jewish

Sabbath (Gonzalez 21). The long-winded discourse (*logos*) by Paul described in Acts 20 is part of a eucharistic meal ("breaking of the bread") on the "first day after the Sabbath" or first day of the week (McGowan 75). Early in the second century, Ignatius of Antioch notes that coming to Christ is signified by no longer celebrating the Jewish Sabbath but instead by observing "the Lord's day" (*Epistle to the Magnesians 9.1,* Gonzalez 21). By the middle of the second century, the eucharistic banquet is normally located on the first day of the week, and Justin Martyr's first apologetic letter to the Emperor Antoninus Pius (ca. 155 CE) describes the ritual as an observance that is regularly on a Sunday, literally the day called "of the sun" (*1 Apol. 67,* McGowan 48; Spinks 30-33).

The significance of designating Sunday as a feast in honor of Jesus' resurrection thus was established early, indisputably by the mid-second century (Gonzalez 24). Not surprisingly, Constantine, in choosing to establish the Christian Church as the official religion of the Empire, supported the establishment of this symbolic day, which both reflected and defined his triumph. By the conclusion of the Council of Nicea (325 CE) during reign of Constantine, there was at least official agreement that the gathering would be Sunday.[7] The eighth day, the day of the Lord marked by resurrection and the establishment of the new creation, was also the day that promised eternity (Gonzalez 29).

This tradition has eroded even in otherwise traditional New England. After nearly 275 years of a legislated Sabbath, in 1979 the Connecticut Supreme Court struck down the Blue Laws that prohibited sports, work, or commerce on Sundays. Now it is surprising to find a day when any store closed. In 2012, the last remaining restriction on days of commerce ended when Connecticut's Governor Malloy signed a bill to allow liquor stores to open on Sundays (Leff). Revenue trumps resurrection.

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[7] Unofficial opposition continued for several decades, even with the threatened consequence of excommunication.

If the timing of early Christian worship was malleable according to the need of the faithful to work and to be safe, perhaps we can adjust our post-modern Christian worship according to the need of the faithful to work and to be sane. If God is perichoretic, I am willing to learn a new dance in order to share the story.

Eucharistic Liturgy on Mission with God

In what way can an expression of this eucharistic liturgy engage in dialogue with an experience of twenty-first century people seeking an encounter with God? Let us suppose that the purpose of liturgy is not simply participation. If the purpose of a sacrament is to make real what it symbolizes, we can agree with Catherine Mowry LaCugna that "liturgy is the ritual celebration of the events of the economy of redemption" (356). The purpose of the contemporary eucharistic liturgy could be to realize the gathered Body of Christ both literally and spiritually. In this way it would echo its original purpose in the first century: a sacramental meal of fellowship and unity that made real the presence of Christ among a group of faithful people as they shared the sacred story (Schillebeeckx, *The Eucharist* 137).[8] Byron Anderson suggests that the Eucharist could both reveal the glory of God and equip the faithful to carry out the mission of God in the world (loc. 794). Anderson further states that liturgical practice is foundationally catechetical: at the Lord’s table, we learn about God and about who we are (loc. 709). The gift and challenge of the Holy Eucharist is that the participants are caught up in the eternal story of God, united with the past, present, and future through a pattern of meaningful ritual (Anderson loc. 2324). If we are interested in coming to know what God is up to (to use the phrase popularized by Alan Roxburgh), we can experience the Eucharist as both the *locus* of encounter and the lens through which to examine it.

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[8] The Vatican was distressed by Schillebeeckx's expansion of the traditional doctrine of transubstantiation. It is most interesting to me that Schillebeeckx uses the language of phenomenology, emphasizing the lived experience of those receiving the sacrament.

Anderson argues that through the liturgy we are formed “in a pattern of relationship to a relational God” (loc. 3485). We participate in eucharistic worship with an eye on the unity that already exists between God and people, even if it is incompletely realized (Anderson loc. 3524). In that sense, the Eucharist can be the most powerful instrument in the process of *theosis,* forming us into a truer version of ourselves, drawing us into the divine identity and life through grace (Anderson loc. 3565).

The eucharistic life is essential in a missional life. In a different context, John Paul Lederach speaks about the capacity of the human moral imagination to discern possibilities of relationship and to venture down unexplored paths to create peace. What binds society together is the invisible web of relationships that at times cannot be completely understood or articulated (75). In a eucharistic sense, the narrative of God that binds us all together, which is a story at the same time ancient, present, and future, is fundamentally relational.

> When deep narrative is broken, the journey toward the past that lies before us is marginalized, truncated. We lose more than just the few thoughts of a few old people. We lose our bearings. We lose our capacity to find our

> place in this world. And we lose our capacity to find our way back to humanity. (Lederach 147)

Shawn M. Schreiner and Dennis E. Northway unintentionally evoke Schillebeeckx when they quote Ronald Rolheiser, locating the Body of Christ in the gathered people of God as well as in the Eucharist (21). Developing an intentional community for children and their adults in an Episcopal parish in Illinois, they framed their eucharistic practice as a missional experience: The Lord is with us. God is in the now. They go on to describe worship as a source of missionary action:

> Our faith is an active faith. Hopefully, a product of participating in worship is the ability and willingness to take what we hear in worship, what we witness in worship, and what we do in worship, outside the "structural doors" of the church and into the world of church that is our daily life. (22)

Missional Engagement with Scripture

Newbigin, Roxburgh, and Zscheile all give priority to regular engagement with scripture texts as a way to discern what God is up to in the world and the way in which we are part of that. Bible study is a missional practice that connects directly to the life of God. From Newbigin's theological perspective, the scriptures contain "a story of which my life is a part, the story of God's tireless, loving, wrathful, inexhaustible patience with the human family, and of our unbelief, blindness, disobedience" (*A Word in Season* 203). This missional reading of scripture moves beyond Niebuhr's description of the Church seeing herself with the eyes of God through biblical history (Niebuhr, "The Story of our Life" 35). The truth of God's story as revealed in scripture encompasses one's personal story, which can lead to a life of discernment each day (Newbigin, *A Word in Season* 203).

Writing from his desire to renew the identity of the Episcopal Church as the people of God and to embrace the mission of God, Zscheile connects reading the Bible to the promise in the Baptismal Covenant to continue in the apostles' teaching. He insists that in order to cultivate the ability to perceive the activity of God in our lives and in the world, we must engage the scriptures to develop the theological imagination of our people (*People of the Way* 91). Without reading the Bible, we cannot go more deeply into the narrative that teaches us who we are. Zscheile lists a number of imaginative ways to support a practice of community-based reading of the scripture, including *lectio divina (The Agile Church* 87-110).

Although he is virtually silent concerning sacramental theology, Roxburgh is most passionate in his assertion that ordinary people can discern the work of God among them, especially when they gather as a group to read the scriptures. Roxburgh outlines a process of *lectio divina* which he calls Dwelling in the Word. Instead of reading the text as a group, the community allows the text to read them, asking God-centered questions and listening quietly for insights from the Holy Spirit. Roxburgh intends that the process not be controlled by leaders, but by ordinary members of a community. The intent is "to create a change in the expectations and practices of people in a congregation" by listening to ways that the living Word speaks to us in the here and now (*Joining God* 60-62).

This missional understanding of engaging scripture shapes Hungry Soul's pastoral approach to liturgy and the Gospel: this must be a community's encounter with God and a source of strength for the journey, not an exercise that is self-contained. The central work in the liturgy emerges as a community study of the Gospel of the week, using a process of *lectio divina* adapted from Roxburgh, using gentle focus questions of my authorship in which all can participate. With an eye toward building community, Zscheile invites the missional practitioner to develop experiments and to keep an open mind with respect to the outcome, which is surprisingly comforting (*The Agile Church* 53 and 103). Working with human beings in a parish context, one never knows whether the outcome will be what is expected, or whether it might be something completely different.

Living into Mission in a New Apostolic Age

To a priest, the demise of cultural Christendom is a very interesting phenomenon. From a theological perspective, there is freedom in not having to adhere to the restraints and expectations of culture. On the practical level of the parish church, however, it is thoroughly worrisome. As an intentional interim minister, I have not yet encountered a parish unconcerned about increasing the engagement of younger families and growing its membership. The anxiety over decreased membership is often palpable when I walk through the door for an interview. From the perspective of practical theological analysis, the deterioration of long-established congregational practices says something about their efficacy and meaning in current time. The question moving forward is less similar to John Westerhoff's famous query about whether our children will have faith (Westerhoff 13-20) than it is about whether the Christian faith will be shared at all with the next generation, when the traditions and programs we have used to accomplish that goal have fallen apart because adults are not participating. Can our aging institution embrace the question Walter Brueggemann raised (in the context of theological education yet still applicable) about our faith "having children," meaning can we trust in God's ability to bring about a future when the prospects appear uncertain (Brueggemann 92)?

Zscheile speaks of the vitality inherent to the freedom in reshaping church life to reflect a changing context (*The Agile Church* 100). He proposes that the vocation of the Church is Spirit-led innovation, inspired by the Living God whose story we read in the Bible (Zscheile "We're in the Innovation Business"). Roxburgh writes about the necessity of moving away from church-centric practices toward God-centric practices (*Joining God* 44). This is not "a question of *church* and culture, but a deeper question of *gospel* and culture: what does it mean to live a life oriented around the gospel of Jesus in contemporary culture?" (Zscheile "We're in the Innovation Business"). As the local parish confronts the impending death of Sunday School as the primary structure for teaching the faith to young people, we can choose to look for new life. As we wrestle with the spiritual vacuum experienced by adults who are unsure of their faith, we can look for a new opportunity to find a way to fill the emptiness by sharing the story of life with God through Jesus.

I concur with Zscheile that we are living in a new apostolic age (*People of the Way* 41).[9] The environment in which we find ourselves is more like the first few centuries of the Common Era than it is like the last few. The first followers of the Way of Jesus were not a dominant force in the extensive and multi-cultural Roman Empire. As a "new religion," the Christians were suspect and closely scrutinized in a time of economic upheaval and spiritual restlessness. They gathered in small groups, prayed and shared the story of Jesus, and went out to share the good news with others. Zscheile sees freedom and the promise of authentic lived faith in our current experience. Accepting dis-establishment means that we do not have to preserve old structures that are not working, and we can innovate to prepare for the future (*People of the Way* 42).

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[9] In fact, I may have used that very phrase before I read his book.

When the parents in Fairfield came to speak with the interim rector, their pleas were practical, not well-formed theological reflections on the apostolic nature of our own time. At the same time, they were sufficiently concerned about the impending failure of the established Sunday School program in passing down their tradition that they felt motivated to sit with a relative stranger and share their concerns. They were aware of the fragmentation and they longed to build something functional. Some of them were sufficiently interested to spend time articulating their priorities as we designed the Hungry Soul project together. They participated in the experience and recruited friends to join them. What originated as a concern that was internal to the system ended up as an experience that they wanted to share with friends outside the system. They were the group in this parish who told me that they really valued hearing their children talk about Jesus at home and in the car, because they took that as a sign that the worship was effective. In their own way, and perhaps without their complete awareness, they were also theologians.

Leadership Informed by Practical Theology

This thesis reflects Richard Osmer's understanding of practical theology as it affects the nature of congregational leadership in challenging situations that demand some sort of change. Following the thought of Charles Gerkin, Osmer envisions the pastor as the interpretive guide, who is authoritative and not just authoritarian (Osmer loc. 265). Following a collaborative model, the guide is willing to travel with the people to a new and unknown territory (Osmer loc. 275). Osmer presents leadership as a transformational (involving deep change), not transactional (an exchange or trade-off), process. Although I am practical enough to perceive that some transactional work can move things forward, the real role of a pastor as leader necessitates and reworks the identity and mission beyond the model of a parish established in the Christendom model. I am not dispensing the commodity of formation; we are all discerning where we are going with God. It is quite possible that the fruit of this transformational work will not be ready before I leave. I hope that this project germinates a vision of possibility.

In the development of this thesis, I was practicing the model of pastoral leadership Osmer endorses (Osmer loc. 187). The first task was to listen deeply as I gathered information on the problem and the context (the descriptive-empirical task). Then I needed to ask the community to discern the reasons the problem was bringing the parish up short (the interpretive task). The third task was to use theological concepts to guide our response (the normative task), which engaged much of what I had been learning in missional theology. And the final task was to discern a possible response with the community (the pragmatic task). Although deep listening is my natural inclination, I am grateful for having read Osmer's enumeration of the four tasks, which gave a clear sequence and framework for the theological tasks.

Osmer is clear that the spirituality of the leader is of utmost importance in this process. We carry out these tasks as we guide our communities "in participating in the priestly, royal, and prophetic office of Christ" and must rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Osmer loc. 388). As we moved into the Hungry Soul project, I had to let go of controlling the experience. This was very different from our usual Sunday morning, in which the priest has responsibility for the liturgy and its administration. This was not about me or even my organizing skills; it was about serving the needs of the developing community and about assisting the members in their own discernment of what God was saying to them. I became their sherpa, their guide in rocky and unknown spiritual territory. Although I have some strong opinions about what constitutes sound Christian spiritual formation, and I am willing to provide necessary information and material for the process, during Hungry Soul I had a keen sense of reliance on the Holy Spirit because I was not sure how the project would unfold.

Advocating the paradigm of servant leadership, Osmer identifies the reversal of the usual pastor-congregant dynamic as the source of genuine authority, offering a catalytic effect of cultural transformation within a community (Osmer, loc. 2270). This was especially challenging in an anxious context, in which parishioners were begging for answers and solutions. Although I worked on the development of the service and found resources to accomplish that, I continued a regular consultation with the three parents who served as a sort of focus group. They were the authorities on the needs and schedules of local families, and they had some strong opinions about what was necessary in a worship service with children: accessible music, brevity, Holy Communion, scripture stories.

After consultation with the wardens, I decided to attend to what I experienced as the deep needs of the parents, and committed to working with them to address the formational dilemma by developing an alternative format for worship. Wary of succumbing to the pressure of savvy tactics of a spiritual consumer mentality, I was quite clear (in my own mind and in my communication) that I needed their assistance to build a theologically meaningful project. We were not certain of the change we needed to find, and together we all decided to pray and to search for one.

The process of leading Hungry Soul deepened my self-understanding as a priest. This group needed their priest to listen and to lead them in discerning how to cultivate their relationship with God as individuals and as a community. In the minimalist service, asking formative questions allowed me to lead without being directive. I rediscovered how much I enjoy teaching about the liturgy and engaging in theological conversation with faithful people. Breaking the bread felt connected to breaking open the Word. The final blessing fell on visibly joyful hearts.

Bridling the Theology so the Project Can Unfold

There is a real challenge in articulating the theology that has informed this project (and which I am inclined to enjoy) while at the same time embracing a methodology of phenomenological study which endorses bridling of knowledge and allowing an experience to unfold. The biggest practical challenge for the priest was to not be the theological expert on Sunday afternoons: to consciously put aside the (almost twenty years of) theological study that informs my work and to allow myself to plunge into the lived theological experience of the people who come to participate in the Hungry Soul project. I cannot exactly pretend that I haven’t studied or that I know nothing. Even if I dress in regular clothing, the people know who I am. And yet, if I am able to dwell in the discomfort of not having to provide an answer, I am hopeful that they can come up with their own theological insights.

Lisa's Story: For me, there has been the community aspect of this and the spiritual/faith aspect of this experience.
From a community aspect, this has reminded me of the beauty of breaking bread together, and so I have started to do Fridays, and have friends over and do dinner and just let the kids play - - and to enjoy that part of community. For me recently, dinner meals have been sort of stressful - - and now [since the marital separation] I am alone. And so it has been really hard. And to make that a joyful communion and sharing again has been so important.
And from a spiritual perspective, if I was to explore that, I would want to choose a scripture verse. I know I have had conversations with people about different verses we have read - I cannot remember one right now - and about how I have had conversations with other moms about our experience. It has been that nourishing.
I remember that the Sunday of Christmas, the kids got into a massive fight on the way to the car – like massive, they were punching each other - and I started yelling - and [another mother] was there - and I said to her how can I go from this peaceful place to this screaming mother in like two minutes? And we talked about having this deep spiritual connection and you walk away and you feel like Boom, you have been walloped by life again. And yet we had that experience and we are sure that we are better off than if we were without it.
Oddly I feel like by reading the gospel verses in this setting, you come to know Jesus in a different way. I don't know why, but I think that we talk about his character and his relationship to the moment in the Gospel differently. So I do feel like it has been an interesting thing from that perspective. Each time we go a little deeper. And we go deeper than we can normally go on a Sunday morning. And the trust we have developed allows us to offer insights we might not have said earlier on.

Pastoral Practice and the Framework of Evaluation

I am a priest who pastors of the people of God. This is the single most important dimension of vocational identity for me. After the Sunday services, which offer the opportunity to provide on-the-ground pastoral care and check-ins with many members and visitors, I spend most of my days cultivating pastoral conversations and listening to the lives of people. On the way in the doors during the week, I often chat with the mothers of the little ones in the parish day school, most of whom do not attend the church but who occasionally have a prayer request. Stopping by the front office, I meet with the many volunteers who support the work of the staff. Calling on the homebound, anointing the sick in hospital, celebrating the Holy Eucharist at a nursing home or in the two midweek services, participating in committee and staff meetings, preparing sermons and presentations, arranging a wedding or a funeral, or praying with the choirs prior to a service, I feel most like a priest when I am able to hear their stories and remind them that we experience the presence of God in the space of our ordinary life together.

During the process of coursework in the Doctor of Ministry program, I recall my surprise in learning that many clergy do not spend time examining or evaluating much of our pastoral practice. The pressure exerted by over-crowded calendars and endless pastoral needs can discourage extensive reflection or evaluation. Although I participate in a peer group and follow a regular schedule for spiritual direction, I have also joked sardonically that there are only thirty hours in a day, and it can be tempting to just put my head down and power through all the tasks without reflecting on them. It is obvious when I mess up, isn't it? I have laughed with clergy colleagues about contemplating the moral implications of erasing the collective memory of George Herbert and Father Tim, those mythological perfect pastors who are always ready to resolve the numerous quandaries of their parishioners.[10] And yet, the often-critical nature of pastoral work actually demands a systematic discipline of reflection and evaluation, in order to maximize effectiveness and reduce the likelihood of pastoral burnout. After the first year of study, I incorporated into my night prayers a daily examen of spiritual work, asking God to assist me in discernment of divine gifts through each day. Where was God today? Where did I miss God? For what blessing am I most grateful? In addition, I have intentionally cultivated a regular conversation with a trusted colleague, with whom I can reflect on matters of pastoral effectiveness. We know and respect one another well enough to be truthful without being threatening. With the parish, I incorporate an annual mutual ministry review into vestry programming, in order to facilitate conversation about the effectiveness of our common ministry. These practices provide some structure for me in an ongoing process of evaluation of the practice of daily ministry. Evaluating the Hungry Soul project, however, would demand a more nuanced and systematic approach.

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[10] Justin Lewis-Anthony (intentionally, through his articulation of the need to re-envision the pastoral dimension of priesthood in *If You Meet George Herbert on the Road, Kill Him*) and Jan Karon (unintentionally through her portrayal of the fictional Father Tim Kavanaugh in her Mitford series) both provide ample evidence that clergy need to reflect on what the call to priesthood entails and how we evaluate our pastoral efficacy.

Quantitative or Qualitative Methodology?

With a renewed commitment to continuing the practice of evaluation of my ministry, I knew that I needed to discern a framework for examining the progress and outcome of the thesis project. Evaluating the Hungry Soul project would be challenging because it would unfold over time, and likely would change along the way, and could be complicated by the number and diversity of the participants. I wanted to find a framework for evaluating the project, and felt somewhat frustrated discerning one as I wrote the proposal for the thesis.

It would have been easy enough, though likely unsatisfying, to evaluate the project using the traditional quantitative measurements of congregational life (attendance, visitors, income, new participants). These sorts of criteria are the basis of many useful statistics (and parochial reports), which analyze the health and effectiveness of the local church by numeric standards. Religious life is not too personal, complex, or abstract to be quantified. Richard Osmer points out that broad statistical patterns can explore relationships between variables and point to possible pastoral responses (loc. 628). Some data are especially well-suited to quantification, such as the significant research conducted by the Pew Foundation concerning the patterns of attendance at services, demographic trends, and spiritual inclinations pertaining to age cohorts ("New Pew Research Center Study," 2015). This sort of data has been quite pertinent in expanding my understanding of the spiritual and cultural climate that has affected the local parish so dramatically in the last decade.

Quantitative measurements, however, seemed not to be entirely compatible with the nature of the information that I hoped would emerge during the project: reflections on the experience and its meaning for the individuals participating in a small group of worshippers. It is exceedingly difficult to measure spiritual formation or an encounter with the Divine in terms of exact quantity. And because the project would unfold over a relatively short period of time, the data would not be extensive or far-reaching. Osmer's insight that qualitative research can be considered as intensive study of a narrow field, with particular focus on "understanding the actions and practices in which individuals and groups engage" supports the consideration of a qualitative methodology (loc. 629). Creswell recommends using a qualitative methodology when the research design is emergent and likely to change or be modified, when the researcher seeks to focus on the meaning that participants derive from an experience, or when the research is likely to lead to an inductive analysis of the data (*Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* 38-9).

At the same time, and I say this with a certain level of ironic discomfort after what could be described as a something akin to a methodological conversion experience, initially I was not certain that a phenomenological approach would be suitable, if for no other reason than I am inclined to skepticism about philosophical systems of evaluation. These have the potential to evaluate, in profoundly intellectual and theoretical terms, what I now would identify as lifeworld research, so that the process and reported conclusions are somewhat out of touch with our lived reality.[11] I am a priest and not a philosopher. I live an incarnational reality in a real parish, and I am less invested in talking about theoretical constructs than I am in figuring out what transforms life for the people of God. I have little patience with academic practitioners of missional theology, who use a parish as their laboratory for *in vivo* missional experiments that lead to journal articles instead of transformative experiences for the people of God.

In the end, I decided that I trusted my advisor enough to articulate a willingness to examine a phenomenological approach, and began to explore the literature during the summer session. I was surprised by the multiplicity of perspectives and the commitment of phenomenologists to accuracy in discerning the meaning of first-person experience, with an eye to deeper understanding of human life. The complexity and diversity of phenomenological processes intimidated me, yet I knew I needed to move into a methodology that went beyond the usual statistical measures.

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[11] The term “lifeworld” (*Lebenswelt*) was coined by Edmund Husserl in his phenomenological approach to the interpretation of lived experience: it is subjective understanding that makes scientific knowledge meaningful. I use the word intentionally to distinguish this ministry project from matters that are more speculative or theoretical, which could be labeled “woo-woo” in the vernacular.

Although I read numerous phenomenologists' accounts of their methods, it was John Swinton and Harriet Mowat who were most persuasive with respect to suitability, writing about the value of qualitative research in practical theological studies. Practical theology looks for the deep wisdom that is contained in knowledge, and qualitative research can provide authentic data for theological reflection (105). The principal resource is the engagement of the researcher with the search for meaning and truth (106). Echoing Max Van Manen, Swinton and Mowat endorse using hermeneutic phenomenology for research into spiritual experience, as it brings together extensive description with the process of interpretation of personal meaning statements (106-108). Through the detailed descriptive process, the researcher gains access to glimpses of inner spiritual experience, which is described in the participants' own words.

Creswell's discussion of multiple qualitative methodologies helped me envision the applicability of phenomenology to lifeworld research and a thesis project. In lifeworld research, phenomenology is more than a philosophical perspective. It is also a method for analyzing data that reflect subjective lived experience in a particular situation or "central phenomenon" and for writing about the process (*Qualitative Inquiry* 89). In contrast to grounded theory, another approach that is frequently used in social sciences, phenomenological studies do not seek to develop a broadly explanatory theory derived from groups of gathered data. Instead, the phenomenological methodology seeks to understand the essence of individual experiences, seeking to identify core commonalities of meaning through the collection of statements articulated by participants. The expected size of the group also influenced my choice of the phenomenological methodology.

Grounded theory works well in a mid-sized group (between 20 and 30 participants). Phenomenology is most suitable in a smaller group of fewer than 20 members (*Qualitative Inquiry* 121).

Swinton and Mowat resolved for me the dilemma of the necessary maintenance of professional distance through the practice of bracketing, using Gadamer's rejection of the possibility of complete objectivity (111). The experience and knowledge of the researcher are necessary to make sense of the world and new experiences. Citing Gadamer, they insist that the most important quality is the capacity to remain open to new experience, which necessarily contradicts or differs from the experience that came earlier (qtd. in Swinton and Mowat 112). This expanded my understanding of the process and perspective of phenomenology as a suitable qualitative methodology for understanding the project, and encouraged me to find a particular method to examine and evaluate the information gathered.

The Nature and Value of Phenomenology

Although there are numerous (and not consistently harmonious) approaches to phenomenology, its many practitioners have commonalities in their foundational assumptions: they study the lived experiences of persons; they believe that the conscious experience (awareness of the phenomenon while living it) has primary value; they choose to restrain their presupposition about what they already know or expect; they develop descriptions of the universal essences of these experiences; they have an aversion to explanation or analysis based on prior assumptions; they look for connections among disparate parts in order to understand the whole; some look for what the meaning of the experience could become, as Mark Vagle does when he projects his lines of flight (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry* 58). Max van Manen states,

> "The essence of a phenomenon is a universal which can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestation of the essence of that phenomenon . . . . A universal or essence may only be intuited or grasped through a study of the particulars or instances as they are encountered in lived experiences." (*Researching Lived Experience* 10)

Phenomenology, very broadly speaking, involves the study of human experience, as objects and events (phenomena) are perceived and understood by human consciousness. It is not now nor has it ever been a single philosophy (Dahlberg et al. 30). German mathematician Johann Heinrich Lambert used the term first in 1764, as he extended the principles of optics to apply them to his philosophical exploration of the human knowledge of truth (Mickey). Immanuel Kant's phenomenology in the second edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason* is an epistemology based on constructivist philosophy, in that the cognitive subject (the person) constructs the cognitive objects (phenomena of experience) by processing sensory data and contributing a structure through reason (Rockmore 44). In the writing of German mathematician Edmund Husserl and his protégé Martin Heidegger, phenomenology emerged in the twentieth century as an influential field in philosophy. In popular thought, statements such as "all knowing is subjective" and "perception is reality" echo the phenomenological assertion that objects and events have a reality that depends on their perception in human consciousness. Current trends in research in health sciences and education seem to favor a phenomenological methodology, which enables the researcher to analyze an individual's subjective perception of an experience and to search for patterns and their meaning.

Practitioners of phenomenology as a methodology in research hold diverse opinions concerning suitable processes. Some, like E.H. Anderson, M.H. Spencer, and Amadeo Giorgi, favor the Husserlian approach, emphasizing the necessity of an exhaustive description of phenomena with minimal interpretation, while restraining the interaction between researcher and outcome (Butler-Kisber 189, Van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice* 211). Hermeneutic phenomenologist Max Van Manen prefers the Heideggerian approach, emphasizing a reflective and interpretive methodology, an openness to allow a natural unfolding in the phenomenon examined, and the necessity of reining in the possible influence of the researcher's own understandings on the outcome (*Researching Lived Experience* 25). Van Manen's process of reduction, or discernment of the essence of a phenomenon, demands the negation of all external influences that may have influence on the discernment. He endorses the practice of bracketing, by which he means it is necessary to suspend or isolate one's prior beliefs or knowledge from the observation of phenomena in the natural world, in order to study the structures of the world discernable through the phenomenological reduction, which transcends the particularity of individual experience and moves toward the universality of its essence or a description of its meaning (*Researching Lived Experience* 175, 18).

With phenomenology, there are no broadly generalized conclusions, as that is not the goal. The end of phenomenological study is to posit the meaning gleaned from a particular experience at a specific time in a small group. Even the exhaustive description of the phenomenon in Creswell's account attends to a small group of individuals' experiences (*Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* 80).

Embracing Dahlberg's Phenomenological Qualitative Methodology

As I designed the Hungry Soul project in the late summer of 2016, I was deep in a review of literature on qualitative and mixed-methods research, and was still not fully committed to a particular system of evaluation for the project. Outlining the order of service, finding a suitable lectionary, and deciding what sort of elements and communionware to use, I wondered how to evaluate what was about to begin. In September, it seemed to me to be impossible to completely isolate what I had been studying from what we were about to do, and I nearly despaired over the very concept of bracketing.

Hermeneutic phenomenologist Karin Dahlberg's methodology is somewhat unique and has had substantial influence on this thesis. Strongly influenced by Husserl's understanding of essences as a phenomenon's way of being in the world ("The essence of essences" 12), Dahlberg also reflects the thinking of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, pointing out that all phenomena are interconnected: it is difficult to see where one finishes and the other begins ("The Essence of Essences" 15). For this reason, language is not separable from thought, and plays a role in creating reality ("The Essence of Essences" 17). Thus absolute bracketing of foreknowledge is virtually impossible, and it is not only possible but valuable that one's knowledge or belief should assist in making sense of phenomena (Dahlberg et al. 38). Objective thinking does not really exist, as no object can present itself entirely in one gaze, and it is the interaction between object and observer that creates reality (Dahlberg and Dahlberg 43).

Dahlberg steps back from the practice of bracketing in her advocacy of the less-restrictive practice she calls bridling. She prefers to recognize a researcher's knowledge and theoretical understanding, which reflect the organic connection between consciousness and the world, while simultaneously advocating the researcher's exercise of restraint in interaction with the phenomenon. In Dahlberg's ideal, the researcher adapts a respectful attitude that allows the experience to unfold according to its own nature ("The Essence of Essences" 16; Dahlberg et al. 129-130). Appropriating the terminology of family systems theory, this is something akin to a hermeneutic of self-differentiation, with the researcher recognizing connection and declining to exercise control over the other members of a system (Friedman 32-35, 296). What is important in this process is the researcher's willingness to take time to understand the whole and remain open to multiple possibilities in the individual parts of the experience, not rushing to "make definite what is indefinite" in the final articulation of the essence of the phenomenon (Dahlberg and Dahlberg 44-45).

Dahlberg also recommends that the researcher wait until after gathering data to adopt a method of analysis (Dahlberg et al. 177). Lifeworld research, even in a church setting, is not as straightforward and sanitary as a laboratory. It is critically important to slow down and dwell with the phenomenon, and to connect the phenomenon with its context (Vagle *loc.* 1078). Dahlberg et al. present both descriptive and interpretive methods for analysis, allowing every researcher to be ready to allow the phenomenon to tell her how it is best studied/analyzed (Dahlberg et al. 241 ff. and 276 ff.). Sustained reflection on the multiplicity of possibilities is the tool that allows the researcher to perceive paradoxes and differences in meaning that would otherwise go unnoticed

(Dahlberg and Dahlberg 47).

It is the disciplined commitment to openness, which Dahlberg calls bridling, that makes her phenomenological approach distinctive. Dahlberg discusses the necessity of openness using Gadamer's description of scientific openness: "a wish to see something in a new way" (Dahlberg et al. 111). She asserts that while this appears to be antithetical to the practice of following a method in research, it is not unscientific. Rather than following a rigid protocol, the researcher must embrace openness, move beyond preconceived understandings, and allow the phenomenon to show itself and its meaning in unexpected ways (Dahlberg et al. 112-114). Her method, which she declares non-methodical, is actually a practice of adaptation to the circumstances of a variable human environment, demanding that the researcher commit to being open to both the generality of an experience (describing it as a whole) as well as the particularity of an experience (describing the unique nature of its pieces). Acceptance of the innate paradoxical nature of lifeworld experience allows the researcher to see phenomena in their complexity (Dahlberg et al.120). The researcher can return to the phenomena themselves, never making definite what is indefinite (Dahlberg et al. 121).

Considering the unique nature of a parish in transition, the probable small size of the group, the local climate for ministry, and the limitations of quantitative analysis, I perceived progressively that phenomenology had real value in terms of what Swinton and Mowat identify as a method (the how: the specific techniques used to construct the research question, collect and analyze data pertaining to individual spiritual experience) as well as a methodology (the why: the perspective underlying assumptions about studying the data and writing about it) (74-75). Due to the complex and evolving nature of the Hungry Soul project, my own commitment to allowing the participants to construct their own interpretations of what the project meant to them, and the significant influence of the local context of affluence and busyness on the development of the project, the phenomenological method of Dahlberg made practical and theoretical sense to me when I read about it in Vagle's text (loc. 1023-1099). It was a serendipitous encounter: I was near the middle of the project and had not begun to analyze any of the results. Reading Vagle's discussion of Dahlberg, I exclaimed aloud to my bemused spouse that I had discovered the best methodology for the project. Ordering the book written by Dahlberg and her colleagues, the more I read, the more I realized that her perspective was an excellent fit.

I confess that as we began the project, I had started out keeping an eye on attendance and the collection. Some of that was habit and some of that was anxiety. Counting heads and knowing the numbers were part of my weekly practice at church in New England, where the parishes I served were often on the declining edge of viability. Would this project make a difference for the participants? Although attendance and dollars are not the only measures of parish life, they are significant. Still, when the regular attendance on Sunday afternoon hovers around a dozen or so, there needs to be another measure of efficacy and meaning. About seven weeks into the project, I had that clarifying experience: the connection between Dahlberg and studying the participants' experience of meaning made utter sense, and I began to focus less on numbers and more on emotional and spiritual expressions. In the Hungry Soul Journal, I abandoned counting the dollars and naming the participants and began to focus on living in the unfolding moment. I was allowing myself to be a phenomenologist.

With respect to this thesis, Dahlberg’s phenomenological method opened up a space for me to complete the project, to reflect on the data gathered afterward while not completely isolating the knowledge I had about the participants or their environment, and to study the effects of the project on participants’ spiritual lives as well as on my work and identity as their pastor. Further, Mark Vagle’s post-intentional phenomenology, which was influenced by Dahlberg’s bridling and adds the construct of “lines of flight” to imagine what the essence of a phenomenon might become, allowed me to conceive that the ongoing movement of consciousness and phenomena could lead to future possibilities in ministry (loc. 2493).

Dahlberg’s Phenomenological Method to Gather and Analyze Data

Lynn Butler-Kisber points out that an important stage in phenomenological method is the capacity to step into the lived experience of another person (loc. 1307). The task of the phenomenologist is to build sufficient trust in the relationship that the participants can share with candor their experience and sense of meaning. It is helpful if the researcher is able to enter into their experience by means of empathy or intuitive imagination. At the least, this requires in-depth open-ended interviews. In the case of the Hungry Soul project, I was able to participate in and observe all the services and spend significant time beyond the services with several of the families engaged in the project, as well as to have conversations and conduct interviews with many of the regular participants. Although I was the priest and the pastor, all the participants knew that I was an interim and this was my doctoral project, so I was able to function with some freedom as the researcher.

Experiencing the whole project, from planning through implementation of the eighteen services over nine months, gave me an overview of its development. I certainly have my own first-person experience of Hungry Soul. What deepened my relationship with the participants was my regularity in supportive interaction: taking the young parents seriously when they complained about the need for an alternative program for formation; listening to the seniors when they needed a compassionate ear or supportive resource; showing up every week we had service and spending time talking over supper. These times of face-to-face relational ministry gave me some credibility, so that I was not a distant researcher or the interim-who-would-soon-leave, but a loving pastor in community. This is my preferred way of being, and fortunately it was compatible with the needs of the project.

I designed the interview questions with assistance from my mentor, seeking to capture the immediate experience of participants. The template for the questions is found in Appendix J. Prior to each interview, I asked the participant (or their parent, if the participant was a child) to give me permission to record the interview with a small digital recorder, and to sign a release form. The release form is found in Appendix C. I interviewed twelve participants, four children and eight adults, spending between 20 and 30 minutes with each participant. Transferring the digital file to my laptop, I transcribed each interview at a later time. These first-person interviews provided substantial data, and formed the majority of the text on which the analysis is constructed.

In Dahlberg's method, the analysis of data follows a tripartite structure, which she ascribes to Gadamer and describes as a movement of understanding between the whole of an experience, to its parts as they are analyzed, and back to a reconstituted whole

(Dahlberg et al. 236-237). This understanding of interpretation as a hermeneutic circle (sometimes called a hermeneutic spiral) encompasses a fluidity of meaning that may offer new understanding as pieces of text are analyzed and reassembled. This not unique to Dahlberg and is a concept held in common among many phenomenologists, including Van Manen, Vagle, and Giorgi. No part of an experience is entirely discrete, and connections with other parts may reveal new interpretations.

Data analysis begins with a thorough (meaning multiple times) reading of the whole text while practicing openness. It is important and necessary to have a sense of the whole material before beginning to examine the parts. The challenge is to "bridle" any evolving understanding, and to see the complexity and multiplicity of meanings in the body of data (Dahlberg et al. 239). This is time consuming and determinative to the validity of the analysis, as it generates questions about the parts, which emerge in the second stage.

I commenced transcribing and reading the interview documents after I had moved on from this parish to another call. The dislocation of relocation disrupted the process of reflection considerably, and meant that I continued the data review more than six months after the completion of the project. The transcription of twelve interviews was time-consuming, and gave me the opportunity to listen again to the voices of the participants, hearing their experience as I actually typed out their responses to questions. The interviews transported me back to the experience of Hungry Soul, in all its mildly chaotic, wonderful, and lively power. I remembered the friendly dinners, and the time when only a few of us showed up; the night the entire parish was there, and the excitement of the pageant service when Lily talked about her dead sister; the times when

Carl tried to teach the children about God, and the times that the children offered amazing insights that no one dared to challenge. And I always remembered little Mark, who could hardly sit still, and his longing to be close to the table when we prayed to confect the Eucharist.

After the initial reading, the researcher can begin to put the data into parts, which is where the analysis begins. The researcher is able to divide the whole into smaller segments, which Dahlberg (following Giorgi) calls meaning units (Dahlberg et al. 243). The meaning units may not emerge quickly, and only grow clear after substantial reflection and analysis. Subsequent readings focus on the meaning units: words, phrases, colors, emotional notes, with an eye to nuances organized into patterns and clusters of meaning. These help the researcher see the essential meanings and structures that describe and explicate the phenomenon. Dahlberg and Dahlberg remind the researcher to remember that all analytical processes of data must be approached with a level of skepticism, as there is no separation between the subject/observer and object/observed: they are necessarily in relationship with one another, and thereby make up a dynamic relationship (41). Dahlberg herself notes that her phenomenological method is evocative of an exercise in Gestalt psychology: the whole will always be greater than the sum of its parts (Dahlberg et al. 244).[12]

Dissecting the project through analyzing the journal, the interviews, and the emails and conversations that surrounded the project has allowed me to examine the many pieces and individual experiences that comprised the Hungry Soul experience of numerous individuals. It took many weeks of pouring over the interviews and the journal, reading them again and again and then highlighting the words and phrases that were similar. It was not until I was able to take the time to perform this task that the larger themes began to emerge from the data.

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[12] After taking a course in Gestalt Pastoral Care in Connecticut in 2005, I began to practice seeking connections between seemingly disconnected elements of pastoral conversations. In retrospect, my pastoral practice has been a preparation for this phenomenological approach to research.

When the researcher has mined the original texts of their data, when the meanings are noted and clustered, it is time to move toward putting together the new whole: to search for the essence of the phenomenon. Dahlberg outlines three questions. What are the phenomenological essences? What are their characteristics? How do they come to be? (Dahlberg et al. 245) She follows Husserl in her unwillingness to definitively talk about the essence of phenomena: “essences *are* their phenomena, and phenomena *are* their essences” (Dahlberg et al. 247). We cannot give a phenomenon meaning from the outside, by naming it: “it is not the researcher who gives a phenomenon its meaning. Neither are essences something that only lie within the realm of the object itself, ready to describe” (“Essence of Essences” 12). It is the act of researching, which takes place between the phenomenon and the researcher, which reveals meaning. The act of research illuminates the essence from within, using its totality and its particulars together, its inner and outer horizons (Dahlberg et al. 250-251). Essences belong to the in-between world, which connects us with everything around us, and all subjects with all objects (“Essence of Essences” 12).

My own concern throughout the project was that the nature of participatory research complicated the epistemological question. What I could know about the lived experience of participation in the Hungry Soul project would be influenced by my own engagement within the service. I was fairly certain that the phenomenon could be changed or diminished by the exercise of writing it down, which would possibly omit some critical detail or emotional nuance. The nature of the whole, and the essence of its being, might remain mysterious even if the notes and interviews were recorded meticulously. If I were to try to describe the essence of the experiences of Hungry Soul, would that either change the meaning or miss the mark?

Dahlberg is clear that the phenomenon ultimately will tell the researcher how it is best studied. It is not possible to decide on methods of data gathering in advance, because in lifeworld research we need to dwell with a phenomenon before examining it (Dahlberg et al. 177). The researcher can gather data through interviews, observations, journals and various written descriptions, and through other means that people use to communicate meanings, always keeping in mind that the gathering of data is not an entirely objective activity and is necessarily an inter-subjective relationship in a lifeworld "vibrating with meanings" (Dahlberg et al. 171-172). If the meaning units contain enough nuanced detail, the result of this tripartite analysis could be a description of the essence of the phenomenon and the individual meanings that constitute it. It is likely that the essence will take a more abstract form than the constituent meanings. The researcher describes each constituent part in depth and includes the nuances present in the original data.

The Priest is a Phenomenologist: Bridling the Ongoing Experience

I am more comfortable as a priest than I am in the role of philosopher. Leading worship, preaching, and the care of souls come more naturally than a systematic analysis of parishioners' experience. At the same time, I am increasingly inclined to understand my work as a pastor in terms of the discernment of phenomenological encounters. As I have written this chapter during Lent and into Eastertide, I perceive that the majority of my pastoral ministry is guiding my people as they try to interpret the meaning of their first-person experience of mysteries that transcend simple telling. In an Episcopal context, which intentionally declines to definitively define the manner in which Christ is present in the Holy Eucharist, there is no expectation of uniformity in experience or in worshippers' theological reflections. This is a context full of opportunity to consider the phenomenology of spiritual encounters, using Dahlberg's flexible methodology.

As the Hungry Soul project moved forward with the participants, it was necessary to bridle my own learning and let the project unfold in its own way. I was careful to limit my interaction with the participants' sharing during the services, keeping editorial insights to myself (recording them in the journal), and adhering to the scripted reflection questions, and later the interview questions, almost rigidly. Participants had unique and personal spiritual experiences during the process, and it was important to allow them to articulate those experiences without controlling the outcome. I had some idea about where we were going, as during the project I designed the interview questions to elicit a description of their personal experience.

Hungry Soul gradually emerged as a phenomenological encounter for me as well. By the evening when we experienced the Christmas story and pageant together, I realized that all the planning, designing, and setting up that I did was less important than the quiet movement of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of participants during the gatherings. It was a stunning realization. Hungry Soul was about neither the project nor the researcher.

Watching closely for the interactions and awareness of the participants invited me to observe the emergence of the larger reality in which I was able to participate as a priest: a newly-formed community was encountering God together during worship.

Chapter 5 Hungry Soul: The Act of Ministry

Carl's story: Yes, I think people listen to one another in this service. I think also we talk to God differently, too. With a formalized service, we put God into a box. You know, in the pew, with the organ, with the structure. There is not a lot of contemplation. This is quite different. We were asked to open our mind and look at the scripture differently, to contemplate it, and think about what we do in the day-to-day world. The kids were fantastic, and you got a different idea from a very young person looking at the scripture through their own experience, and we got a different point of view.

You can look at the scripture at any age. All the different pieces of scripture. Sometimes it was surprising how much they listened and heard. This is completely different from regular church. I have always had a strong relationship with God, so that hasn't really changed. This has changed how I look at God's word, how that would be used in ordinary life, really. It is not like hearing what is preached in a sermon or what you read for inspiration. It is about how you use this in life, this is life lessons.

The act of ministry called Hungry Soul originated in one particular affluent and busy Episcopal parish in Fairfield, Connecticut. Spiritual formation, in the form of classroom instruction and craft projects on Sunday mornings, was not effective in the local context. Adults remained unsure of their own faith, and perceived that they did not have the background or capacity to teach their children when they were unable to participate in Sunday School.[13] I did not expect to develop a universal antidote to the decline of formational programs, nor did I expect to find the singular resource to save the Church from her cultural disestablishment. I did hope to discover a process to share the story of Jesus in the Gospel and to support some anxious parents during the tenure of my interim ministry. The experiment would necessarily be short-lived, as I was not the settled rector and would be moving on within a year.

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[13] Whether or not this perception was accurate is immaterial. The truth of perception is within the heart of the individual and wields formidable influence over rational thought.

Hungry Soul project had a yearlong timeline that included three months of active preparation and nine months of execution. The planning process was intense and involved research, practical discernment, many collaborative decisions, and some serendipitous luck. We needed to initiate some changes along the way. I recorded the experience in a journal each week at the end of the service, so the record would be fresh and I would not have to rely on my memory of each Sunday. As we continued the project, it developed into an interesting spiritual community of practice, with some unexpected outcomes in terms of participants, parish engagement, and sacramental innovation. And as my own spiritual practice, I tried to bridle the experiences as we lived through them, focusing on what was happening each afternoon, and not projecting my expectations onto the process.

Practical Planning for the Project

The planning of Hungry Soul was integral to its success. In February and March 2016, I had a dozen informal conversations with concerned parents, on the phone, in emails, and finally in person. The parish was just beginning the transition process, and so everything in the community was new to me, including the identities of members. One of the most influential advocates for an intervention actually did not have a personal interest in the process: Christine had served as a warden of the parish, and was part of the committee that interviewed me. Her children were grown and she was frequently in church in Sunday mornings. She did, however, have the experience of a previously-organized spirituality group for mothers who had youngsters in the parish day school, and knew that parents were key contributors to the spiritual formation of their children. She wanted others to benefit as she had, from relationships with peers and support in raising children in the faith. She was intentional about connecting me to young parents who were concerned about Sunday struggles, making introductions and telling the other women that I was both trustworthy and committed to helping them.

From April to early May, we were able to convene a more structured focus group to set priorities and consider appropriate responses to their concerns. Three mothers comprised the focus group. It was they who had spoken most frequently with the former warden about their Sunday School dilemma. We met in late afternoon and they brought along their children, so we were immersed in the world of vocal, energetic, and busy families for the two times we were together in the home of one participant. The mothers were intense, smart, and dedicated to providing the best of everything for their children, and they considered some sort of spiritual formation to be a requisite for healthy family life. All the mothers were from a background that was not Episcopal, and had chosen this parish because of its proximity to their homes and its reputation as a family-friendly community. Two had children who had attended the parish day school. Two were married moms who were staying home, and one was a single parent who worked full time. They were extremely helpful as I learned about local and parish culture, and how to engage other members of the Fairfield community.

The first matter to settle was a good time to insert some sort of intervention. With their full time work (for one mother and all the fathers), regular after-school commitments, music lessons and athletic competitions, this was a very busy group. Many had already planned weekends to travel for the rest of the year. We settled on Sunday afternoons, around 5 p.m., although most of the mothers were clear that there was no way they would be able to do this every week. We excluded identifiable holiday weekends (Columbus Day weekend in October, Thanksgiving, the entire school break from Christmas through New Year's Day, and so on). Most months, we were able to plan two sessions of the program.

The summer of 2016 was busy. From late May into June, I completed significant research and study to prepare the academic foundations of the thesis proposal which would lead to this project, and participated in the final summer session of classes at Virginia Theological Seminary. In July and August, I assembled resources and planned the liturgy in conversation with the mothers. There are vast numbers of books on worship with children, although most of them are written for a non-liturgical or Roman Catholic tradition, and others were just not useful in my context (i.e., children's liturgy with props or puppets).

A number of resources supported my inclination toward multi-generational worship. Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross support intergenerational models for theological as well as sociological reasons. They advocate that children belong in worship with their parents, because the gathered people of God are the Body of Christ and also because families in worship together enable children to see what adult faith looks like. Because spiritual development is not identical to cognitive development, the sense of belonging within the wider community is both comforting and formative (Allen and Ross 195). Susan Bock echoes their viewpoint, insisting that an intergenerational model is both necessary for theological reasons (noting Episcopal baptismal promises promising support for the children's life in Christ) and for formational reasons (contact with the whole community is meaningful and imputes importance). Bock notes that “church is for the Child *[sic]* in each of us”, and parishes must work with intent to find ways for children and adults to worship together (loc. 162).

Other resources supported a liturgical format. Simon Rundell offers some exceptionally creative liturgies in the context of the Anglo-Catholic tradition of the Church of England, and he used to write a youth ministry blog which was included on the Church of England website (www.churchofengland.org). Shawn Schreiner and Dennis Northway’s expansive explanation of the Episcopal service designed for children, outlined in *The Rite Place*, was encouraging and inspiring, though not perfectly adaptable to our context. Bock offers seasonal prayers plus some very sensible advice for intergenerational worship planning, especially reminding adults to embrace their inner child (loc. 275). The best wisdom I gleaned from them was also the most practical. Experienced children’s ministers encourage clergy to use child-friendly language (Bock loc. 295), music that speaks of what our hearts long for (Schreiner and Northway 37), repeatable rituals (Donoghue 2016), good stories (Irwin 2016), to find practical applications for the focus of the lesson (Bock loc. 295) and to have fun (Schreiner and Northway 46-56; Baird 2013). Anticipating a small group, I paid close attention to David Csinos and Ivy Beckwith’s insights on best practices in intergenerational ministry in smaller churches and liturgy/music that works across generational lines (loc. 2325-2363). They are passionate about the practice of spiritual mentoring, which is a key to addressing the dilemma of parents who are fearful about raising their children in faith.

Assembling a eucharistic service was more challenging than performing the research. I knew I wanted a eucharistic prayer that was simple and at the same time pedagogical: something to emphasize what we do at the communion table. I had ruled out the “regular” prayers from the *Book of Common Prayer*, as they were traditional and a little wordy. I like the resources in *Enriching Our Worship,* and still ruled them out also as too sophisticated or too long. Invited to serve as a chaplain to a group of teens at our diocesan camp, I was impressed by the Camp Washington worship booklet. The opening and closing sentences were straight from the *Book of Common Prayer,* so they offered continuity with the “regular” adult-focused service. The intercessions were brief and suitable for young readers. The Eucharistic prayer was written by the Anglican Church of South Africa and was very popular with the summer campers. It evoked the question-and-response of a Passover Seder. With permission, I brought home the book and did some more research to verify the source. Simon Rundell includes it in his book (33-34), and I decided it was worth using. The service is outlined in Appendix E. The communion elements would be pita bread (plus some gluten-free wafers for those with allergy issues) and white grape juice in addition to wine, so all could participate without restriction. That left the focus group and me with decisions about music and scripture.

I also borrowed the Camp Washington songbook, which included some Vacation Bible School favorites plus pop songs and spirituals, and decided to use many of the songs that were in it, adding a few favorites of the adult members of the focus group. I was disappointed to realize that although Schreiner and Northway’s *Rite Place* service has many excellent musical selections, including gospel acclamations, we were not able to use many of them as we would be singing *a capella*. Because we had no budget for a musician, we wanted to find songs that were well-known and easy enough for us to sing without accompaniment. The mothers and I chose our favorites and made our own Hungry Soul Music Book. Its Table of Contents is included in Appendix G.

At the same time, I was considering resources for the scripture we would use. I thought that to follow the Sunday morning pattern of using four selections might be too much. I reasoned that it would be most instructive to use fewer passages and to reflect on them in depth, so the mothers in our focus group discussed it among themselves. They decided it would be best to use the Gospel of the day, and we discussed the translation we would use. We agreed that the New Revised Standard Version was a bit complex for youngsters. The associate rector had a copy of Lyn Zill Briggs's lectionary paraphrase of the Reformed Common Lectionary to be used for services with children, *God's Word, My Voice.* The text was simple enough for youngsters to understand and sufficiently nuanced that adults would listen to it. The parents actually preferred it to *The Message*, which is more colloquial. Appendix F includes a sample of the propers we used at Hungry Soul.

The process of deciding on how to reflect on the scripture was central to the project. I have long used a dialogue-based homiletical process with adults in smaller midweek services, as it is engages them and honors their theological understanding. In Hungry Soul, I hoped to blend this with a practice of reflection on the Gospel. In the Episcopal Church in Connecticut, we had been practicing Roxburgh's method of *lectio divina,* which he names Dwelling in the Word (*Joining God* 68-69). Roxburgh's method blends the meditative method of traditional *lectio divina* with the group reflection process often called African Bible Study, and he recommends using three particular questions to facilitate discernment. Like *lectio divina,* this reflective practice allows God to shape us in and through the scripture. Feeling inspired, I planned the Liturgy of the Word around a time of group reflection on the Gospel, instead of a clergy-delivered sermon. Trusting that the living Word of God would have a formative impact on the group, I designed three questions that would be read aloud by the priest.

Knowing that regularity of ritual would assist with participation, the process of *lectio divina* of the Gospel in Hungry Soul would follow the same pattern each week:

- The Gospel passage was read, followed by a brief period of silence for reflection
- The priest would read the first question: What word or phrase catches your attention?
- The group would share what they thought
- The Gospel passage was read a second time, followed by a brief period of silence for reflection
- The priest would read the second question: What could God be saying to me/us in this Word?
- The Gospel passage was read a third time, followed by a brief period of silence for reflection
- The priest would read the third question: How does this Gospel lead me to want to talk with or listen to God?

Having decided to read the Gospel three times during each service, I made a decision that had enormous influence on the success of the program. As a mother, I am an advocate of hands-on instruction. I had found that my children paid better attention and learned more when they were actually doing something, rather than just hearing an adult telling them about it.[14] I suggested to the parents that their children read the Gospel aloud, instead of the priest. In part this was motivated by the practical consideration of engagement of participants in the intentionally brief service. In part this was motivated by my missional desire to move the clergy out of the center of everything in the service. This was a fortuitous decision. Not only were the parents thrilled (perceiving that it was an honor for lay people to read the Gospel at a service), the children were very excited. Many were early readers (between the ages of 6 and 8), and they enjoyed the experience of reading something important to the adults. The parents paid very close attention to their children, often standing with them and quietly coaching them as they read. This emerged as a practical exercise of spiritual mentoring for the parents, who took very seriously the public reading of the Gospel, and who seemed to read it in an new and close way themselves.

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[14] I have learned that this is foundational to the Montessori method of early childhood education and also to Piaget's theory of cognitive development in children. It is good to know that the research of experts is supportive. At the time, I was following my practical experience as a parent.

The final step in the preparation phase was the decision to include a potluck supper at the end of the service. This addition partially reflected the busyness of the families: any activity that could combine two or more necessary tasks into one was attractive, and the mothers thought it would be great: a spiritual “two-fer”. From an historical perspective, this could be considered a return to the original apostolic practice of the dinner party in which the eucharistic feast was originally located, but truthfully that framing occurred to me after the parents talked about the convenience.[15] The original plan was to encourage participants to bring food that they could buy already prepared (to reduce stress), but the many food allergies and dietary restrictions among the youngsters nullified that almost immediately, and we returned to preparing food ourselves and bringing it along. The parish provided paper goods and kitchen access. Because we did not want to move from one location to another, and because we were trying to be intentionally friendly to families with younger children, we decided to meet in the parish hall (instead of the church). We would sit at the round tables that the parish used for coffee hour, and would leave enough open space that children could move around if they needed to. After the service, I could put away the communionware as the families started sharing their supper.

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[15] This is a fine example of the ancient tradition of theology following practice.

With the service designed, I had it printed on a single sheet and laminated it for repeated use. We would use weekly handouts with the Gospel passage in large print. The song books were printed on sturdy paper so they would survive handling. By August, we had finished our preparation and were ready to issue an invitation. I announced Hungry Soul through our regular parish channels (electronic newsletter, bulletin inserts, and brochures sent through the day school, see Appendices A and D). The mothers of the focus group expended considerable energy and time, sharing the news with their local friends and neighbors.

The Hungry Soul Project Unfolds

The Hungry Soul project commenced in mid-September 2016 and continued until May 2017. Over the nine months we offered 18 sessions of intergenerational worship on Sunday afternoons, with a few adjustments to the program as we went along. Three of those 18 services were of a special nature: one baptism, one all-parish dinner church for stewardship ingathering, and one Christmas pageant. The rest were "regular" Sundays. By the time we completed the project, we had grown a small community of people who enjoyed reflecting on the stories about Jesus and then eating supper together.

The setting up was more complicated for the first several weeks, as I was trying to discern some practical matters: seating plans, how much communion to provide, how much food to prepare and tableware to use. That felt more awkward than regular church services. I do not have to worry about these sorts of details at a Sunday morning Holy

Eucharist, in part due to the work of the Altar Guild and in part due to the standardization of that preparation. After three weeks, I knew what needed to be done ahead of time and could focus on centering myself for the evening. I set out the communion vessels early: two plastic goblets served as our chalices, a small basket for the communion pita bread, a regular linen corporal. Then I could pray quietly until the families arrived.

I chose the Gospel lesson from Briggs's text every Monday, copying it from the Kindle edition into a Word document. The parish secretary was especially helpful, making sure that we had copies of the Gospel reading each week, as well as the announcement section of the regular bulletin. I laid out the lesson, the Hungry Soul Music Books, and the laminated service sheets on a table near the door to the parish hall. The families could take them as they entered the hall to find a table.

It was important to me to share that this project was part of my doctoral study. I had shared this verbally with parents, and wanted to be absolutely clear with everyone who participated in the services. Finding a form online, which was used for another research project, I modified it to suit Hungry Soul. For the first three services, I kept a folder for permission forms, and asked parents to sign them on behalf of themselves and their children. They were very happy to do this. The form is found in Appendix B.

Music was an immediate challenge, because we had no accompaniment and the room was large, so listening to each another sing, so helpful in group song, was not easy. The group struggled with the opening song at our first service, as the adults knew it but not the children. After that, I switched to a song at the offertory with repeated lyrics (easy to sing and no reading) and closed with an old Vacation Bible School standard that included some hand motions (which brought hilarity into the room).

At the initial service, two children and one adult read the Gospel. This was not planned ahead of time: I asked for volunteers during the progress of the service. The children *loved* reading the Gospel. They approached the task with absolute reverence and labored to pronounce words correctly. (Even the lectionary designed for children has some challenging vocabulary). Although they were used to reading aloud in a classroom setting, this was different from school. Over the 18 gatherings, nearly every child over age 6 took a turn reading. Some weeks, we had adults take a turn reading also, usually a practical decision (when the children didn't really want to read), and as the program continued because it was just the way we did things together. Because lay people do not often read the Gospel aloud, this was a new experience for nearly everyone, and it was clear that they felt joy in this. Some weeks over the nine months, as families came in, the children ran to me, asking to read.

The responses to the reflection questions after each reading of the Gospel generated tremendous energy. The process of a shared *lectio divina* was embraced by the children more easily than by the adults. Most of the adults had not done this in a religious service before, and it was unusual. In the worship journal from the first service I noted that there was "a lot of enthusiasm about [reading] . . . and good participation . . . There were some silences, which I allowed to be. The children really hear the message of the story, which contrasts earthly and heavenly values and skills." The enthusiasm of the whole group continued for the rest of the program, and with each question, they were able to go a little deeper into their experience of God in the Word, progressing from their first impression to what they would want to say in response to God.

Two children were designated each week to take the collection. Although there were not very many participants in each service, this was another opportunity to engage them in a practical ministry and an incarnational way to allow those who were in attendance to support the mission of the parish. The children were very pleased to take the offerings of the adults, and to place them on the altar table.

The peace was often surprisingly long for a small group. This was the time for a little community meet-and-greet, with hugs and brief conversations. I was especially pleased that the children grew to like meeting visitors and older participants who were not their neighbors: they seemed to enjoy welcoming people into the fold and showed them how to receive Communion. Sometimes the littlest ones needed to spend a few minutes running laps around the parish hall, to let off some kinetic energy before the eucharistic prayer.

The first service demanded two immediate adjustments with respect to serving Communion. I had not chosen liturgical assistants ahead of time, and decided to invite two older children to serve the chalices. They were *very* pleased to elevate the chalices at the fraction rite of the eucharistic prayer ("Behold the Body of Christ" – see Appendix E) and to serve Communion. They needed some instruction to administer the chalice, which was accomplished discreetly in the moment. In the future, this would be a role exclusively for the children. They clearly relished fulfilling a role usually reserved for adults. For that first service, we used one chalice with wine and another with white grape juice. The group as a whole did not welcome the wine. After the service, during the supper, the three mothers and I decided that moving forward, we would use only white grape juice for communion.

After the first service, I invited the children to assist me in burying the unused elements in the parish garden. Before we left the parish hall, Mark, the littlest child, came forward and asked to consume the remaining bread. He was mostly pre-verbal, so his petition was a combination of gestures and baby words that were not clearly articulated, although I had no difficulty understanding his intention. After that day, Mark always came to ask for "seconds" of Communion, and often came to the table we used as the altar, standing next to me during the prayers of consecration, sometimes gently touching the elements. He very much wanted to be close to the action at the altar. It struck me at the time, and has remained with me as a very powerful memory, that in a "regular" service, Mark would never be behind an altar during the consecration.

After several services, two parents asked me to provide some discussion questions for them to bring home to use with the children during the week. They were finding the process of unpacking the Gospel interesting, and they wanted to have some additional material to work on. In response to that, I began to add a few reflection questions at the bottom of the page with the Gospel reading on it. These were questions that they could discuss while driving in the car or at the dinner table. I was very pleased that the adults were finding this opportunity to continue their Sunday experience, and that they were feeling strong enough to initiate discussion with the children.

We continued to celebrate the Hungry Soul service from autumn until the spring. By the middle of May, the community was beginning to enter its summer pattern (meaning they could not/would not be at church), and it was a good season to suspend Hungry Soul, especially in anticipation of the parish's impending call of a new rector and my moving on to my new call. Our final gathering was both extremely joyous and a little tearful, as I was saying farewell to the community we had gathered and grown.

Keeping a Record of the Experience

At the beginning of the Hungry Soul project, I decided that the best way to record the experience was to use a weekly journal, writing down what had occurred during each service so I would remember for writing the thesis. Originally I had intended to record the service verbatim on a digital recorder. The size of the room and the very lively acoustics rendered that option impossible. I saved the digital recorder for later interviews and resorted to the old-fashioned method: writing it down.

I used a standard template for each week's journal entry, making it comprehensive enough that the more important elements of the project were always noted, and general enough that I could place more extensive descriptions in subjects that felt more significant. This material would provide my own lived experience for later analysis. This could not provide a moment-by-moment record, but captured enough highlights that I felt fairly secure in the utility of the record. See Appendix H for the template.

In addition, I saved most of the emails from the parents in a virtual folder, so I could return to them for later examination. We corresponded frequently via email, as I would share information about upcoming services with them for dissemination in the local neighborhood, and ask for their feedback about particulars of the service, and we were not obstructed by the usual difficulties with respect to availability and voicemail. Several times, I resorted to texting with parents when I needed a fast response, and they would respond very rapidly to a text message. The text messages were not critical and were not saved.

Hungry Soul as Spiritual Practice

Over our nine months of gathering, Hungry Soul project emerged as a significant spiritual practice for the parish. This was an intentional spiritual community, which existed in order to facilitate the spiritual formation of children and their parents, and which gathered to hear and reflect on the story of Jesus in the Gospel. It was regular and sacramental in nature.

Jerome Berryman, the renowned spiritual mentor for children, states that there seem to be four *de facto* sorts of theological traditions about children. He labels them high, low, and indifferent, and “the graceful view” (24). The high tradition “respects children and what they can teach us about mature spirituality”; the low tradition “sees children as getting in the way of adults”; and an indifferent tradition “pays them no mind for the moment because of other concerns” (8-9). Berryman advocates for the fourth tradition, that children teach the church, as they are “a means of grace for the continuity of Christ’s presence in the church as a source of wonder and creativity” (9). God’s gift of grace is one filled with energy, playfulness, and creativity. “The grace children so intensely reveal is the raw energy flowing out from God that can be known by humankind through the creative process” (27). Berryman’s proposal for a doctrine of children connects children to a sacramentality of divine presence: they [i.e., the children] are a means of grace (230-236). This is the reason that they must be included in the community, for the sake of the adults who may have lost some of their connection to the life-giving grace of God.

I am not inclined to be quite so bold as Berryman, by locating the sacraments in children. I am more naturally aligned with Schillebeeckx, who identified Christ as The

Sacrament of God, revealed by encounters the community has with the Divine, through the Church and the sacramental rites (*Christ* 177-181). At the same time, there was something distinctive about the spiritual nature of this service. As it unfolded, as the community developed relationships and practiced the reflection on the Gospel through the *lectio divina,* there were moments of unanticipated grace that I would identify as awe-evoking and surprising. We did not summon or conjure up the presence of God. Yet we surely experienced encounters with the Holy One. As I am not a church planter, I have wondered whether this is the normative experience of the leader who grows a new community, or whether we experienced something unique.

As ascribed to James Joyce, “Catholic means ‘Here comes everybody.’” If that is true, then Hungry Soul was an exercise in foundational catholicity. We experienced a surprising variety in participants from the beginning of our services. The first week, we were surprised that six senior citizens joined us. One was a long-term parishioner who was living with health issues that made it difficult to get moving in the morning. One was a parishioner from another tradition (Carl was a Missouri Synod Lutheran), who lived near the church. Others were curious. Although the service was explicitly designed for children and their families, over the course of nine months, we had about seven seniors join us with some regularity. This number does not include the variety of participants who attended the three special Hungry Soul services for a baptism, a parish meeting, and a Christmas pageant.

The normative Hungry Soul service had between twelve and fifteen participants, the majority of whom were school-aged children. The families with children usually arrived right on time for the service, in contrast to the seniors who liked to get into the hall a few minutes early. The children usually grabbed the service sheets on their way in the door and ran to sit down, as their mothers carried the dinner foods to the serving tables. We would start by singing a song from our songbook, and then settle in to reading and talking about the Gospel. The process for sharing Communion felt intimate and collegial, almost like an expansive family dinner. The adults were willing to let the children take the lead, largely because they were interested in using this process as a means of offering spiritual formation to the younger participants.

On a regular Hungry Soul afternoon, we spent about thirty minutes unpacking the Gospel of the day and sharing Communion as we enjoyed the fragrance of the food we would soon consume. Eating a light supper on paper plates (for the sake of ease in serving) and cleaning up (by putting away tables and chairs, and washing up any serving dishes) took another thirty minutes. With few exceptions, we were on our way out the door by 6 o'clock. I am not sure of the reason that I originally thought this would take 90 minutes. It never did. This seemed to delight the parents, who needed to get children bathed and homework completed for the following school day. The mothers were entirely correct in their intuition about the value added to Hungry Soul by the "two-fer" nature of the service.

There were four unexpected developments along the way. The first was a baptism, which was an organic extension of the project. One parent, who had really struggled with attending regular church services after the birth of her fourth child, asked me to baptize that child at our All Saints' Day service. He was nearly two. I agreed because Alyce was engaged in the little community, and regular at the Hungry Soul services. The baptism drew 45 people to the Hungry Soul service. For that day, we used the examination and

Baptismal Covenant from the *Book of Common Prayer,* our usual Gospel reflections and eucharistic prayer, and a large salad bowl for the baptism. I was concerned about the participation of the extended family, who were not active in any church. I noted in the Hungry Soul journal:

> Interesting conversation with the very Roman Catholic Polish grandfather of the baby - who approves not only of the program for children but the accessibility of communion for all who participate in the service. He is still wounded by exclusion after divorce/remarriage and grateful for the religious service that is open to all. He is even okay with the woman priest. And loves the idea that saints are regular people [which was the community reflection on the Gospel].

The second unexpected development was an all-parish gathering, which was a pragmatic accommodation. The parish had a tradition of holding one service for their stewardship ingathering in the late autumn. This year, the day coincided with the diocesan Convention, which required my attendance at a Sunday service in Hartford. To accommodate the tradition of the parish as well as my Convention responsibilities, the wardens agreed that our singular service would follow the Hungry Soul worship pattern. This was very different from our regular service! There were 147 people in the parish hall, sitting close together at tables. Our regular participants were sprinkled among them. The parish musician played the grand piano, and the choirs were gathered on one side of the room to lead the singing. I asked each table to read the Gospel as a small group and to use the question prompt as a reflection starter, using a Zen chime to signal the time to start and cease reflection. The energy level was amazing, and the noise level was almost uncomfortably high. At the time of Communion, I asked one of our confirmands to assist me in distributing the bread, and four youngsters served the chalices. Instead of going to tables, we asked the people to come to us. Although I missed the intimacy of the smaller gathering, many parishioners reported that they enjoyed the experience of talking about the Gospel instead of listening to a sermon. The young chalice bearers were thrilled to serve in a "big service" and the confirmand told me later that he thought serving the bread was an honor. I did notice that the three regular Hungry Soul families present left early. This was not their community and they told me later they felt out of place. This was both a concern and a delight. On one hand, this indicated that members of the Hungry Soul group did not identify as a sub-group of the wider parish, and that concerned me. On the other hand, this indicated that members of the Hungry Soul group had a distinct identity, similar to the 8 o'clock group, which was also not well-represented at this late afternoon service, and that was a wonderful revelation.

The Hungry Soul Christmas Pageant was rather a last-minute development. After the baptism, one mother mentioned that as a little girl, she loved the pageant. Then in mid- November, a second mother, not affiliated with the parish at all, visited the office and asked if we needed assistance with our pageant. She had moved from another state, and wanted to find a church with a pageant. After about a nanosecond of reflection, I asked that second woman if she would assist with a pageant that had never been done before. She surprised me by agreeing. We gathered costumes, props, and several adult assistants. I assembled a Gospel story from Briggs's lectionary, and printed it interspersed with verses of well-known Christmas carols (see Appendix G for the Gospel lesson). We celebrated a pick-up Christmas pageant on the Third Sunday of Advent. I observed in the Hungry Soul journal:

> Mary and Joseph were appointed (I asked their moms ahead of time). Two fathers were wise men, and one older kid joined them. There were 6 angels and 4 shepherds. Greg [my husband] narrated and helped with music. The children clearly enjoyed acting out the Christmas Gospel. Some of them know more about Jesus than the others, and they were happy to share what they knew. Parents were VERY excited and participated by singing and taking pictures.

The meal that evening was a really festive process: we shared chicken, beef stew, bread, hors d'oeuvres, cider, iced tea, cookies. Everyone ate a lot! And there were games, and music, and laughter - kids talking with the seniors, everyone helping clean up. In the "things I have learned" section of the journal, I wrote: "I am so happy we took the chance to do this - two completely new families, lots of fun, the Christmas story, fellowship, and the kids totally got the gospel. OMG I am so happy – thank you, Lord."

The fourth unexpected outcome of the Hungry Soul experience was an episode of pastoral care at a critical time for one of the participating families. A mother called me to inform me that their family would be absent for a week or two because her son needed some surgery. I asked if she would like me to anoint him prior to the surgery, for strengthening and peace of mind. The two came to the office the afternoon before his admission, in-between their other after-school activities. I explained to the six year old boy that the oil of anointing is blessed just before Easter during Holy Week, and that the Holy Spirit dwells in the oil with her healing powers. After he gave me permission, I anointed his head and hands and prayed that God would be present with him in the operating room, would guide the hands of the surgeon, and would restore him to strength and health quickly.

Three days later, on her way home from hospital with her son, the mother called me. “Amy, Tommy wanted me to tell you that he doesn’t understand how it all happened, but there was something to that anointing you did on Monday! The surgeon finished early and we are going home. We are so relieved!”

I am fairly certain that without the relationship we had built through Hungry Soul, that anointing would not have occurred.

Bridling Multiple Experiences: The Unique Nature of My Perspective

In recounting the Hungry Soul project, I am aware that my perspective is not that of an omniscient narrator, nor is it entirely objective. I was excited by the activity, and thrilled at the moments of insight, and entirely enraptured by the joy of the children and their parents. I would like these reactions to be universal, and I recognize it is impossible to say unequivocally that this is the case without including the voices of others.

In keeping with the phenomenological method I have embraced, I have tried to record in this chapter the directly observable data that pertains to others, as well as my own emotional experience. I can reflect more accurately on my own experience of each moment that we were engaged in Hungry Soul. The value of the journal is in its immediacy – many of the thoughts were jotted down rapidly and were unprocessed emotions without the polish of reflection. I have written here as much as possible as if we are in the moment of experience, drawing from the journal.

Chapter 6 A Phenomenological Analysis of Hungry Soul

Court's story: Our relationship with God is so important that we need to make every effort to share that with all the members of our parish who are not here regularly on Sunday. I felt as if we were moving along together in a group, with God in our center and around us. It was really quite powerful to read those scriptures three times. We kept hearing more of the story each time! And we found out that God's story was also a part of our story!
It is not as though I don't have a relationship with God on other days. This underlined its importance to me: it is not only about what I do on my own. And perhaps it invited me to explore something deeper - something I can share with others. I am so often private and on my own. It is a new thing for me to talk about the Gospel with other people.

Steps and Procedures for Qualitative Analysis

Although the general procedure for qualitative analysis is similar among the many practitioners of phenomenology, I found Karin Dahlberg to offer most useful process, primarily due to her embrace of bridling, and secondarily due to her comfort with the often-uncertain nature of the data culled from human experience. I was fairly certain that I could follow her analytical procedure with integrity. Later I found it was necessary to include other methods of analysis in the middle of that step, largely because I had not foreseen the practical limitations of Dahlberg's process.

Congruent with the practice of other phenomenologists and hermeneutists, Dahlberg's analytical process starts with the epistemological question: "what kind of knowledge is needed for human phenomena to be interpreted and understood?" (Dahlberg et al. 276). All knowledge is mediated by human experience. Co-existing in lifeworld research are the researcher, other individuals, and the phenomena that connect them, and it is interesting that Dahlberg seems to locate the researcher within the data. In a lifeworld that vibrates with meaning and provides the backdrop for human experience, the analysis of phenomena emerges from data derived from the intersection of the researcher and the object of study (Dahlberg et al. 233).

Dahlberg's analytical method contains four steps, moving from the whole through the parts and finally to a new whole (Dahlberg et al. 236, 281). In the first step, after the researcher gathers the data, she transcribes the information and immerses herself in it through intensive and repetitive reading of the whole transcript. While she is resistant to articulating one particular hermeneutical method that will identify material to be interpreted, Dahlberg closely follows Gadamer in stating that the primary methodological principle for gathering and interpreting data is openness, which she defines as moving forward while not making definite what is indefinite. In practice, she expects the researcher to allow the indefinite nature of phenomena to last as long as possible before drawing conclusions (Dahlberg et al. 241). This distinctive posture differs from Van Manen's bracketing of knowledge in order to find the reduction of a phenomenon, in that Dahlberg is willing to allow that the influence of the researcher's pre-understanding can assist in making sense of the phenomenon, while Van Manen emphasizes that pre-understanding must be acknowledged or recognized and then set aside, so it does not predispose the researcher to a particular interpretation (*Researching Lived Experience* 47)[16].

The lifeworld data has been obtained from interviews, descriptions, conversations, or observations of phenomena. In order to analyze the data, they all must be transcribed into text format. It is preferable that non-verbal information, such as silences or pauses, laughter, and emotional expressions, be included in the transcripts. Wide margins allow the researcher to make notes or add observations. Because any analysis is framed by the larger context of the whole research project in the background, all lifeworld analysis is foundationally synthetic: "the different parts, the meanings, particularities and uniqueness are related to each other and to the whole of the research" (Dahlberg et al. 233). No experience exists discretely.

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[16] Like Martin Heidegger, Van Manen is not as rigid as Husserl, who advocated a strict bracketing of foreknowledge. Dahlberg is still more inclusive.

While from Dahlberg's perspective it is not really possible to shed or suppress any pre-understanding, she also asserts that the researcher must be aware of her assumptions and knowledge, restraining and withholding the pre-understanding through the attitude of bridling (Dahlberg et al. 279), or waiting to see how meaning unfolds. Self-reflection and self-awareness, as well as a "reflective consideration of one's experience with the subject matter of [the] research project" are the orientation that is integral to the possibility of objectivity (Dahlberg et al. 160). Although she declines to specify how detailed the notes should be, or whether they should identify connections between the current research and earlier learning and experiences, Dahlberg recommends that the researcher use a research journal, to note pre-understandings at the beginning of the research process, and to include notes and thoughts about the phenomenon and experiences during the research process (Dahlberg et al. 279).

After embracing a commitment to openness and bridling pre-understandings, and after observing the phenomenon as it unfolds, the researcher must pursue the task of interpretation, making something "unfamiliar . . . and obscure into something real . . . and intelligible" (Dahlberg et al. 281). This process of analysis reveals the general principle of the hermeneutic spiral in Dahlberg's phenomenology. Dahlberg prefers Gerard Radnitzky's hermeneutic spiral to Gadamer's hermeneutic circle, as movement through the spiral is open at the beginning and the end and implies movement to a higher plane of understanding. Meaning inheres in the whole phenomenon (as revealed in the whole text, interviews, field notes), in the parts (or component data as discerned through the analysis), and then in a newly illuminated whole (the essence, which is different from and possibly greater than the sum of the component parts). Dahlberg asserts that the new whole is a structure at a higher abstract level in the hermeneutic spiral, revealing new patterns and connections that were previously obscured. The new interpretations may affirm a previously accepted truth, or they may open up new avenues for understanding (Dahlberg et al. 281-286).

What Dahlberg names “the initial whole” of the entire text is the full transcription of all material. During this critically important step, the researcher maintains the attitude of openness while reading, meaning that she is willing to be immersed in the text and curious to understand and even to be surprised by the text (Dahlberg et al. 238). This immersion in the text assists the discipline of bridling one’s pre-understanding, because the more closely the text is read, the more interesting become the complexity and manifold nature of its meanings, and the more difficult it is to rush to any particular or general conclusions, not rushing to make definite what is indefinite (Dahlberg et al. 238-239). This step involves a significant amount of labor and time.

After the time of immersive reading of the full text, the researcher begins the second step of analysis by putting the data into parts. In my experience with the Hungry Soul materials, this felt like a natural progression, as different expressions of meaning emerged during the repeated intensive reading. Dahlberg recommends dividing the text into smaller pieces, which (following Giorgi) she calls meaning units (Dahlberg et al.

243). In the margins of the transcripts I made notes, and used highlighters to distinguish between particular strains of meaningful expressions. Dahlberg observes that meanings may change as the researcher sifts through the material, and over the month I worked through this step, I found myself re-categorizing more than one phrase.

This second stage of the analysis was an organic process, and I experienced the text as something quite lively. The meaning expressed in one brief comment can illuminate an entire interview, revealing meaning across several pages of responses. Conversely, the whole of the text (in this case, the experience of Hungry Soul as shared in the multiple interviews plus emails, my worship journal, and conversations that I transcribed) had some effect on each piece of the phenomenon. Although each respondent had a fairly unique perspective, I found parallels, repeated themes, and similarities between different individuals, and connections emerged individually and as part of the whole. Dahlberg speaks of this as the movement between the figure and the background. "The meaning of a phenomenon . . . cannot be revealed to is in another way than in its totality and its relationships with its particulars" (Dahlberg et al. 250).

Then after breaking it all down, the researcher "interrogates" the text (Dahlberg et al. 252). Questions are not directed at the data, but toward the phenomenon. How is the phenomenon described? Is the comment a reflection of understanding of the phenomenon, or is another object in focus? Does an interviewee express more than one understanding? Are divergent statements in conflict with each other or cohesive? Is there repetition (Dahlberg et al. 253)? The goal is to see the meaning of the phenomenon, and so particular attention should be paid to "expressions of emotion or uncertainty, pauses and hesitations, and other expressive qualities which can provide clues" to the phenomenon as experienced (Dahlberg et al 253).

At this stage, I was certain that I needed some additional structure in the analytical process, in order to understand the data. Dahlberg speaks about clustering meaning statements, but does not offer any particular format for accomplishing that.[17] I needed something more specific, and remembered a reference to fundamental existential structures in another doctoral thesis. Peter John Hobbs cites Van Manen's categories of lifeworld experience, which he utilizes as guides for reflection: *lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporeality), and *lived human relations* (relationality or communality) (Hobbs 118, *Researching Lived Experience* 101). In the context of this project, I decided to adjust these categories to: *experience of space* (environment), *experience of self* (incarnation), *experience of God* (transcendence), *experience of relationship* (community). In addition, I decided to incorporate a step of intentional interpretation into the categorization of meaning statements, to facilitate the discernment of essences of the lived experience of Hungry Soul.

When Dahlberg gets to the point of completing the analysis of the experience, she leaves the process up to the researcher. While this is entirely within the tradition of phenomenology (which is a way of being in the world and which declines to offer prescriptive processes for discernment), it does leave the researcher to find her own way. I both appreciated her openness and despaired of it. At this late stage of analysis, my methodology became a hybrid model. I adopted what felt like the best offerings of Dahlberg (her bridling), and added some from Van Manen (his existential categories), and Hobbs (his final step in analysis, the interpretive clusters).

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[17] This was the only time that I was really frustrated by Dahlberg's process: in the specifics of analysis, I decided that she is a little too open.

Ultimately, when the researcher has culled all the meaning statements and they are sorted into categories, it is time to move to the third step of analysis, returning to the text as a whole, with an expectation of discerning a broader understanding than in the beginning (Dahlberg et al. 245). She states that if the data are sufficient, the clusters of meaning form a pattern, and the researcher can perceive the essence, or what makes the phenomenon what it is. When the data are of poor quality, due to linguistic difficulty, lack of fluency or skill, or lack of nuance in interviews due to inexperience of the interviewer, it is possible that it will not be possible to glean the essence of the phenomenon from the text, and the researcher could end up with just a few "themes of meaning" (Dahlberg et al. 254).

Here, Dahlberg is also less than clear with respect to process. Again I relied on Hobbs, who devised a process to discern what he calls "Interpretive Clusters," by re-sorting the interpretive descriptions into new thematic groupings (140). This satisfied Van Manen's insight that the researcher needs to balance the parts with the whole, and would allow me to find the patterns that Dahlberg's hermeneutic phenomenological methodology anticipates (*Researching Lived Experience* 33-34). By physically separating the interpretive descriptions into individual pieces of paper, without identifying their original meaning unit, and re-reading their contents, Hobbs discerned new connections among them. I adopted his process because it was practical.

This discernment of essences is not meant to be an exercise at abstraction, nor is it a practical assemblage of parts that are somehow disconnected. The phenomenologist does not give the meaning to a phenomenon, nor is she deciphering clues in order to connect them into an entirely new whole. The study of essences, in the phenomenological context of Dahlberg and her colleagues, is the discovery of the real nature of the phenomenon, what constitutes its very meaning (Dahlberg et al. 246). Dahlberg's process reiterates Maurice Merleau-Ponty's foundational understanding of the inseparability of essences from phenomena: "It is impossible to decompose a perception . . . because in it the whole is prior to the parts. . . . The matter of perception is 'pregnant' with its form . . ." (Merleau-Ponty 15). Essences are their phenomena, and phenomena are their essences (Dahlberg et al. 247).

Finally, the researcher presents the essence of the phenomenon in a short descriptive essay. Creswell calls this a composite description, incorporating both the textural (what happened) and structural descriptions (how it happened) (*Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* 159). Butler-Kisber calls the final step the writing of an exhaustive description, reflecting the essential structure of the phenomenon (loc. 1340). Dahlberg does not give a particular name to the description of the essence and its constituent meanings. She describes quite clearly the process of writing the presentation of results, however, expecting the researcher to "first present the essence, . . . and then [describe] the constituents [meaning particular meanings] in depth, . . . [writing] in the present tense, . . . and preferably [keep the text] relatively short" (Dahlberg et al. 255). She is clear that this final description must include general meanings as well as the particular expressions of meaning as articulated by individuals (Dahlberg et al. 256).

Texts, Significant Statements, Meaning Units, Descriptions

The texts of the Hungry Soul project were my weekly worship journal, the interviews with twelve participants, a small group of emails, and some conversations between the participants and me, which I transcribed into the journal as they occurred, so I would not misplace them. Altogether this amounted to about fifty pages of single-spaced material. In the context of the analysis, it is significant that I took part in the project as a participant as well as the researcher, as the unfiltered experience of the Hungry Soul project influenced me as a person as well as a priest. In the stage of textual immersion, my experience of Hungry Soul was renewed and deepened, with additional layers of meaning that emerged from reading the articulations of other participants.

After the intense exercise of reading the entire text, I used highlighters to mark significant statements according to their experiential categories. I carried the pages with me for a week, and they grew dog-eared. I let them sit on the desk for a week. Then I performed the exercise again, and was surprised that I felt that I needed to re-categorize some of the statements. This text had something of an independent life, over which I did not have control. I organized the statements into a chart (see Appendix K), so they were arranged in their categories and in correlation to which participant articulated them. I added the age of each participant, to assist in discerning whether there were any differences in responses according to age cohorts.

During the creation of this chart of significant statements, organizing the discrete pieces into categories, I was amazed to see patterns that I had not perceived in reading the text as a whole. Several adult participants described the environment as peaceful or calm-inducing, notwithstanding of the activity and energy of the children (Lisa, Carl, and

Glynnis, Appendix K, Statements 4, 5, and 7). The largest number of comments across age groups concerned the nature of the community, which was perceived as diverse, welcoming, and inclusive. Senior citizen Candace observed "After our service, we all sit down to dinner, it's a nice fellowship thing. We get a chance to talk with each other. And the youngsters talk with grown-ups who are not their grown-ups" (Appendix K, Statement 71), while eight year-old Ethan stated "I know most of the kids. And now I know some new people from church – the grown-ups. Some of them are pretty old!" (Appendix K, Statement 74), and ten year-old Belle said "It feels like we are all one big family and we are happy" (Appendix K, Statement 76).

Most moving to me was the level of transcendence experienced by the participants, probably because that is what I long for as the outcome of my ministry. As Will pointed out, people really did speak about what they thought God would be saying to them in the Gospel readings (Appendix K, Statement 33). During the interview process, two young children told me that they pray when they are alone (Appendix K, Statement 35 and Statement 56), and a single mother of three, Lisa, spoke with emotion about the way Hungry Soul had been a spiritual experience for her because she was exploring God alongside her children (Appendix K, Statement 39). Even elderly and confident Carl said that Hungry Soul had led him to pray to God in a different manner (Appendix K, Statement 43).

Although the data were quite familiar to me, especially as I had done the transcriptions myself, in this process different phrases and words leapt to my attention. As I read and re-read these statements, I grew into a more nuanced understanding of what had developed during the Hungry Soul project. I was surprised that I was surprised.

While I had designed and participated in the eighteen services, I did not perceive these patterns clearly until they were on paper, in a chart, right in front of me.

The textural descriptions connected the similar themes and expressions that were articulated among the twelve participants I interviewed as well as my own journal's observations. These were fairly straightforward yet still required undistracted attention, as they were composite statements instead of direct quotations. This upward step in the hermeneutic spiral felt as if I were examining the phenomena from a balcony, noting the similarities and distinctions among participants.

In the final stage of this analytical exercise, I examined all the direct statements and the textural descriptions, and developed three positive conceptual statements for each of the four meaning units. The interpretive descriptions that emerged from the textural descriptions of what happened during Hungry Soul pointed to themes that were more conceptual and less concrete. This work required more time, because I needed to discern commonality of themes, articulating what was really going on in a more abstract and less concrete manner, and especially looking for nuances in words. At this point, it was also clearer what Dahlberg had meant when she stated that linguistic issues and lack of fluency would be an impediment to analysis (Dahlberg et al. 254). This step up in the hermeneutic spiral moved the analytical process into the realm of the conceptual.

It would be an overstatement to say that the process of analysis was easy, although it unfolded somewhat readily and in an orderly manner. Developing the textural descriptions demanded time and focused attention. Discerning the interpretive descriptions demanded that I connect what had happened with a less direct, more thoughtful process of conceptualization. When I completed the analytical chart, the

Hungry Soul project took on new meaning for me.

Statements and Descriptions of Hungry Soul: In Their Words and Mine

The full results of the process of analysis are captured in Appendix K. This section includes extracts from that table in which I name the meaning units, present the textural description, add several significant statements, and finally summarize with the conceptual interpretive description.

Meaning Unit: Environment

Textural Descriptions

- The parish hall was a wide-open and lively space
- Some participants experienced the energy of other participants
- Most experienced the physical environment as supportive (calm/serene/warm/friendly) and the power of the worship environment in a positive way

Examples of Significant Statements: Environment

Will, an adult participant who tends to be introverted, noted that the parish hall "was such a big space," and "there was a lot of energy in that room – a lot more energy than in the parish – and a lot of joy!" Court, a senior citizen who needs hearing aids, stated "sometimes it was hard to hear," which was affirmed by ten year-old Belle, who said that the room "has echoes." Alyce, a parent of five, observed (with some appreciation) that "there was room to run if the kids needed to" and her son Ethan said that it was fun to move around. Hope, another senior citizen who has significant theological education, at first discounted the environment as less significant than the learning, yet still described it in this way: “It was warm. It was sweet.” Court summed it all up with the statement “Something special was happening,” elevating the environment to something beyond the physical space.

Meaning Unit: Incarnation

Textural Descriptions

- Welcome and warmth, anxiety and discomfort are felt in our physical selves.
- Importance of food: we feed our souls and our bodies together
- The paradox of an incarnational life: the holy and the ordinary are co-mingled: the spiritual is not isolated from the physical

Examples of Significant Statements: Incarnation

Introverted Will stated “I was a little uncomfortable at first to be with people I didn’t know well,” and “I was welcomed by a child” on his first attendance. Tom, who was six, and who regularly read the Gospel, made two statements that contrasted to each other. First he said “I felt good when I read the long thing [the Gospel]” and yet later in his interview he said “Sometimes I felt embarrassed [when I didn’t know a word],” and he grimaced at that recollection. The incarnational experience of welcome, anxiety, and discomfort were manifest in physical format.

Living through a painful divorce during this project, Lisa emailed me afterward to share a retrospective: “I felt depleted in every single way but that service was the one place where I felt I could go to be fed. Hungry Soul indeed. And God showed up in a big way.” Eight year-old Alex noted with giggles that “I love it when we get to eat pizza!” Carl said “Dinner was fantastic. I love to eat. So that is really good!” Elderly Court pointed out “The dinner smelled so good! It was lovely to sit and eat with a group.” This led me to point out the importance of the food in this project. We fed our souls and bodies together.

Sometimes the serenity of the Hungry Soul experience did not last long. Lisa told me that one afternoon, the children had a huge fight on the way to their car, and she erupted in anger. “How can I go from this peaceful place to this screaming mother in two minutes? Boom, I was walloped by life again!” Court observed that one toddler who tended to run around and shout randomly during the service was sometimes quite still. “The distinction between [the child’s] energy during the lesson and during the prayer before communion was noticeable. He was really focused during that eucharistic prayer.” The spiritual and the physical were not separate: moments of extraordinary holiness mingled with ordinary life.

Meaning Unit: Transcendence

Textural Descriptions

- Expressions of very real spiritual encounter
- Deep spiritual questions and statements emerge in a safe place to articulate them
- Faith may be distinct from participation in a church community
- There are a variety of paths to relationship with God

Examples of Significant Statements: Transcendence

Will was often quiet during the Hungry Soul service, yet he observed that he had very real spiritual encounters. “We created a spiritual community and a spiritual reality. People spoke about what they felt God was saying to us. I felt as if the Spirit was hovering around us in the big room.” Six year-old Tom plunged into the mystery of what he was hearing. “A few weeks ago, I thought that Jesus was God’s son. I still think that. And I also think that God is Jesus. How can that be?”

Young Ethan wrestled with theological matters and their practical application. “Jesus is God, right? God doesn’t teach us to do things that are weird or hard. He teaches us to do things that are right. I like that Jesus tells us about what God thinks. . . . I don’t get why people didn’t listen to Jesus! He was telling them to do good things.” Belle intuitively connected her learning of God with her life: “When we talked about how much God loves us all, because we are his children and baptized, I felt like we were very important.” Both Tom and Belle share that they pray when they are alone.

Although Lisa allowed “for me, God and church are two separate things. This gave me a context for my faith,” she also said “I have rediscovered the beauty of breaking bread together.”

Candace, who struggled with health issues, and enjoyed traditional Sunday services but found it difficult to get up early enough to attend them, discovered that “this was like here is another avenue to [have a relationship with God].”

Meaning Unit: Community

Textural Descriptions

- Expressions of a context of reciprocity, mutuality, and equity in exploring faith
- Participants expressed feelings of connection, openness, and trust across generational lines
- Church is community - and we do it together - and we are sometimes on the same page and sometimes we are different!

Examples of Significant Statements: Community

In framing Hungry Soul as a community of equity and reciprocity, Will noted "here we each had something to give and to receive." He included a theological observation: "Exploring relationships across generations and family ties is a way to explore all the possible richness of a relationship with God." Hope identified this as a mutuality, saying "There's a whole level of interaction among the people in the room. And there's also the dinner. I think that is really, um, different and profound. We can all learn from one another, even the kids." Elderly Court noted the equity of the multiple groups, saying "the conversations crossed lines - the children and the adults were all on one level. Some of us knew more, and we were all trying to figure out what the story meant to us."

Participants also expressed feelings of connection, openness, and trust in the group. The multi-generational nature of the gathering was considered a strength. Court, who had served as a Scout leader for many years, said "I enjoyed being with the little ones. It was encouraging to be with new families again. I was surprised that the children talked with me as if we knew one another well. Is this what worship like this does?" Belle noticed that the adults paid attention to the youngsters: "It is nice that everyone can say something and that the grown ups listen to the kids, Usually that doesn't happen. They watch us while we talk. That's kind of cool." Lisa, mother of three, noted "I got a different idea from a very young person looking at the scripture through their own experience. The kids were fantastic."

Participants appreciated the diversity of the group, as well as the variety of thoughts and perspectives. Lisa stated "It's a surprisingly diverse group, and I appreciate that so much, and the Gospel strikes each in a different way and that is so great." Alyce spoke cheerfully that "it was quite an eclectic group we had, and it was kind of neat to see that we were [that way] the majority of the time, and we were sometimes all on the same page."

Ten year-old Belle summed up her vision of the community when she reported "It feels like we are all one big family and we are happy."

Discerning Interpretive Clusters

Returning to textual wholeness after sifting out all the individual statements was rather a challenge. I could not just return to the entire raw text and say I was done. I wanted to find a way to gather the interpretive data into a new whole in a concrete sense before moving into articulating the essence of the experience. I decided to follow Hobbs's method of literally cutting up the column of interpretive descriptions and re-forming them into groups according to similarity of theme (140). This was something of a new whole, and gave me clues to the essence of the lived experience of the Hungry Soul project.

Three themes emerged, and following Hobbs's procedure, I named them. These follow below, along with the interpretive descriptions that support them, and the voices of participants, which are the source of most of my discernment process.

1. Intentional Community: a new way of being.

    - This worship experiment built a small intentional community, and it crossed the usual dividing lines of parish life (age, socio-economic status, children/no children).

- Transcendent moments shared with others during Hungry Soul were powerful. There is a theme of transcendence, or encounter with God/Jesus/the divine, enhanced by relationship (which I identify as incarnational transcendence).
- In our faith communities/parishes a hunger for God appears to intersect with hunger for community.
- The worship experience of Hungry Soul was enhanced by a feeling of safety, welcome, and warmth, which may have diminished initial anxiety.

2. Needs of the Hungry Soul: safety, warmth, food, welcome

- The sense of calm/peace/serenity attached to Hungry Soul does not seem to be directly connected to the space or the level of activity.
- The worship experience of Hungry Soul was enhanced by a feeling of safety, welcome, and warmth, which may have diminished initial anxiety.
- Hungry Soul addressed a feeling of hunger/needing to be fed.

3. God Among Us: Spiritual Experiences in a Non-Consecrated Space

- Hungry Soul unfolded in a wide open space, which gave some participants more freedom (which held more importance among the children), relaxation, comfort.
- The atmosphere around Hungry Soul enhanced a unique experience. Participants described it as special, deep, warm, sweet, powerful (qualities evocative of the presence of the Holy Spirit).
- Hungry Soul offered an unusual level of interaction among groups usually separated in church life, and they seemed to collaborate on spiritual work.

- Hungry Soul seemed to facilitate moments of transcendence and friendship or communion with God/Jesus.
- Transcendent moments shared with others during Hungry Soul were powerful. There is a theme of transcendence enhanced by relationship (which I identify as incarnational transcendence).
- With Hungry Soul, the sweet holiness of our life mingles the sacred with the ordinary, and may be connected with our incarnational satisfaction, either physical or emotional (which I identify as transcendent incarnation).
- Moments of transcendence were surprisingly real.

Following the analytical process, I took a week to fulfill parish obligations and allowed the learnings to steep for a while in my unconscious. While the results were quite interesting, and I was far from dissatisfied with them, they were not entirely what I had anticipated at the beginning of this project. On a quiet Saturday morning, I sat and wrote the exhaustive description that follows on the next page, describing the lived experience of the participants in Hungry Soul. Reflections, recommendations, and future possibilities pertain to the next chapter.

An Exhaustive Description of the Essence of the Lived Experience of Participants in the Hungry Soul Project

The experiment in worship and formation called Hungry Soul emerged as a new community within the parish, which crossed the usual dividing lines of parish life (age, socio-economic status, children/no children). The experience of Hungry Soul was supported by the feelings of safety, welcome, and warmth, which may have diminished the initial feelings of anxiety in participants. The Hungry Soul project revealed an intersection between hunger for God and hunger for human community, which were both difficult to find in a local culture of upper middle class suburban busyness. The community dinner at the Hungry Soul service was a practical bonus, addressing physical and emotional hunger, which were expressed realities for many participants of various ages. The experience of calm/peace/serenity reported by participants in Hungry Soul does not seem to have a direct connection to either the location of the service in the large parish hall or to the level of activity among the participating children.

During the Hungry Soul project, there were incidents of incarnational transcendence, or moments of encounter with the divine, which were deepened by the experience of sharing the phenomenon, through relationships developed in this intentional community. Participants in Hungry Soul articulated that the sweet holiness of our life is marked by what the researcher identified as transcendent incarnation: the sacred is mingled with the ordinary. At the same time, the experience of holiness during this worship was enhanced by a sense of satisfaction in the physical/incarnational realm. The atmosphere at Hungry Soul was described using words that evoke the presence of the Holy Spirit: special, deep, warm, sweet, powerful.

This project was marked by the collaborative nature of the service, which engaged in the spiritual work of reading the Gospel and the celebration of the Holy Eucharist by including all members of the community. Participants from all age groups in Hungry Soul reported with a level of wonder and surprise that the openness and relative equality of members of the community were valuable to them. The moments of transcendence were surprisingly real for those experiencing them.

Chapter 7 Conclusions and Future Directions

An emailed note from Lisa a year after the project concluded: When I think back about the last few years, the evening service you created was one of the few things that actually carried me through that dark time [of the divorce]. I felt depleted in every single way but that service was the one place where I felt I could go to be fed. Hungry Soul indeed. And God showed up in a big way through it. I cannot begin to thank you enough.

The Hungry Soul project was an innovative eucharistic service in a traditional Episcopal parish in a fairly socially conservative location. As the interim rector, I had the opportunity to introduce new and short-term programs in a transitional context, which could be understood as experiments in exploring new life in the parish. Although the presenting problem was the anxiety of young parents and the decline in attendance at Sunday morning formation classes for children, by the conclusion of the analysis I considered that as a secondary issue.

My thesis statement reflected confidence that the Hungry Soul project would support spiritual development through worship instead of classes. I predicted in the first chapter that participants would be more ready to explore a relationship with God, would speak with more confidence about their spiritual life, would grow in understanding of scripture, and would experience the sacrament as transformative. These outcomes were attained to some degree. Of greater significance was the final prediction concerning the development of the little community, which emerged as the framework, the context, and the foundational support for relationship with God. While this was not a surprising result, I had not expected that the value of community would be such a powerful influence in the outcome of the project.

In agreement with other hermeneutic phenomenologists, Dahlberg cautions against using analytical conclusions of lifeworld phenomena to make generalized statements. “Phenomenological and hermeneutic research results are . . . never understood as universal” (Dahlberg et al. 343). In the context of the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology (the underlying assumptions about studying data and writing about it) and method (techniques used to construct the research question, collect and analyze data) that framed the Hungry Soul project, it is unlikely that I will reach broadly applicable conclusions about its meaning that would be directly relevant in other circumstances (Swinton and Mowat 74-75). Although researchers may choose to move upward in the hermeneutic spiral and to link concepts with other studies that border their concepts, ultimately creating theories, it is better to understand a smaller segment of the lifeworld more clearly through a more thorough analysis (Dahlberg et al. 276 and 346-348). Because this qualitative study is by its nature small in scale, all the results are profoundly contextual.

To that end, in this final chapter, I offer some learnings and some ruminations. I will discuss the way in which the essence of Hungry Soul, as revealed through the analysis of the data collected, connected with my conclusion. It is possible to share what I learned about liturgy and spiritual formation in this parish. I can reflect on what community means to the participants in Hungry Soul, and in what ways the concept of community intersects with clerical professionalism, leadership, and theology, and how this informs my ongoing ministry. I include theological reflection in this chapter, and discuss the ways in which we perceived that God had shown up. Finally, it would be appropriate to consider whether this intervention resolved the problem articulated in the beginning of the project, as well as future possibilities for lifeworld research around spiritual formation and liturgical practice.

Learnings

The Hungry Soul project, which originated in an experiment in worship as a means of spiritual formation, seems to have completed its run as a powerful experience of the formation of community. The first-person phenomenon of Hungry Soul, which Dahlberg and other hermeneutic phenomenologists would identify as its essence, emerged in articulations of many levels of spiritual and interpersonal encounter, which were facilitated through our worship in a small group. The essence of the Hungry Soul project was encountering God and others as we developed community.

This was thrilling to me, especially as the incidence of spiritual and theological and community-reflective statements made by the children was quite high (see Appendix K: 23 of 78 significant statements articulated some degree of transcendence, and 21 of 78 reflected on the community). As I noted in Chapter 1, cultivating an encounter with God in worship is the cornerstone of my ministry. I live for this. While this result may be connected to an experience of spiritual and faith formation through the process of *lectio divina* with the Gospel, and I do postulate that this is what happened, what was especially remarkable to me is that the members of this diverse group did not just learn about the story of Jesus. They actually came to know, appreciate, and respect one another as they reflected aloud on what Jesus could tell them about life with God. When they shared a meal, they came to care what they could eat together, such as when Carl worried about finding something he could bring that would not negatively impact children's food allergies (Appendix K, Statement 23).

The significance of the community-centered experience of formation is not entirely disconnected from the parents' expressed longing for a program for their children. In our original conversations, the parents asked for a resource to compensate for what they were missing when absent from the Sunday morning classes. I have not concluded that their anxiety over missing church-based spiritual formation was disingenuous. What the parents clearly relished, however, was the opportunity to interact with other people (of all ages) in this setting. They chatted before and after the service, they helped one another with child management issues, and they built friendships across age lines (which I noted in the Hungry Soul Journal on six different weeks). It was interesting that the adults felt that they were on a level that allowed discussion with the youngsters (Appendix K, Statements 25, 39, 54, 66, 68, 72). As much as the parents delighted in sharing this experience of hearing and unpacking the Gospel with their children, they also enjoyed reflecting with other adults on what it meant for them. The children enjoyed this also. Ethan's insight "I know most of the kids. And now I know some new people from church – the grown-ups. Some of them are pretty old!" (Appendix K, Statement 74) was both amusing and right on target.

The enthusiasm expressed for the experience of being with others has led me to conclude that the most meaningful experience in this project was being together with the group, in a safe and welcoming environment, as we engaged something meaningful (experiencing our life with God through Jesus). This is where the interpretive clusters of Hungry Soul, found at the end of Chapter 6, intersect to form the new whole, the pattern that Dahlberg et al. seek to explain the data (284-285). The Hungry Soul project revealed that in St. Paul's in Fairfield, Connecticut, the hunger for God intersected with a hunger for community and a desire for safety, welcome, and warmth. Although the lived experience of Hungry Soul involved an experience of vulnerability for some of the participants, as they went into a new space, read the Gospel aloud, conversed instead of listening passively, and met new people, it was in some way softened by the longing for community, the perception of safety and warmth, and the growth of new relationships. Ultimately these latter experiences led them to return. When the group had gelled (probably by the time we organized the Christmas pageant in mid-December), they were sufficiently engaged to ask to continue after the originally scheduled ending date. We continued until the late spring, when traditional formation classes also would have finished their season.

After reflecting on the interpretive clusters, I recalled that a part of my own journey into the Episcopal tradition, decades ago, was connected to a local parish's practice of spending time together. It was, for me and for my family, the perfect antidote to suburban isolation and loneliness. On an intellectual level, I embraced the Episcopal eucharistic theology because it struck me as theologically honest. I wanted a church that welcomed the gifts of women. Neither theology nor polity issues were nearly as attractive as the place that connected us to other people. We are the people of God and we are made to abide together. My ecclesiology is that we do this thing we call church best as a community. Apparently, the influence of Schillebeeckx on my theology is quite deep, on an eminently practical level. I am certain that we can encounter Christ, the sacrament of God, in a community where we know others and where we are known (Schillebeeckx , *Christ* 137). Our current social culture, which rewards busyness and erodes the foundation of community, and the time the development of community demands, is not optimal for this endeavor.

The expressions of spiritual/theological engagement and joy in the development of community crossed age categories. Although linguistic expressions varied among the age groups, the themes of reciprocity, respect for difference, appreciation of other members were repeated by eleven of the twelve participants interviewed. From Belle (10 years old) noting "It is nice that everyone can say something and that the grown ups listen to the kids. That doesn't usually happen" and Tom (age 6) declaring "I love going to church, because I love making friends," to Court (age 86) commenting "I was surprised that the children talked with me as if we knew one another well" and Alyce (age 36) stating "It was quite an eclectic group we had, and it was kind of neat to see that we were [that way] the majority of the time," the overwhelming majority had something positive to day about the experience of the group. There were no drawbacks articulated.

One of the premises of this project, derived from preliminary research, was that worship could be personally and spiritually transformative, because it empowers participants to perceive the connection between God's story and our story (Niebuhr "The Story of Our Life" 43, Hauerwas and Jones 5). In this nine-month program, worship seemed to function well as a locus of spiritual formation. Once the group learned the pattern of the service, and grew comfortable in the process of *lectio divina* that we used to discuss the Gospel reading, they were willing to go deep into their examination of what God could be saying to us in the context of our regular lives. In addition to pondering the meaning of the week's passage, the children grew comfortable enough to inquire about different liturgical and religious practices (e.g., the "right way" to make the sign of the cross, what is the purpose of Holy Communion).

In addition, theological reflection became part of normal life for some participants. Serving as ministers during this service (reading the Gospel, assisting with the chalices of juice at communion, greeting visitors, receiving the collection) allowed for children a fuller participation than they usually enjoy. They started asking questions about what they were doing, and what it meant. They expressed some fairly deep spiritual inquiries. Tom commented about Jesus. “A few weeks ago, I thought that Jesus was God’s son. I still think that. And I also think that God is Jesus. How can that be?” Ethan talked about Jesus and miracles with his mother (Appendix K, Statement 45). Two mothers spoke to me about the experience of reading the same Gospel three times in one service. This practice allowed them to go more deeply into the text, and they heard something new each time.

The various roles of family, the community, and the work of professional clergy intersected in the formation process. One of my motivations was to equip parents to feel more secure in nurturing the faith of the children, so allowing adults to mentor and support the children’s exploration was important. Additionally, the natural interactions between the senior participants and the younger parents gave the adults a sub-community on which they could rely. Hope named this intuitively when she said “This [service] is about giving them [millennial and Gen X parents] trust and a relationship” (Appendix K, Statement 63). Although I was very happy to serve this group as their priest, I was very intentional about cultivating an environment that was not centered on clerical ministry. Consulting with the mothers’ focus group, designing liturgy to be primarily the work of the un-ordained people, and incorporating children were all contributing factors in constructing a process that reflected an approach to worship that was missional in its nature. We were journeying together to encounter God, and I was grateful not to serve as their expert witness for most afternoons. There were a number of occasions when only the ministry of a priest would be appropriate: the consecration, the anointing, the baptism. The community learned something, I think, about their own spiritual roles and power.

At least three learnings are connected to questions that this project raised for me. First, what does "community" mean? We do tend to use that word liberally in church life. We speak of faith communities, suggesting that attending services regularly bonds parish members who may or may not know each other's names. Is a community a group that forms naturally, without an intentional stimulus, such as when bus passengers meet during their commute and foster conversations? Or is community a gathering with intention, such as Christine's remembered mothers' group from the parish day school? In the case of Hungry Soul participants, the meaning of the community seems to be intentional, centered on the work they performed together and the environment that fostered it.

Second, what does "formation" mean anyway? To what end do we choose to form children? In Chapter One, I spoke of both spiritual formation (which was the vocabulary about Sunday School classes at St. Paul's) as well as religious formation (which suggests spiritual formation according to the precepts of a particular faith tradition). The two are not interchangeable, although sometimes in a parish context we treat them as if they are. In Chapter Two, I noted the decline in ecclesial formation programs, which have paralleled the decline in institutional religious observance, as well as the rise of an interest in spiritual formation, which may be either non-ecclesial or non-religious. In my experience with the participants in Hungry Soul, the parents were seeking religious formation in the Episcopal tradition, even if they had a recent or superficial connection to that tradition. They were clear that they wanted a Christian, Jesus-focused program, with sacraments and scripture. Perhaps in a parish context, we can afford to be less apologetic about the religious context of our formation programs.

Third, what is the nature of pastoral leadership in a time of deep change in our institutional life? Osmer's practical theology casts the pastoral leader as an agent of change through discernment and thoughtful questioning (loc. 187 and 265). This sort of deep listening is actually more demanding of the priest than the clergy-centered model which commands and directs. While it allows for creativity and sharing of ministry, this pastoral model requires a level of engagement and mutuality that demands significant spiritual energy. This priest needs to spend time in serious prayer, and not just work as an administrator of programming.

There were several surprises during the duration of the project or things I learned and had not anticipated. There was a group of seniors who liked to come to worship in the late afternoon. I had not expected them to enjoy this as much as they did! The circumstantial marginalization of some members of the parish emerged unexpectedly during this project. Lack of financial resources, emotional isolation due to age or marital status, and health issues relocate individuals to the edge of a parish, where they become virtually invisible. It surprised me that forms of hunger marked our experience together. We were able to address the literal hunger among the seniors (due to financial issues) by sending them home with takeout containers of food. It was more challenging to consider how to answer the metaphorical hunger expressed by the very busy Gen X parents. They were longing for connection. I was surprised by the way the children heard so much even if they were playing when someone read the Gospel. They sometimes responded to the readings after appearing to ignore the conversation. I was also surprised by the power of locating the altar close to the people. It was a powerful structure for the children, who seemed to gravitate to it. It was powerful for me as the priest, because I felt that the consecration was a prayer we shared and not an action that I performed with the congregation watching.

Ruminations

I have been wondering about the perichoretic God, who piqued my curiosity to explore an interim position in this parish, who drove Christine and the parents to my office to ask for an intervention, who led this interesting group of people to consider participating in an alternative eucharistic service on a Sunday afternoon. We spent nine months together, doing something that none of us had done before. It felt rather like a dance: invigorating, joyous, breathless, wonderfully exhausting. It may have been perichoretic, although I do not believe that we somehow conjured up the presence of God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit. I do think that we may have become more aware of their presence among us, even for a few moments at a time, as our eyes and ears and hearts were opened when we read the Gospels together.

I have come to value qualitative research methods deeply. The experience of Hungry Soul would not have been understood well using the traditional measure of Sunday attendance or dollars collected. It turned out that Hungry Soul was best studied by being within the mystery of the relationships that grew out of worshipping together. Participatory research allowed me to be immersed in the experience, and to witness firsthand some of the conversations that were meaningful to participants. This also influenced the way in which I experienced the program, as less an academic process and more of a spiritual journey. This project reinforced my belief, in a very practical way, that the power of the story of Jesus is transformative as we discern its intersection with our stories. As we hear the stories of Jesus we cannot help but consider our own stories, and the process of actually listening to one another changes the group dynamic. None of this is realistically quantifiable.

I have been thinking about the way in which playfulness and flexibility intermingle with the life of faith. The Hungry Soul project would not have developed if I had not committed to getting out of the Sunday morning structure, if the parents had been unwilling to explore different practices, if the seniors had demanded quiet or stillness. God seems to have a playful, spontaneous nature. For what other reason would Jesus have told his friends that they needed to be more like little children to inherit the reign of God? I can still see little Mark gently poking at the communion bread, anticipating when he would be able to taste it, and then taste it again.

I have been reflecting on the perspective of missional theology. This project sought to move the worship of the Church out of the sanctuary and into the spaces where people of God dwell, uncertain of their relationship with the Holy One and longing for some sort of connection. The unraveling of Sunday formational classes was an opportunity to explore how we could share the good news of Jesus in an increasingly unchurched context. I want to spend more energy figuring out what life with God in Christ is about than I spend figuring out how to manage institutional maintenance.

I wonder whether this intervention “solved” the real problem. For a time, the Hungry Soul project seemed to meet an acute need for connection in community (the real issue) and spiritual formation (the presenting issue) for a small group in this parish. It was more effective than I had originally believed when I had completed the work. The positive tone of my thesis statement and original predictions in Chapter 1 notwithstanding, I did not realize the impact of the project until I compiled the significant statements for the analysis. I understand that the new rector of St. Paul's has developed a Sunday evening service called Night Church, to meet the needs of the local community that can not or does not "do" Sunday morning worship.

I wonder where I need to go from here. I have moved on to another parish, this time in a small city in another state. We face similar cultural and demographic issues in a less affluent and sophisticated context. I am mindful of what Vagle identifies as flight lines, which beckon us to consider what the next step could be (loc. 2493). The expansion of learning would be a cumulative process. Findings may be applied in other contexts, in order to make more explicit the meanings of the knowledge that has been gained (Dahlberg et al 345). I can foresee that church leaders will be called to explore different ways to evangelize and form souls in faith. It is possible that there will be entirely new opportunities to connect with people who are hungry for God and community. Perhaps the most important things I learned from this project were the value of listening deeply to the parishioners who are not at the center, and responding to them with love.

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Appendix A: St. Paul’s Parish Newsletter Article, September 2016

Hungry Soul: 5 pm Sundays

Do you work or travel on weekends? Do athletic practices keep you from getting the kids to Sunday School? Let’s explore a solution together!

On September 18, we are beginning a pilot program for a Sunday afternoon service of Holy Eucharist. Intentionally designed to meet the needs of those unable to participate in Sunday morning church services, ***Hungry Soul*** will offer Holy Communion, scripture-based spiritual formation for all ages, and a supper, within a 90 minute timeframe.

We will meet on a variety of Sunday afternoons - 12 weeks over five months – and will gather feedback as we progress, in order to find the best structure to serve our community.

(Editorial note: This project initially was planned to offer twelve sessions over five months. It was expanded to continue for four more months and six more sessions due to the enjoyment of the participants. After two weeks, we realized that we could finish a Hungry Soul service in one hour).

Appendix B: Consent to Participate in a Research Study
For the Doctor of Ministry Program
Virginia Theological Seminary, Alexandria, Virginia

Title of Study: Hungry Soul: An Experiment in Worship, Formation, Building Community

Researcher: Amy D Welin **Phone:** 203-217-2461

Introduction

- You are being asked to participate in a research study that is one part of a doctoral project.
- You have been selected because you have participated in the Hungry Soul worship service.
- We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Study

- The purpose of the study is to explore the spiritual experience of people within the framework of worship at a time other than Sunday morning.
- Ultimately, this research will be incorporated into a doctoral thesis and may be used to write a book

Description of the Study Procedures

- If you agree to be in this study, you may be asked to do the following things: share your experience of spiritual development, share any meaningful conversations you have following the service(s), offer evaluation of what has been meaningful to you.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study

- The study has the following risks: You will participate in a form of worship somewhat different from our regular Sunday morning worship. You may eat foods at the potluck community supper that are different from what you eat at other times. You may sit with people you do not know.
- There may be unknown risks.

Benefits of Being in the Study

- The benefits of participation are that you may be able to assist in the development of worship programming that may benefit people who want to learn more about Jesus.

Confidentiality [*choose one of the following*]

- This study is anonymous. We will not be collecting or retaining any information about your identity. We will note your age and sex.
- The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. [*If audio or video tape recordings are made, explain*

specifically who will have access to them, if they will be used for educational purposes, and when they will be erased/destroyed and indicate how they will be destroyed or erased.] We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

Payments

- You will receive the no payment/reimbursement aside from intangible spiritual benefit.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

- The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* without affecting your relationship with the researcher of this study or St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Your decision will not result in any loss or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the interview at any point during the process; additionally, you have the right to request that the interviewer not use any of your interview material.

Right to Ask Questions

- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Amy Welin at adwelin@gmail.com or by telephone at 203-217-2461. If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you.

Consent

- Your signature below indicates that you have agreed to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigators.

Subject's Name (print): ________________________________

Subject's Signature: ________________________________ Date: ____________________

Researcher's Signature: ________________________________ Date: ____________________

Appendix C: Audio Recording Consent Form
Consent to Audio Recording and Transcription
For the Hungry Soul Project
Researcher: Amy D. Welin, Virginia Theological Seminary

This study involves the audio or video recording of your interview with the researcher. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audio recording or the transcript. Only the research team will be able to listen to the recordings.

The tapes will be transcribed by the researcher and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither our name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice or picture) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

By signing this form, I am allowing the researcher to audio tape me as part of this research. I also understand that this consent for recording is effective until the following date:

_________________.

On or before that date, the tapes will be deleted or destroyed.

Participant's Signature:

____

Date:

____

- This study is anonymous. We will not be collecting or retaining any information about your identity. We will note your age and sex.
- The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. [*If audio or video tape recordings are made, explain specifically who will have access to them, if they will be used for educational purposes, and when they will be erased/destroyed and indicate how they will be destroyed or erased.*] We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

Payments

- You will receive the no payment/reimbursement aside from intangible spiritual benefit.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

- The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* without affecting your relationship with the researcher of this study or St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Your decision will not result in any loss or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the interview at any point during the process; additionally, you have the right to request that the interviewer not use any of your interview material.

Right to Ask Questions

- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Amy Welin at adwelin@gmail.com or by telephone at 203-217-2461. If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you.

Consent

- Your signature below indicates that you have agreed to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigators.

Subject's Name (print): ______________________________

Subject's Signature: ______________________________ Date: __________________

Researcher's Signature: ______________________________ Date: __________________

Appendix D: Brochure

Try
some real
soul food

at

St. Paul's
Parish Hall
661 Old Post Rd
Fairfield

St. Paul's
EPISCOPAL CHURCH • FAIRFIELD

Extravagantly welcoming . . .
Young Ones

We welcome children to worship alongside us, remembering our Baptismal promise "to do all in our power to support these persons in their life in Christ." We recognize that children may not participate in the service the same way adults do. We celebrate that all beloved children of God bring their own love and understanding to this sacred place. We are grateful you are here!

Too busy for
Sunday morning
church?
Still hungry
for
God?

Hungry Soul Dates

September 18 & 25

October 2, 16, & 30

November 6, 13, & 20

December 4 & 11

January 8 & 1

Try
Hungry Soul

5 pm
Sundays

at

St. Paul's!

Family-friendly church
+
Gospel for kids
+
Holy Communion
+
Dinner
in
90 minutes

We want to help you find time
for spiritual nourishment
without losing your mind.

We offer a timely, family-welcoming, real church service, with weekly Christian formation for all, and a communion service open to all.

We follow it with a potluck supper.

Come as you are.

Bring your family.
Encounter Christ.

Appendix E: Hungry Soul Holy Eucharist Service Sheet

(derived from the South African Tradition)

Gathering

Opening Song

Priest Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
All Blessed be God's Name, now and for ever. Amen.

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from y no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Chri our Lord. *Amen.*

Lord, have mercy.	**Lord, have mercy.**
Christ, have mercy.	**Christ, have mercy.**
Lord, have mercy.	**Lord, have mercy.**

Priest Let us pray. (opening prayer)

Proclaiming and Reflecting

The Gospel

Three Questions: What word or phrase catches your attention?
What could God be saying to me/us in this Word?
How does this Gospel lead me to want to talk with or l to God?

Praying

Let us give thanks to God for all the gifts so freely bestowed upon us.
For the beauty and wonder of your creation, in earth and sky and sea. **We than you, Lord.**
For all that is gracious in our lives, revealing the image of Christ. **We thank you, L**
For minds to think, and hearts to love, and hands to serve. **We thank you, Lord.**
For health and strength to work, and leisure to rest and play. **We thank you, Lord.**
For the brave and courageous in suffering and faithful in adversity. **We thank you, l**
For all valiant seekers after truth, liberty, and justice. **We thank you, Lord.**
We lift our prayer for all on our hearts and minds (pause)
Above all, we give thanks for the great mercies and promises given to us through Je
To God be praise and glory, now and forever.

Priest The peace of the Lord be with you always!
All And also with you!

Praying before Communion

Offertory Song and Collection

Priest The Lord be with you **All And also with you**
Priest Lift up your hearts **All We lift them to the Lord**
Priest Let us give thanks to the Lord our God **All It is right to give our thanks and praise**

Priest Why do we give thanks and praise at this table?
All We give thanks and praise for all that God has done for us.

Priest God the Father created the heavens, the earth, and everything in them, and created us in God's own image
All Let us give thanks and praise

Priest Christ our Lord became human like us, and died to save us
All Let us give thanks and praise

Priest God send the Holy Spirit to gather us together as the people of God
All Let us give thanks and praise

Priest So come let us join together to worship this God who loves us
All Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Priest We praise you, Father, that before Jesus our Savior suffered and died, he gave us this holy meal to share
and told us to continue it until he comes again.

All Why do we eat bread together at this table?
Priest On the night before he died, Jesus took bread. After giving thanks, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples,
saying, "Take, eat. This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

All Why do we drink from the cup together at this table?
Priest In the same way, after supper Jesus took the cup, saying "This cup is God's new covenant, sealed with my
Blood, poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me."

All What do we remember at this table?

Priest We remember the Father's gracious love for us, Christ's death and resurrection for us, and the Spirit's
tender care for us. Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

Priest Merciful Father, pour out your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts of bread and wine. In eating and
drinking together, may we be made one with Christ and with one another.
AMEN.
Let us pray in the words our Savior Christ taught us.
All Our Father . . .

Priest Behold the Body of Christ. Behold what you are. May we become what we receive. **AMEN.**

Communion Song

Giving Thanks after Communion

All Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us as living members
of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament
of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessings
Deacon/Priest Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord
All Thanks be to God

http://anglicanchurch.org.za in Rundell, pp 33-34

Appendix F: Sample Proper for Hungry Soul

The Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to Luke [16: 1– 13]

Jesus told his disciples this story: There was a rich man who learned that his manager was not handling his property honestly. So he hauled him in, and said, "I don't like what I'm hearing about you. I want an investigation of what you've been doing. You can't be my manager anymore." The manager said to himself, "What am I going to do without this job? I'm not strong enough for construction work, but I'm too proud to beg. I know— I'll sweet-talk the people who owe my master money, so that after I'm fired, they'll give me work." So, that's what he did. And his master applauded the manager even though he was dishonest, because he was crafty. We don't need to be dishonest, but we need to be at least as creative as the dishonest people are. If you are honest with little things, you'll be honest in big things. Just like faith. If you are faithful with what belongs to someone else, perhaps you will be faithful with your own. Nobody can serve two masters. You'll hate one or the other. It's like that with God and wealth— you've got to choose between them, which one you're going to build your life around. **The Gospel of the Lord.**

Briggs, Lyn Zill. God's Word, My Voice: A Lectionary for Children (Kindle Locations 6891-6897). Church Publishing Inc.. Kindle Edition.

Let's think about this!

Why do good people need to be clever as well as honest?

What does it look like to be a faithful person on an ordinary day?

Who do you want to build your life around? Where is God in that?

Appendix G: Hungry Soul Christmas Pageant Gospel

In order to count how many people there were so that he could tax them, the Roman emperor told everyone to go to their hometowns to be counted. So Joseph went with Mary, his fiancée, who was expecting a baby at any time, from Nazareth to Bethlehem. His family was descended from King David, and King David had lived in Bethlehem.

O little town of Bethlehem/How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep/The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth/The everlasting Light
The hopes and fears of all the years/Are met in thee tonight

While they were in Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to a baby boy. She wrapped him up tight, and laid him in a feed trough in the barn where they were staying because the inns were all full.

Away in a manger/No crib for His bed
The little Lord Jesus/Lay down His sweet head
The stars in the sky/Look down where He lay
The little Lord Jesus/Asleep on the hay

Meanwhile, in the fields, shepherds were watching their sheep during the night. All of a sudden an angel stood right in front of them, and God's glory was shining all around and they were scared to death. The angel told them not to be afraid because there was only good news. "This news is so good," the angel said, "that everyone will be happy. Today in the city of David, the Savior whom everyone's been waiting for was born. I want you to go find him. Here's how you'll know he's the right baby: He'll be lying in a feed trough all wrapped up in strips of cloth." When the angel said that, the skies burst into song, and angels filled up the entire sky, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to those on earth whom God loves."

Angels we have heard on high/Sweetly singing o'er the plains
And the mountains in reply/Echoing their joyous strains
Gloria, in excelsis Deo/Gloria, in excelsis Deo

When the angels had gone back to heaven, the shepherds said to each another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and find this baby boy they were talking about." So they ran and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the feed trough, just as the angel had told them.

What Child is this/Who laid to rest
On Mary's lap is sleeping?/Whom Angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,/Whom shepherds guard and Angels sing
Haste, haste, to bring Him laud,/The Babe, the Son of Mary.

The shepherds told Mary and Joseph what the angel had said, about who this child was and would become. Everyone was amazed at their story. But Mary kept this entire story in her heart. The shepherds praised God for all that had happened that night, and went back to their sheep who had been wondering where their shepherds had gone.

There's a star in the East on Christmas morn,/Rise up shepherd and follow.
It will lead to the place where the Saviour's born,/Rise up shepherd and follow.
Follow, follow,/Rise up shepherd and follow.
Follow the star of Bethlehem./Rise up shepherd and follow.

After a while, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem to ask, “What’s this about a child born king of the Jews? We saw a star in the sky that led us here, and we’ve come to honor him.” King Herod, who was very insecure and a little crazy, said, “King? What king?” Herod was scared that another king was out there. So he called all the priests and smart people together and asked them where this king of the Jews was supposed to be born according to the books. They looked and found out that he was supposed to be born in Bethlehem. So Herod told the wise men to go to Bethlehem and made up a story about how he wanted to go and honor this newborn king as well. He was lying: actually he wanted to destroy him. The wise men set out for Bethlehem. The star in the sky stopped over the spot where Jesus lived. The wise men were thrilled! When they went inside, they found Jesus and Mary and they got down on their knees to worship him. They opened their packages full of treasures and gave him gifts of myrrh, incense and gold. They had a dream that told them not to go back to Herod, so instead of going back through Jerusalem, they found another road and went home.

We three kings of Orient are/Bearing gifts we traverse afar.
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,/Following yonder star.
O star of wonder, star of night,/Star of royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,/Guide us to thy perfect light.

Once the wise men were gone, an angel from God came to Joseph in another dream. The angel said, “The king is trying to find Jesus to kill him because he heard Jesus was a new king.” That woke Joseph right up, and in the middle of the night, they ran away to Egypt. They stayed there until Herod had died and couldn’t hurt them anymore. When Herod died, the angel came back and said it was safe to go back to Israel, where they were from. Joseph found out Archelaus was the new ruler, but Joseph didn’t trust him either. So, after another dream, he went instead to Nazareth in Galilee. The prophets had said that the Messiah would be called a Nazorean, someone who lived in Nazareth.

Go, tell it on the mountain/Over the hills and everywhere
Go, tell it on the mountain/That Jesus Christ is born

Appendix H: Music Book Cover and Contents

Hungry Soul
Music Book

Table of Contents

All Things Bright and Beautiful (2)
Amazing Grace (3)
Create in Me a Clean Heart (4)
Day by Day (5)
Dona Nobis Pacem (6)
Father I Adore You (7)
Here I Am Lord (8)
I've Got the Joy (9)
Lean on Me (10)
Let It Be (11)
Let Us Break Bread Together (12)
Lord of the Dance (13)
Morning Has Broken (14)
Peace Like a River (15)
Pharaoh, Pharaoh (16)
Place in the Choir (17)
Praise Ye the Lord (18)
Rise and Shine (19)
Santo, Santo, Santo (20)
Seek Ye First (21)
This Little Light of Mine (22)
This Is the Day (23)
We Are Marching in the Light of God (24)

Adoramus Te Domine (25)
Laudate Domunium (25)

Appendix I: Template for the Hungry Soul Worship Journal and Sample Entry

Used every week as the template for journal entries

Date (Proper)
Set Up Notes
Participants
Service Notes
The meal
Things I have learned

8 January 2017 (Baptism of Christ)

Set Up Notes Setting up after parish discernment meeting was fairly easy. We were invited to use the leftover sandwiches (although we did not). Three tables are sufficient for our needs.

Participants Alexis & Campbell, Elisabeth with Lexi, TJ, and Luke, Wendy C and Julie S, Candace, Carl, Amy

Service Notes The kids are comfortable reading and reflecting on the gospel now. Some disruption as Luke tends to wander off and try to get food from the serving table, and Elisabeth needs to restrain him. LOTS of participation, even when the kids are tired from their day - they seem to like to reflect on what the lesson means and what God could be saying to them through it. A lot of adult participation also. Wendy and Elisabeth talked about what baptism means to them now. Why would God choose to mingle human life with divine life.
I. words that strike them: God's law, ridiculous, saw God's Spirit fly
II. What is God saying: obedience, recog Jesus as God's son, Jesus humanity
Lots of conversation re significance of baptism, initiation vs washing away sin, God's openness to communication with human beings. We are God's children! (awe)
III. we can call on God - amazement

The meal Wendy, Julie, Carl, Candace and I stayed for the meal. This is a real service to the older participants who come for food as well as companionship. And they all assist with clean up.

Things I have learned
Tonight I am very tired and not at my best. I am delighted that the group is together and that this is making some difference in their lives.

Very positive phone conversation with Alexis Yates plus two emails this week from mothers: addenda to Journal entry:
Alexis (right after Jan 1) : I am so pleased that Campbell enjoys this service – this is the only time she has ever asked to go to church! The shorter time frame is helpful,

and the content is structured so she really understands. I have felt terrible that I have not been able to find a way to get to Sunday School - often it is too difficult with our family schedule. She loves the readings, and she has been thinking about Jesus as a person. This has been life-changing for me. I am able to share this with my daughter.

AJ Schwarz: this service has kick started my family getting back into church, it's been great! (week of Jan 1, email)

Elisabeth S (Jan 8): love the idea that we would have regular dates for our sessions to make it easier to keep track of when it is “on”.

We definitely plan to attend tonight and on the 22nd. We have to hustle out quickly tonight to attend a gathering down in Norwalk that has been on the schedule for some time but we can at least make it for the church part! I also purchased a cheese/salami/crackers platter to bring.

Amy, I don’t think I have communicated at all just how grateful I am for your willingness to try this out and to make this time and space for our families. It is such a gift and has gotten me back to church at a time when everything has felt really crazy. It has been so good for all of us and I am truly grateful!

Appendix J: Hungry Soul Project Interview Questions

1. What word or phrase evokes/ describes your experience of Hungry Soul?
   Can you describe a time when you had an experience of [use the descriptor word]?

2. What has been important / meaningful for you in Hungry Soul?

3. During Hungry Soul, we usually unpack the Gospel with three questions.

What do you think about the Gospel stories leading people to want to talk with/listen to each other?
Describe a time when you felt that this was a meaningful experience.

4. Can you tell me a story about an experience outside the Hungry Soul services that echoed / reminded you of something that we talked about on Sunday?

5. Has Hungry Soul shaped the way you think about a relationship with God?

[Follow up: Tell /draw a story about our experience at Hungry Soul]
Who was there?
How did it feel?
What was going on ?
What was dinner like?

Appendix K: Significant Statements, Textural and Interpretive Descriptions

	Meaning Unit:	**Environment**	
Name of Participant (Age)	**Significant Statements**	**Textual Description (“What happened”)**	**Interpretive Description**
Will (55)	1. It was such a big space		
	2. There was a lot of energy in that room – a lot more energy than in the parish – and a lot of joy!	a) The parish hall was a wide-open and lively space	*i*) Hungry Soul unfolded in a wide open space, which gave some participants freedom (more importance among the children), relaxation, comfort.
Hope (64)	3. The setting was less important than the learning. It was warm. It was sweet.	b) Some participants experienced the energy of other participants	
Lisa (40)	4. It was peaceful.		
Carl (68)	5. It was laid back.	c) Most experienced the physical environment as supportive (calm/serene/warm/friendly) and the power of the worship environment in a positive way	
Alyce (36)	6. There was room to run if the kids needed to		*ii)* The sense of calm/serenity attached to Hungry Soul does not seem to be directly connected to the space or the level of activity
Glynnis (40)	7. I feel a sense of calm when I come in – I love that feeling of being calm and at peace.		
Ethan (8)	8. It was fun to be able to move around.		
Court (86)	9. Something special was happening.		*iii)* The atmosphere around Hungry Soul enhanced a unique experience: special, deep, warm, sweet, powerful (evocative of Holy Spirit)
	10. It was powerful to read the Gospel three times		
	11. The service felt deep – we went deep		
	12. Sometimes it was hard to hear.		
Belle (10)	13. I usually felt comfortable.		

	14. The room is really big and it has echoes.		
Candace (68)	15. The room was warm and friendly		
	Meaning Unit:	**Incarnation**	
Will (55)	16. I was welcomed by a child		
	17.I was a little uncomfortable at first to be with people I didn’t know well.	a) Welcome and warmth, anxiety and discomfort are felt in our physical selves.	*i)* The worship experience of Hungry Soul was enhanced by a feeling of safety, warmth, which may have diminished initial anxiety
Tom (6)	18. I felt good when I read the long thing [the Gospel]		
	19. Sometimes I felt embarrassed [when I didn’t know a word] (he grimaced)		
Alex (8)	20. I love it when we get to eat pizza! [giggling]	b) Importance of food: we feed our souls and our bodies together	
Lisa (40)	21. How can I go from this peaceful place to this screaming mother in two minutes? Boom, I was walloped by life again!		
	22. I felt depleted in every single way but that service was the one place where I felt I could go to be fed. Hungry Soul indeed. And God showed up in a big way.	c) The paradox of an incarnational life: The spiritual is not isolated from the physical, and the holy and the ordinary are co-mingled	*ii)* With Hungry Soul the sweet holiness of our life may be connected with our incarnational satisfaction, either physical or emotional (transcendent incarnation)
Carl (70)	22. This changed how I consider how I can use God’s Word in ordinary life.		
	23. Dinner was fantastic. I love to eat. So that is really good! Finding something that		

	everyone can eat was a challenge.		
Glynnis (40)	24. We don’t get to have dinner together a lot.		
Ethan (8)	25. I like that we all get to talk. I like it when I can serve the juice. It feels like I can do something great.		*iii)* Hungry Soul addressed a feeling of hunger/needing to be fed.
Court (86)	26. The distinction between [a child’s] energy during the lesson and during the prayer before communion was noticeable. He was really focused during that Eucharistic prayer. 27.I want to cling to the things I hear (when my hearing aids are working). It is all so meaningful. 28. It was a chilly afternoon and it was much warmer in the parish hall. 29. The dinner smelled so good! It was lovely to sit and eat with a group.		
Belle (10)	30. I must have been hungry. 31. I talked with my Mom on the way home, and she told me that she loved me a lot. 32. I like the communion, especially the juice. It is sweet.		

	Meaning Unit:	**Transcendence**	
Will (55)	33. We created a spiritual community and a spiritual reality. People spoke about what they felt God was saying to us. I felt as if the Spirit was hovering around us in the big room.	a) Expressions of very real spiritual encounters	*i)* The moments of transcendence during Hungry Soul were surprisingly real
Tom (6)	34. I remember the story about Jesus and the man who came to see him at night. Everything is real that we talk about.		
	35. Sometimes when I am alone, I pray.	b) Deep spiritual questions and statements emerge in a safe place to articulate them	
	36. A few weeks ago, I thought that Jesus was God's son. I still think that. And I also think that God is Jesus. How can that be?		
Alex (9)	37. [If we will be alive in heaven] then maybe I can see my sister. She died.		
Hope (64)	38. Meeting Jesus is real and transformative. There are no coincidences for me, they are all God-incidences.		*ii)* Transcendent moments shared with others during Hungry Soul were powerful – there is a theme of transcendence enhanced by relationship (incarnational transcendence)
Lisa (40)	39. This was a spiritual experience, It is the first time that I have had an experience where I felt like my kids and I were exploring God together as a family.		
	40. For me, God and church are two separate things. This gave me a context for my faith.	c) Faith may be distinct from participation in a church community	

	41. I have rediscovered the beauty of breaking bread together.	d) There are a variety of paths to relationship with God	
Carl (70)	42. In this setting, you come to know Jesus in a different way.		
	43. I think I talk to God differently [through this]. There is more contemplation, too. This is another way of worshipping God.		
Candace (68)	44. This was like here is another avenue to [have a relationship with God].		
Alyce (36)	45. Last week, Ethan was talking about Jesus healing someone who was born blind.		
	46. Some of the [Gospel] stories were eye-opening to me.		
Ethan (8)	47. I don't get why people didn't listen to Jesus! He was telling them to do good things.		
	48. Jesus is God, right? God doesn't teach us to do things that are weird or hard. He teaches us to do things that are right. I like that Jesus tells us about what God thinks.		*iii)* Hungry Soul seemed to facilitate moments of transcendence and friendship or communion with God/Jesus
	49. [The prayer before communion] is about Jesus blessing the bread and God loving us.		
	50. Jesus had a friend who left him. Jesus must have been such a nice person. How come		

	he didn't have more friends?		
Court (86)	51. I am a lot older than most of the group. I am really counting on Jesus offering new life.		
	52. This is not creative mythology, this is a deep truth that has been shared with us. It is a new thing for me to talk about God and the Gospel with people.		
Glynnis (40)	53. I love how communion is [with the children so engaged}. It is a big deal.		
Belle (10)	54.When we talked about how much God loves us all, because we are his children and baptized, I felt like we were very important.		
	55. My grandfather died this year. We talked about how God let Jesus die. I don't get that. Mom doesn't get that either.		
	56. I want to be friends with God. I pray when I go to sleep at night. I think that God hears me.		
	Meaning Unit:	**Community**	
Will (55)	57. Here we each had something to give and to receive.	a) Expressions of a context of reciprocity and equity in exploring faith	
	58. Exploring relationships across generations and family ties is a way to explore all the possible richness of a		

	relationship with God.		
	59. The best part was when the children got to serve the communion to the adults. They took such pride in that.		*i)* This worship experiment built a small intentional community, and it crossed the usual dividing lines of parish life (age, socio-economic status, children or no children)
Tom (6)	60. I love going to church, because I love making friends.		
	61. The grown ups listen when we answer.	b) Participants expressed feelings of connection, openness, and trust across generational lines	
Hope (68)	62. I love to see Christian communities being built.		
	63. When I looked at who was there, I saw a hunger in the millennial and slightly older group. This is about giving them trust and a relationship.		*ii)* In our spiritual communities it seems that hunger for God intersects with hunger for community
	64. I liked that people were connected.		
	65. There's a whole level of interaction among the people in the room. And there's also the dinner. I think that is really, um, different and profound. We can all learn from one another, even the kids.	c) Church is community – and we do it together - and we are sometimes on the same page and sometimes we are different!	
Lisa (40)	66. It's a surprisingly diverse group, and I appreciate that so much, and the Gospel strikes each in a different way and that is so great.		
	67. In my daily life, I don't read the scripture so much and I don't experience the community so much. That is		

	what church is for me. This has given me context for my faith. And a community for it, you know.		
	68.I got a different idea from a very young person looking at the scripture through their own experience. The kids were fantastic.		*iii)* Hungry Soul offered an unusual level of interaction between groups usually separated in church life, and they seemed to collaborate on their spiritual work
Carl (70)	69.[The kids] add a whole new dimension to the project, the conversation, here. Sometimes it surprised me. They actually listened. And they were not shy about sharing.		
	70. We did this together.		
Candace (68)	71. After our service, we all sit down to dinner, it's a nice fellowship thing. We get a chance to talk with each other. And the youngsters talk with grown ups who are not their grown ups.		
Alyce (36)	72. It was quite an eclectic group we had, and it was kind of neat to see that we were [that way] the majority of the time, and we were sometimes all on the same page.		
Glynnis (40)	73. [My daughter] was comfortable and it felt like a little community! She started asking when she could go to church again. It's cool that there are so many different people at this. The small gathering is a great thing.		
Ethan (8)	74. I know most of the kids.		

	And now I know some new people from church – the grown ups. Some of them are pretty old!		
Court (86)	75. I enjoyed being with the little ones. It was encouraging to be with new families again. I was surprised that the children talked with me as if we knew one another well. Is this what worship like this does? 76. The conversations crossed lines - the children and the adults were all on one level. Some of us knew more, and we were all trying to figure out what the story meant to us.		
Belle (10)	77. It is nice that everyone can say something and that the grown ups listen to the kids. Usually that doesn't happen. They watch us while we talk. That's kind of cool. 78. It feels like we are all one big family and we are happy.		

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COST WHAT IT WILL"

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Attachment A
Identification of Content

Title of Content:___ Hungry Soul A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of Worship and Spiritual Formation

Author(s):____Amy Doyle Welin____

Date Content was Created:_____May 2018____

Description of Content:__ In a large, stable, suburban parish, Sunday formation programming was declining rapidly. Parents expressed concern that their children could not participate in Sunday School classes due to other family commitments. As a missional experiment during a transitional period, the interim rector introduced Hungry Soul, an innovative eucharistic service designed to provide spiritual formation for young families. Using a contemporary format of *lectio divina*, the group explored the Gospel and shared communion, which was followed by a potluck supper.

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