

HOW FOSTERING SPIRITUAL PRACTICE BUILDS SPIRITUAL CONFIDENCE

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ABSTRACT

In this project I address pervading local and cultural anxiety by providing congregational leaders with a set of workbooks designed to develop spiritual vocabulary and nurture growth in spiritual confidence. I base my project on the nature of spirituality itself, spiritual gifts, the theology of baptism, and the kingdom of God, and support my methods with educational, faith development and neuroscientific theory. On the basis of the project's outcomes, I conclude that guided spiritual exercises combined with group support provide congregational leaders with needed confidence for speaking meaningfully about their prayer lives, growing spiritually and sharing with others about their faith. These findings have implications for evangelism, community development and church-without walls.

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INTRODUCTION
THE BUILDING SITE

Dirt

A scientist confronted God, declaring that since science could now create a human being, there was no further need for God. "Fine," God said, "Show me how you can make a human being." The scientist bent down to grab a handful of earth, but God said, "Wait a minute. Get your own dirt."¹

Only God creates *ex nihilo*. This project, and this paper, obviously grew out of other, preexisting phenomena. So to begin, here is the "dirt," the axioms, from which this paper grew.

First, some basic Christian theology: God created the world, including human beings, to be good. Human beings were created "in the image of God," each bearing God's imprint and some reflection of God's capacity for creating. However, human beings are not robots or puppets. They must choose to act for good as God wills, and sometimes they choose badly. Through these bad choices, theologically known as human sin, creation has become corrupt.

God however continues to work to set creation to rights. God's continuing purpose is to redeem creation and bring it to perfection. God has acted not only through the original act of creation, but through covenanting with human beings, through the Law

¹ This story is an old stand-by among preachers. This version is paraphrased from "Get Your Own Dirt," *Stories for Preaching*, 2017, <https://storiesforpreaching.com/get-your-own-dirt> (accessed February 16, 2017).

and the Prophets, and in sending God's Son Jesus Christ, to teach, live, die and rise again in the service of God's kingdom. Though human beings are finite and imperfect, God intends that we participate and cooperate with God in the redemption of the universe and the establishment of God's kingdom.

Jesus Christ preached that the kingdom of God is near, and demonstrated what that kingdom is like, by feeding, healing, teaching, forgiving, loving, liberating, empowering and advocating for the poor. When human beings participate in Christ-like activities, we participate in the kingdom of God in the here and now. In other words, the kingdom is not something we have to die to achieve, although the redemption of the universe will be complete only in God's own time. Scripture describes this time of consummation as "the Day of the Lord."²

The universal church is the conduit for God's grace (though perhaps not the only one?) in keeping this vision and passing it on. The Church, which is understood to be the mystical body of the Son of God, accepts members through the sacrament of baptism, and sustains them through the sacrament of the Eucharist, the reenactment of Jesus Christ's self-giving to humankind.

Through baptism people are called to be ministers of the kingdom of God. For this purpose God gives each person a unique constellation of innate talents, known as "spiritual gifts." Ministry is using these gifts to build the kingdom of God. In baptism every Christian is called to ministry. In other words, a personal relationship with Jesus

² The Old Testament prophet Joel predicted a "day of the Lord" (2:28-32) when God "will pour out [God's] spirit on all flesh," and "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." St. Peter quotes this passage at Pentecost in proclaiming that this passage has come true in Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 2:16-24.) Throughout this paper, biblical references are to the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

does not a Christian make. Being baptized means one has received a call to reach out to the needy world in some kingdom-of-God way – feeding, healing, teaching, forgiving, loving, liberating, empowering and standing with the poor.

Each person’s life presents him or her with unique opportunities to act in kingdom-of-God ways. Each Christian life requires discernment of both spiritual gifts and one’s particular situation. This is called “vocation.” Individuals have personal vocations, and church communities have collective vocations. Vocation, and discernment of vocation, is rooted in prayer. That’s where spirituality comes in. For the purpose of this paper, spirituality will be considered to be the experience of highest or fundamental reality and the practical application of that experience.³ My desire to explore this link between spirituality and vocation forms the basis of the project this paper describes. My original thesis was that nurturing spirituality increases awareness of baptismal vocation.

The first Chapter of this paper describes how my original thesis that nurturing spirituality increases awareness of baptismal vocation arose and then evolved into a statement on nurturing spiritual confidence. Chapter 2 describes the design, implementation and results of the project of nurturing spirituality. In Chapter 3, I explore how Christian theological tradition both underpinned the concept of the project and sheds light on its outcome. Chapter 4 describes how relevant behavioral theory informs the subject. I will synthesize these components in Chapter 5 before presenting my conclusions in the final Chapter.

³ The nature of spirituality will be explored more fully in Chapter 3 of this paper.

For now, for introductory purposes, I move on to foundational “dirt” of another kind: the context in which my thesis and project were born. Vocation is always contextual.

Context for Ministry

America is angry.⁴ The recent presidential election was the most contentious and uncivil in recent memory. Comments following online news stories and Facebook posts are vitriolic and rude. People seem only to subscribe to news sources that enforce their own prejudices. Few public figures are models of confident, peaceful self-integration. Consequently we have few models of public discourse that are respectful and constructive and consistent with kingdom-of-God ways. The baseline anger everywhere evident bespeaks deep and widespread inner hurt and fear. If ever there were a need for people living out kingdom-of-God values it is now.

Lawrencefield Parish Church is an Episcopal Parish founded in 1956 with an Average Sunday Attendance of 45 divided between two services. The building is located on a semi-rural hilltop 6-1/2 miles from the center of Wheeling, WV, a small rust-belt city whose population and economy have been in decline since the 1930’s. Though few families in this congregation are directly threatened by poverty, everyone feels the weight of community erosion at some level. Store fronts are empty. Children leave home in search of jobs. Downtown landmarks decay and some are torn down. These conditions tend to raise anxiety levels.

⁴ Esquire Editors, "American Rage: The Esquire/nbc News Survey," *Hearst Communications* (January 3, 2016). <http://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a40693/american-rage-nbc-survey> (accessed February 27, 2017).

While the Wheeling environment particularly suffers the effects of long-standing economic decline, our area is far from unique in experiencing spiritual crisis of some sort. Malaise in the national culture has been attributed by some to a social pace set by technology rather than human interaction, resulting in a widespread sense of anxiety. Benedictine nun, author and speaker Joan Chittister puts it this way:

The truth of the matter is that, though we may be suffering from what we have lost in this generation, we are also suffering from what has increased in it as well. In a culture of computers and cars and personal independence, we have not only bartered stability in the society; we have also added to it a touch of despair, a tinge of frenzy. The planet is in orbit; the country is in orbit; families are in orbit. People move from place to place and fad to fad and idea to idea. Everything is in flux. Everybody is going somewhere for something else. Everybody is scrambling. Everybody is straining and stretching to get more of something: more things, more security, more status, more power.⁵

In other words, with all of our society's material resources and opportunities, people feel off-balance and disoriented. In a sea of daily change, the quest for what is newest and most powerful creates a culture where dissatisfaction is the one universal constant.

Sociologist Susan S. Phillips refers to "the dark side of our contemporary culture: a circus-like environment of fragmented attention and fractured relationships."⁶ As technology increases the need to multi-task, our attention is divided and our relationships suffer. This adds to the base level of anxiety in our culture.

Likewise, sociologist and activist Parker Palmer sees a growing gulf between "soul and role." On the basis of examples from the headlines as well as his own

⁵ Joan D. Chittister, *Heart of Flesh: A Feminist Spirituality for Women and Men* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 93.

⁶ Susan S. Phillips, *The Cultivated Life: From Ceaseless Striving to Receiving Joy* (Downers Grove, IL: ivpress.com/books) Kindle Electronic Edition, 19.

experience, Palmer asserts that in their jobs and relationships people as whole sense a widespread lack of genuineness and integration between their inner and outer lives. This dis-integration creates anxiety, competition and alienation in society.⁷ Wheeling is no exception.

Thus, one reference for the project herein described is lack of self-integration in the culture around us, as described by Chittister and Palmer. This situation represents a clear opportunity for ministry. “The challenge is to choose and participate in our spiritual cultivation within a captivating circus-like culture,” says Phillips.⁸ One of the roles of today’s church in our fragmented world can be to promote the spiritual cultivation of which Phillips speaks. However, while the fragmentation of modern experience makes development of one’s spirituality a necessity, the same fragmentation inhibits such development.

New Ways of “Doing Church”

At the same time, church as mainstream Americans have understood it for generations is changing. Many churches are shrinking and some have closed. Denominational loyalty is weak, and cultural expectations no longer include church affiliation.⁹ For families, Sunday mornings have been taken over by youth sports.

⁷ Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), Kindle Electronic Edition, 94.

⁸ Phillips, *The Cultivated Life*, 22.

⁹ “The religiously unaffiliated (also called the “nones”) now account for 23% of the adult population, up from 16% in 2007.” Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life, “U.S. Becoming Less Religious,” November 5, 2015,

Scandals, schisms and unpopular social attitudes have turned people off from the institutional church.

New ways of “doing church” to keep alive the kingdom-of-God message of Jesus Christ have been proposed: house churches, “Emerging Church,” cyber-church.¹⁰ Obviously our habitual understanding of church, with a capacious physical plant and full-time clergy, is not the only way to do church. The time to look at alternatives has clearly come.

On the other hand, many of the alternatives proposed do not fit every struggling church. For example, though a recent survey in the Episcopal Church pointed out that growing churches tend to use drums to accompany worship,¹¹ adding drums by itself is not going to solve the problems of most shrinking churches. One size does not fit all.

If God’s purpose is to redeem creation, God is not going to be thwarted by changing tastes, evolving demographics and technological evolution. God isn’t finished

<http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/> (accessed February 17, 2017).

¹⁰ For the modern house church movement see Charles E. Hummel, “The Church at Home: the House Church Movement,” in *Christianity Today: Christian History*, issue 9: Heritage of Freedom: Dissenters, Reformers, & Pioneers, 1986, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-9/church-at-home-house-church-movement.html> (accessed February 16, 2017). For emergent church see Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012). On cyber church see Sarah Pullman, “The Art of Cyber Church,” in *Christianity Today: Guest/ Limited Access*, September 2009, Vol. 53, no. 9, pg. 50, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/september/29.50.html> (accessed February 16, 2017).

¹¹ C. Kirk Hadaway, *New FACTS on Episcopal Church Growth and Decline: A look at the dynamics of growth and decline in Episcopal congregations based on the 2014 Survey of Episcopal Congregations, in conjunction with the Faith Communities Today (FACT) ecumenical/interfaith survey project* (New York: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 2015), 14.

with us yet. Our vocation individually, and collectively as communities as faith, is still to build the kingdom of God. If the old ways aren't working as well as they used to, what new ways can we try?

Reinventing ourselves from the ground up may not be practical or even possible. Surely it makes sense to assess our existing strengths and build on those. This is the concept behind the community-building plan developed by John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight known as "Asset-Based Community Development", or "ABCD."¹² What works in community activism to energize neighborhoods ought to work in the parish. At Lawrencefield, therefore, we are attempting to build on our strengths in order to live out our vocation to build the kingdom of God.

Bricks

In the Exodus story, Moses and his brother Aaron go to Pharaoh to convey God's order that Pharaoh let the enslaved people of Israel go worship in the wilderness. Pharaoh of course is contemptuous. If the people have so much time on their hands that they can leave their labors for a three-day journey, Pharaoh decrees, they can instead collect their own straw for brick-making. However, they will still be expected to produce their former

¹² See John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets* (Chicago: Acta Publications, 1993). ABCD grew from the observation that charity as it is usually offered to needy communities, whether in the American city or the African bush, tends to create a passive population, whereas seeking out and enlisting the community's existing assets produces more sustainable results. I attended a church-sponsored retreat on ABCD where the emphasis was on what churches can do in community revitalization. While that is not, strictly speaking, my specific interest in this project, I am convinced that building from gifts is more efficacious than simply addressing weaknesses.

quota of bricks. The impossibility of this task is presented as an example of the unbearable oppression imposed upon the people of Israel, and of Pharaoh's unreasonable "hardness of heart."¹³

Sending people out to do the work they have to do with insufficient resources while expecting productive results is unreasonable and even heartless. Yet this is what is often unconsciously done to congregational leaders.

The church is called to support congregational leaders with prayer and worship. The church's work is, in fact, to be rooted in prayer and worship.¹⁴ Otherwise the church is just another social service or fraternal organization. Without a foundation in prayer, the various functions of church workers and officers become jobs to fill rather than ministries. Churches generally provide their leaders with adequate corporate worship opportunities, but may not be providing *all* the spiritual underpinnings that congregational leaders need to support their lives and ministry.

Many adults currently serving the church were taught how to pray as children, either by rote (The Lord's Prayer, or "Now I lay me down to sleep") or by formula ("God bless Mommy and Daddy and my pet hamster..."). The limitations of such an approach for an adult living in the modern world with many complex cares and responsibilities are obvious. A possible remedy is to tap into the many spiritual resources that have

¹³ Exodus 5:1-9.

¹⁴ The Catechism of the Episcopal Church states that "The Church pursues its mission as it *prays and worships*, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes, justice, peace and love: (Italics mine.) *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing, 1979), 855.

accumulated in the Christian tradition for many centuries and intentionally present them to our congregational leaders.

Prior exposure to the rich tapestry of Christian prayer tradition for the average adult Christian may be minimal, even among those who rise to leadership roles in the congregation. As a consequence, adult Christians may be using the same personal rituals they learned in kindergarten. They may have a vague sense, spoken or unspoken, that their prayer life lacks something, but they don't know what to do about it. They may even be secretly ashamed that they don't know more about prayer. They are supposed to be leaders in the church! But they may not even know where to find the books and classes that might present them with more effective, mature forms of prayer. And if they do locate these resources, they may find them discouragingly difficult or misleading if they don't have personal guidance and support.

They are ministers of the church. They are supposed to do God's work. They are doing the best they can, but they don't have all the materials they need to do their work confidently and well. They don't have the straw to make the bricks they are expected to produce. This represents another reference point for my project.

Opportunity and Vocabulary

Could one of the reasons mainstream churches are shrinking be that religion is no longer being successfully passed from one person to another, from one generation to another? Mainstream Christians don't seem to talk a lot about their faith with each other, even within the safe confines of the parish itself: *even* within their families. To illustrate, I once heard about an Episcopal clergy conference where the presenter asked the assembled priests how many of them had adult children who still attend church. When

only two priests raised their hands, the presenter sadly observed, “We have failed to commend the faith that is in us.”¹⁵

Why don't people talk about their faith? They may feel the subject is too personal. They may think that everybody's way to God is valid and their way will have no intrinsic value to another person. They may be ashamed they don't know enough, or that they're not “good” enough in their relationship with God. They may fear being obnoxious or offensive, having experienced Christians who are either or both. Or they may not have the language. They may not even have what they feel is an appropriate opportunity to talk about their faith with others.

These drawbacks do not exonerate baptized persons from the call to ministry implicit in baptism. As indicated above, baptism means vocation. How is a pastor to encourage the baptized in fulfillment of their Christian vocation in the world? What are some ways we can give our people the tools to discern and fulfill their baptismal vocation?

Answering this question requires consideration of the very nature of vocation. Vocation involves the identification of two things: what one has to offer, and what the world needs. The former depends on the unique gifts of the individual or congregation. The latter depends on the specific situation of the individual or congregation. As writer-theologian Frederick Buchner says, “The place God calls you to is the place where your

¹⁵ This is a reference to a confessional prayer in the “Litany of Penitence” from the Ash Wednesday service in the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer*, 268.

deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.”¹⁶ Buechner here presents a neat equation to describe the nature of vocation: Gifts plus situation equals vocation.

Deep Gladness

In general terms, the forgoing provides most of the “dirt” for the project described in this paper. Earlier I described the context in which my congregation finds itself: widespread social anxiety, anger, fear and dis-integration, all of which undermine both personal relationships and the kingdom of God itself locally (in Wheeling) and abroad. This situation represents one half of the vocation equation: the “deep hunger” of Buechner’s definition. Social changes are threatening the church as we have known it while we Christians are failing to pass on the Good News of our faith.

The remaining “dirt” to identify is the other half of the vocation equation: gifts. What are the unique gifts, Buechner’s “deep gladness,” that Lawrencefield Parish Church can bring to meet the deep hunger we see around us?

My 2015 congregational study of Lawrencefield Parish Church provided the following insights:

1. Leaders in the congregation report a sense of abundance, belonging, fellowship and joy.
2. Leadership and faith seem strongly linked.
3. People identified as “leaders” tend to characterize themselves rather as “helpers.”
4. Parishioners welcome direction in spiritual matters.

¹⁶ Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC* (New York: Harper One, 1993), 135.

In summary, in this congregation spirituality is strong but untrained. Spiritually speaking, people in this parish are like athletes with great native talent who might go further with focus and encouragement. This situation represents evidence of gifts to be educated and tapped.

These are the “ABCD” assets upon which Lawrencefield can build a ministry to this hurting, angry world: modelling self-integration, respectful discourse and kingdom-of-God values. We can’t solve all of the world’s problems, but we can make ourselves as spiritually healthy as we can be: by learning strategies for soul-building and for dealing with the pains and challenges of everyday life, and demonstrating this health and these skills in our interactions inside and outside of the church community.

The greater Church already possesses the resources to make this happen. Christianity has a practically limitless tradition of spiritual instruction from which to draw. The richness of this tradition has too long remained the province of the spiritual elite in any given parish. All human beings are spiritual by nature. One does not have to be a scholar or an accomplished mystic to avail oneself of the vast riches of the Christian spiritual tradition. One only needs access and opportunity.

Congregational leaders may have no idea of the readily available resources upon which they can draw that will build their spiritual confidence, enhance their relationship with God, support their ministries in the church, and approach life’s issues in a more intentionally prayerful way. The project described in this thesis paper describes how all these results are possible with a simple course of intentional study combined with regular group meetings.

My hope is that my findings will be useful to other leaders of congregations by giving them the spiritual straw they need to make the bricks of ministry.

CHAPTER 1

THE PLANS: THESIS AND HYPOTHESIS

Lawrencefield Parish Church is gifted with a spirit of peace and cooperation. Here leadership is understood as “helping” and is associated with having faith. This is a profound resource. Larger organizations and the world at large in many cases must attempt to cultivate this spirit through deliberate programming. Yet this same spirit abounds at Lawrencefield, this small parish. Perhaps within the parameters in which these parishioners live, move and have their being, Lawrencefielders can be exporters of the peace and joy already experienced at church. I concluded my Institutional Study by saying:

The aim of our efforts in supporting spirituality at Lawrencefield needs not only to be a closer relationship with God, but to serve the Kingdom of God in the world. Here at Lawrencefield, we have joy, faith and love. The world needs joy, faith and love. We need to be in the export business.¹⁷

In beginning this project, I was convinced that the faith that undergirds leadership here could be encouraged and translated into outside ministry by spiritual training: the provision of spiritual resources from the Christian tradition, the encouragement of the exercise of spiritual disciplines, and the fostering of an understanding of baptismal vocation, within the supportive environment of small groups and with the sponsorship of

¹⁷ The Rev. Cynthia Byers Walter, "The Export Business: An Institutional Study of Lawrencefield Parish Church, Wheeling, WV," (Virginia Theological Seminary, 2014), 25.

the whole parish. Thus fortified, parishioners would leave church on Sunday equipped to be, intentionally and effectively, the church in the world. Seeing themselves as well-equipped ministers of Christ by virtue of their baptism, they would be empowered to embrace their individual and collective vocations, taking the peace and joy we experience within our congregation outside its walls.

Personal Motivation

I first tested this hypothesis by considering my own experience. My own vocational discernment was certainly rooted in my experience of prayer and spirituality. In my own case, awareness of my baptismal vocation emerged from my exploration of spirituality, under professional and caring guidance, and in the company of like-minded peers.

How universal is this pattern? I wondered. In my own case exploration of spiritual disciplines increased my awareness of my baptismal vocation, eventually resulting in discernment of my call to ordination. I therefore conceived the project that forms the basis of this paper as a test of the thesis that "Fostering spiritual disciplines increases awareness of baptismal vocation."

Here at Lawrencefield Parish Church, this concern dovetailed with the observation that my parishioners were eager and enthusiastic about developing their spirituality, and the conviction that, in a spiritually hurting world, their gifts of joy, community, and ministry would be an obvious use of native gifts. It seemed a given that if baptismal ministry could be stimulated through supplying the spiritual guidance for which my people seemed to hunger, then we could both address their desire for spiritual growth and also contribute to healing in the larger community.

Argument

The argument for this project is fourfold: In the first place, our parish ministry both as individuals and also as a community is based in the Christian's baptismal covenant. Serving the kingdom of God is something for which we have vowed to strive and to which we are called. Service in the world which builds the kingdom of God and grows out of baptismal identity is what I call "baptismal vocation."

Secondly, many parishioners are already involved in kingdom-of-God work in their families, jobs and free time. Identification of kingdom-of-God work already happening will build awareness of lay ministry.

Thirdly, promoting and exercising baptismal ministry needs to be couched in terms of personal and congregational vocation, and the discernment of what that might be.

Finally the project was conceived as a communal venture: one that emphasizes not only personal spiritual development, but also common parish life, along with the collective call to serve the greater community.

These references suggested that an effective intervention would involve development of spiritual resources, including the understanding of baptismal ministry, cultivation of a kingdom-of-God outlook, and discernment of personal gifts and vocation, in the supportive environment of circles of trust¹⁸ and the congregational family.

Earlier, in the context of hypothesizing why more mainstream Christians don't share their faith stories, I proposed that these people may not have either a spiritual

¹⁸ A circle of trust is a small group "where people can take an inner journey toward living 'divided no more.'" Palmer, "Gratitudes," *A Hidden Wholeness*, Location 39.

vocabulary to talk about their faith or the opportunity to do so. The project described in this paper provided access to spiritual resources and the opportunity for spiritual development and faith-sharing to a variety of congregational leaders with differing spiritual experience, educational backgrounds, aptitudes and learning styles.

As a result of this intervention, I reasoned, participants should be aware of themselves as Christian ministers, be given the tools to discern vocation, and, consciously equipped with spiritual resources, would carry kingdom-of-God values more confidently into their weekday dealings.

The results, while not exactly the results expected, were abundantly rewarding and of potential value to pastors seeking to raise spiritual confidence in their congregational leaders, inspiring and empowering them to take kingdom-of-God values into the spheres in which they operate outside the church.

The need for kingdom-of-God values in these spheres is self-evident. The internet and other media, both traditional and electronic, serve as ubiquitous vehicles for anger, egotism, superficiality and paranoia. People need an alternative venue for sharing matters of ultimate concern. They need a model for constructive, respectful intercourse and connection on matters of what has deepest meaning for them. People are hungry for such an outlet and such a model. The church is in an ideal position for providing both.

Many people, even those in leadership positions in church, are not in the habit of talking about their faith. They may have neither the opportunity nor the vocabulary. Yet the passing on of the faith requires that the current generation of believers communicate somehow with the next generation. The church, again, is in an ideal position to provide both opportunity and vocabulary for faith-sharing.

The kingdom of God is built when people exercise their spiritual gifts, but many people, even congregational leaders, hesitate to recognize themselves as gifted for ministry, perhaps through a sense of modesty or fear of arrogance. Educating people about spiritual gifts and giving people the tools to identify their gifts gives them confidence to stretch themselves in kingdom-of-God ministry. It is the calling of all Christians through baptism to build the kingdom of God. The church is in a unique position to help people identify and use their spiritual gifts in the service of the kingdom of God. I am concerned to provide congregational leaders with all the support they need to take their gifts, and therefore their ministry, outside the walls of the church into the world, in fulfillment of their baptismal vocation.

The next part of this chapter describes how I arrived at my initial thesis that fostering spiritual disciplines increases awareness of baptismal vocation. The final section describes how the project designed to test this thesis led to somewhat different conclusions.

Original Thesis Statement

Spiritual interest and hunger in my parish were evident, but untapped as a resource in ministry. Educating, developing and focusing this energy by exercising different approaches of prayer, exploring baptismal theology, and sharing meaningfully in small groups while in communication with the congregation at large, would, I believed, equip lay people with spiritual resources that enable them to discern vocation, understand themselves as ministers, and function consciously as ministers in the secular circles in which they move.

Thus my original thesis statement was that members who participated in the program would be able to express an understanding of themselves as ministers by virtue of baptism, name spiritual resources upon which they can draw, and articulate a greater sense of integration between “soul” and “role” as defined by Parker Palmer. The short form of this was *fostering spiritual disciplines increases awareness of baptismal vocation*.

The study process did not prove this thesis directly, as the following chapter, which describes the project, will show. Awareness of baptismal vocation did not increase as a direct result of the fostering of spiritual disciplines that genuinely occurred. However, participants indicated a greatly increased range of spiritual resources. And, indirectly at least, through their responses to exit questionnaires and interviews, they were able to articulate enhanced spiritual integration between “soul” and “role.” Furthermore, their confidence as spiritual persons increased radically, which confidence bore fruit in both their prayer lives and their relationships.

My thesis began to evolve.

Revised Thesis Statement

The evidence for enhanced baptismal vocation as a result of fostering spiritual practices did not materialize. However another quite remarkable phenomenon emerged. At the beginning of the project nearly every participant expressed an uneasiness at being part of a group whose focus was spirituality. The problem was not that they had no interest in spirituality. They had a great deal. Neither was the problem that they did not consider themselves spiritual. They all did. The problem was that they did not consider themselves *spiritual enough*. They lacked what I came to call “spiritual confidence.”

Furthermore this lack of spiritual confidence was a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy, further inhibiting their spiritual development.

By the end of the project, no one doubted that they belonged in the group, and in fact wanted to continue meeting once the original exercises were complete. Their capacity for self-expression in spiritual matters increased dramatically. Several reported beneficial effects of their enhanced prayer lives on their relationships outside church.

My thesis had to evolve. My thesis, based on my findings, became: *Guided spiritual exercises and group support provide congregational leaders with needed confidence for speaking meaningfully about their prayer lives, growing spiritually and sharing with others about their faith.* The operative factors are providing both a spiritual vocabulary and a safe environment to practice spiritual sharing.

Nurturing baptismal identity in congregational leaders remains a vital goal, as I will explain in Chapter 5 of this paper, but the process of doing this is somewhat more complex than I originally envisioned.

The nurturing of spirituality is definitely a part of encouraging baptismal vocation, but does not appear to have a necessarily causal relationship to it. Dedicated baptismal instruction is indicated, especially for adults who were baptized as infants and are not in the habit of reflecting on the implications of being baptized for their ongoing Christian journey. At any point in this journey, however, the fostering of spiritual practices provides an invaluable stimulus for congregational leaders, as this study demonstrated.

Enhanced spiritual confidence on the part of congregational leaders has implications for evangelism, Christian formation, strengthening community and doing

“church without walls.” These possibilities will be explored more fully in Chapter 6 of this paper.

I suspect that even casually organized prayer groups would have some beneficial effect on spiritual confidence in congregational leaders. However, the disciplined structure of my dedicated course in spirituality, combined with meaningful group sharing, saw a truly dramatic flowering of spiritual confidence over a relatively short period of time.

The next chapter describes the design, the implementation and the outcome of this project.

CHAPTER 2

ASSEMBLING MATERIALS: THE PROJECT

Evolution of an Idea

The initial inspiration for this project was the idea of doing church in a new way, not dependent on the old assumptions of always having a large physical plant and full-time on-site clergy. At the same time, the study context would be Lawrencefield Parish, a parish that currently has both a physical plant and dedicated clergy. Even here, however, it might be possible to form “a community within the community” to test the idea that a group of people could function as a sort of “mini-church,” supporting each other in serving Christ and God’s people without a building and a full-time priest being integral or necessary.

What if a parish could sponsor a community-within-the-community that covenanted for daily prayer, spiritual study, and regular group meetings for mutual support, along the lines of the lay orders of monastic houses? As models, the Third Order of the Franciscans comes to mind,¹⁹ as well as the international association of

¹⁹ “The Third Order of the Society of St. Francis is an Anglican/Episcopal religious order for people of all kinds — single and in committed relationships, lay and ordained—who live by Franciscan principles ‘in the world.’” The Third Order of the Society of St. Francis, Province of the Americas: *Home*, <http://tssf.org/>, 2017 (accessed February 9, 2017).

Benedictine Oblates.²⁰ Within the Episcopal Church, groups like the Daughters of the King covenant for daily prayer, ministry, regular worship and chapter meetings.²¹ Such a community could exist without walls, perhaps even in a virtual environment.

Some kind of trained facilitation would obviously be necessary. As the rector of my parish, I could supply this facilitation in a prototype group at Lawrencefield, but conceivably lay persons could be trained to facilitate future groups in other places. A model for spiritual encouragement in community not dependent on clergy or a building could be tested even in the presence of clergy and a building.

Such was the concept. Reality soon demanded adaptation. The idea of a “Third Order” community-within-the-community met with confusion and uncertainty when presented to the small group of parish educators and leaders who served as my advisory committee. This was not, I knew, resistance to innovation, but a genuine sense on their part of a bad fit. The consensus of the committee was that the “Third Order” model was not well-suited to Lawrencefield.

There was however considerable enthusiasm over spiritual exploration, consistent with the findings of the previous congregational study. Discussion continued, looking for

²⁰ “Oblates of St. Benedict are Christian individuals or families who have associated themselves with a Benedictine community in order to enrich their Christian way of life. Oblates shape their lives by living the wisdom of Christ as interpreted by St. Benedict. Oblates seek God to become holy in their chosen way of life. By integrating their prayer and work, they manifest Christ’s presence in society.” OSB, *The Order of An Introduction*, 1995-2009 (rev. May 7, 2015), <http://www.osb.org/obl/intro.html>, (accessed February 9, 2017).

²¹ “A Daughter pledges herself to a life-long program of Prayer, Service, and Evangelism, dedicated to the spread of Christ’s Kingdom and the strengthening of the spiritual life of her parish.” *The Order of the Daughters of the King: Our Rule of Life*, <http://www.doknational.org/>, (accessed February 9, 2017).

a way to address the very real spiritual hunger in the parish but with more specific direction than that suggested by the Third Order model.

When the idea of spiritual workbooks emerged, the committee were quick to get on board.²² Workbooks are a proven tool in spiritual development. Maxie Dunnam's workbook series from Upper Room is an excellent example, still in print after several decades. I had personal experience with these workbooks in a previous parish and knew them to be effective.²³

It remained to test the workbook idea with colleagues and mentors, who affirmed the general viability of the project. Creating a community-within-the community could take shape around the chapter meetings initially envisioned for the "Third Order" concept, but workbooks of daily exercises would explicitly guide spiritual practice. The vast tradition of Christian spirituality provided abundant material for the workbooks.

Conforming the workbooks to discreet seasons of the church year, Advent and Lent, was a logical choice, providing both a thematic framework as well as a practical term for the exercise. I prepared separate programs for each of the two seasons.

The Friends of St. Lawrence

Plans for the program were announced in October. Participation was limited to ten persons: a group large enough to represent a range of prayer experience, but small

²² Spiritual directors are familiar with this phenomenon: there is a point in the discernment process when things fall into place, and there is a sense of arriving at a place of truth.

²³ The best of this series in my opinion is Maxie Dunnam, *The Workbook of Intercessory Prayer* (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1979).

enough to allow for meaningful sharing during group meetings. Seven persons volunteered, all from the leadership core of the parish. I personally invited three additional persons who had been identified as leaders in a previous congregational survey.

My rationale in focusing on parish leaders was that the leaders network with a wide variety of other persons in the congregation. I reasoned that involving the leaders might cascade into eventually involving other members.

The group was dubbed “The Friends of St. Lawrence” after the patron saint of our parish, and abbreviated “FSL.”

Chapter Meetings

A group component was part of the concept from the very beginning. The reasons for this were many:

- The community-building value of group meetings has been well tested and proven over centuries in the monastic and para-monastic (Third-Order) tradition.
- People engaged in a common task may, in regular meetings, learn from and support each other.
- Only by hearing from and about other seekers may participants recognize the rich variety of religious experience, while finding common ground.
- From my work in spiritual gifts workshops and retreats, I know that group work is invaluable in validating one’s unique gifts and personal experience.
- Bearing partial responsibility for group discussion, each participant has the opportunity to mature in prayer, becoming less dependent upon the Leader.

- Studying prayer in a group helps one avoid isolation, preventing the development of quirky and unwholesome prayer habits.

For all these reasons, the Friends of St. Lawrence were to meet weekly at what we called “Chapter Meetings.” Each Chapter Meeting was to begin with a “sharing circle,” on the lines of Parker Palmer’s “Circles of Trust,” during which each participant would be allowed to share their experience of the last week’s exercises without interruption, question or comment from anyone else.²⁴

In execution, Chapter meetings proved to be a favorite part of the program for most participants. Once everyone had had an uninterrupted chance to share about their experiences of the preceding week, conversational exchanges were allowed to spring up naturally, with the understanding that everyone’s experience was to be respected. Normally we concluded Chapter with another sharing circle, when each person shared a single word or concept that he or she would take away from the session.

The Advent Workbook²⁵

Advent introduced a daily framework for spiritual exploration, to promote the idea of prayer as “time spent with God,” rather than verbal prayer, or prayer for specific outcomes.

Each week began with a daily reflection on the Sunday lectionary or sermon, to promote the practice of prayer as listening rather than speaking. These Sunday exercises

²⁴ Circles of trust are characterized by “clear limits, skilled leadership, open invitations, common ground and graceful ambience.” Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, Chapter 5, Location 765.

²⁵ See Appendix A.

were a sort of “Lectio Divina,” encouraging participants to identify a single word, phrase or concept from the Sunday worship as the foundation for reflection and prayer, relevant to their present situation.

Each week ended with a Saturday reflection on the exercises of the previous week, not only to review, but also to look for patterns of prayer and awareness. I intended, this way, to encourage openness to God’s continuing communication and guidance and observe whether there was spiritual growth over the term of the project.

I conceived the weekdays of Advent as a sort of extended Ignatian Examen.²⁶ The classic Examen is conducted in its entirety once or twice every day. As commonly taught today, the Examen consists of five steps: Becoming aware of God’s presence, Reflecting on the day past to identify moments when one felt close to God, Reflecting on the day past to identify moments that felt distant from God, Asking for God’s enlightenment as to how God’s guidance is thus manifest, and Closing with a prayer to be thus moved in the future.²⁷

I adapted this method to three-and-a-half weeks of daily exercises: the first week cultivating awareness of God’s presence, the second week contemplating our closeness to

²⁶ The Examen is a daily spiritual discipline of reviewing the events of the day or hours past for evidence of the movement of God in one’s life, developed by Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, in the sixteenth century. Ignatius describes the process in his classic text, *The Spiritual Exercises*, nos. 24-26, 32.

²⁷ I use the Puhl translation. *The Spiritual Exercises*, Translated by Louis J. Puhl, SJ (New York: Vintage Spiritual Classics, 2000), 20. I also refer to the simplified, modern-language treatment of the Examen in Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn and Matthew Linn, *Sleeping With Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 6-7.

God, the third week considering occasions of distance from God, and the fourth a synthesis of how God may be moving in the individual's life.

I entitled the exercises for the First Week of Advent, devoted to cultivating awareness of God's presence, "Abiding in Love". Using Scripture and a few lines from Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, the participant was invited to experience God's nearness.

Building on this awareness, the Second Week, entitled "God's Presence in You," emphasized spiritual gifts. God is so close that God actually dwells within, working in each person through his or her unique constellation of gifts. I hoped spotlighting spiritual gifts would inspire reflection on individual vocation and baptismal ministry.

Having addressed the closeness of God through one's giftedness, the Third Week explored the contrary sensation, those occasions of sensing God's distance. Here Psalms of Lamentation opened the week. Ignatius's concept of Consolation and Desolation²⁸ and Henri Nouwen's theory of the Wounded Healer²⁹ were then introduced. The week closed with exercises in discerning God's movement in painful moments and negative circumstances.

I intended that the exercises for the Fourth Week of Advent pull together the experiences of the previous month, including a healing meditation to bring the previous week's concentration on God's distance full circle. This short week (Christmas was on a Friday) concluded with a meditation on waiting on God, expecting something wonderful to happen at Christmas.

²⁸ Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises*, nos. 316.3 and 317.4.

²⁹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Image Books, 1990.)

The Lent Workbook³⁰

After the hiatus of Christmas and Epiphany Seasons, I introduced a new workbook in Lent. The title of this series was *A Cloud of Witnesses*. A variety of saints and spiritual writers with insights into developing relationship with God were presented, each of the five weeks of Lent featuring a different saint.

I restricted the choice of spiritual authorities to writers with standing in the tradition and recognized relevance to a variety of Christians over the centuries. I attempted to provide a variety of approaches, in hopes of providing “something for everyone,” while remaining firmly within the bounds of orthodoxy. As in Advent, I based each Sunday exercise from the Lent Workbook on the day’s readings and sermon. Again, Saturday involved a review of the week.

Our first spiritual writer was St. Francis of Assisi. I based my decision to begin with Francis on Monsignor Chester Michael and Marie Norrisey’s finding that in their own research: “There was a strong preference for the Franciscan type of prayer by all personalities.” Michael and Norrisey posit that Francis’ “free-spirited and open attitude” appeals to the modern mindset.³¹ Starting with an accessible form of prayer seemed advisable not knowing what exact personality types or prayer experience might be represented in the group.

The over-arching theme for Francis was “oneness.” The five daily themes were “Oneness with Creation,” featuring the famous *Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister*

³⁰ See Appendix B.

³¹ Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrisey. *Prayer and Temperament: Different Prayer Forms for Different Personality Types* (Charlottesville: The Open Door, 1991), 27.

Moon,³²“Oneness with Humanity,” based on *A Prayer Attributed to St. Francis* (“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;”³³ “Oneness with the ‘Least,” which related the story of St. Francis and the Leper from *The Legend of Three Companions*; “Oneness with Christ,” in which the story of St. Francis receiving the stigmata from *Legenda Minor of St. Bonaventure* was related; and “Oneness with Oneself,” which quoted from *The First Rule of St. Francis*.³⁴

In the second week of Lent, the workbook introduced St. Benedict of Nursia’s *Lectio Divina*. The theory in this placement is that “Lectio,” like Franciscan prayer, is “suitable to all basic temperaments.”³⁵ With its four-part method of *Lectio* (Reading,) *Meditatio* (Reflecting,) *Oratio* (Responding,) and *Contemplation* (Internalizing,) *Lectio Divina* also provides a solid, basic pattern for any Bible-based spiritual discipline.

I drew scriptural material for this week from the daily lectionary for The Second Week of Lent 2016. Thus the five selections for the week came from the Gospel of Mark: 3:13-15 (The Appointment of the Twelve); 3:31-35 (“Who are my mother and my brothers?”); 4:14-20 (The Parable of the Sower); 4:30-32 (The Mustard Seed); and 4:35-41 (The Calming of the Sea.)

The Third Week of Lent presented another Francis: St. Francis deSales, particularly his teaching on the cultivation of virtues. Each weekday featured a virtue

³² St. Francis of Assisi, *Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon*, <http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=183>, (accessed October 12, 2016.)

³³ Book of Common Prayer, 833.

³⁴ Francis and Clare: *The Complete Works*, Translated and Introduction by Regis J. Armstrong, OFM CAP and Ignatius C. Brady, OFM (New York: Paulist Press, 1982.)

³⁵ Michael and Norrissey, *Prayer and Temperament*, 31.

described by Francis in his classic *Introduction to the Devout Life*.³⁶ The five virtues receiving special attention were Patience, Humility, Gentleness with Others, Gentleness toward Ourselves, and Temperance.

Our Fourth Week featured the most modern among our spiritual writers, Evelyn Underhill. I based the decision to introduce Underhill this late in the program on a previous experience with an adult education program based on her *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People*. I had considered Underhill's presentation to be very straightforward, but participants in the previous program (there were only three) struggled with her abstract language. Thus I decided to focus only on the earliest stages of Underhill's instruction in mysticism, to give our group a taste of her approach that they could later pursue in depth if they wanted to.

The first Underhill exercises in the Lent Workbook merely explained her broad definition of mysticism. Underhill says simply that, "Mysticism is the art of union with Reality."³⁷ The rest of the week explored what Underhill calls "Recollection." For the purposes of the workbook, I broke the practice of Recollection into three parts: first concentrating on one object to the exclusion of distractions, then turning that purified attention to "the real you," then moving from Recollection to "stretching out in love."

I chose St. Ignatius of Loyola for the final week of Lent, on the theory that Ignatius' method of projecting oneself back into biblical scenes is excellent preparation for participating in Holy Week. As with the week spent with *Lectio Divina*, selections

³⁶ St. Francis of Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life* (Christian Classics Ethereal Library), Kindle Electronic Edition.

³⁷ Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1915), Kindle Electronic Edition: Chapter 1, Location 95.

from the lectionary for the week provided the basis for the daily meditations. Once again, these came from the Gospel of Mark: 9:30-37 (“Whoever wants to be first must be last”); 9:38-41 (“Whoever is not against us is for us”); 10:13-16 (Jesus and the Children); 10:17-22 (The Rich Young Ruler”); and 10:35-40 (“The cup that I drink.”) I concluded the Lenten booklets by offering optional exercises loosely based on an Ignatian approach for the days of Holy Week.

During the Lent session, I offered background material on each of the saints under consideration during Chapter meetings, but took care that participants’ experience with the exercises, rather than the historical background, remained the focus.

The choice of these five saints was admittedly arbitrary. I chose them because I am familiar with them and have found them personally helpful. Michael and Norrissey, with their suggestions about presenting different spiritual approaches to different personality types, provided additional guidance.

Interviews and Questionnaires

I administered questionnaires and conducted entrance interviews at the outset of the project. I based the questionnaires loosely upon the Duke University Religion Index,³⁸ modified to reflect an emphasis on awareness of baptismal vocation. Entrance questionnaires established a baseline for concept of spirituality, current spiritual practice, awareness of God’s presence, awareness of baptismal vocation, satisfaction with prayer

³⁸ Harold G. Koenig and Arndt Büssing. *The Duke University Religion Index (DUREL): A Five-Item Measure for Use in Epidemiological Studies*, *Religions* 2010, 1, 78-85; doi:10.3390/rel1010078 religions ISSN 2077-1444 www.mdpi.com/journal/religions, (accessed October 1, 2016).

life, and current prayer concerns.³⁹ Participants filled out a similar questionnaire and were again interviewed at the conclusion of the Advent session in an attempt to measure movement in any of these areas.⁴⁰ The process was repeated a third time at the conclusion of the Lent session.⁴¹

Reactions to the different saints varied among participants. As expected, St. Francis of Assisi was popular. Benedict's *Lectio Divina* met a more reserved reception, except for the meditation on the Parable of the Sower, which clearly captured the general imagination of the group. The pictorial nature of that particular scripture seemed to make it easier to conceptualize and discuss. Francis deSales proved a happy discovery to people who had never heard of him before, and his topical approach to the virtues fostered spirited discussion in Chapter. Underhill was the biggest surprise. Based on my previous experience with Underhill in a small group I had expected her appeal to be small, but one person with previous experience in meditation related to martial arts found deep resonance here. Ignatius met a mixed reception. As I had hoped, however, every participant found something in each week to enrich his or her spiritual experience and enhance confidence in prayer.

³⁹ See Appendix C for the Entrance Questionnaire and Appendix D for Entrance Interview Questions.

⁴⁰ See Appendix E for the Advent Exit Questionnaire and Appendix F for Advent Exit Interview Questions.

⁴¹ At the conclusion of the Lent session, the Advent Exit Questionnaire in Appendix E was re-administered with additional questions which may be found in Appendix G. The Lent Exit Interview consisted of the same questions asked in the Advent Exit Interview, with the final question revised as noted at the end of Appendix F.

I found the particular choice of spiritual experts, in the end, not as important as exposing the group to a variety of approaches to spirituality, all of them valid and all of them orthodox. Presenting several prayer methods spanning several centuries provided ample evidence to FSL participants that spirituality is both inherently human and specific to the individual, reinforcing their own native spirituality while exposing them to previously unknown methods that might stimulate their prayer lives.

Findings

My findings did not directly support the hypothesis that fostering spiritual disciplines increases awareness of baptismal vocation. Several participants reported a greater awareness of their vocation as baptized persons as a result of having also attended a separate series that I offered to our local Cluster of four Episcopal churches during Wednesdays during Lent, but such awareness arose from attending lectures explicitly about baptism during the Cluster series rather than from their spiritual exercises with the Friends of St. Lawrence.

These results indicate that my own experience of having awareness of vocation emerge from spiritual practice is not universal, or even general, at least within the time frame of this project. However, the concentrated spiritual exercises had the unforeseen effect of increasing the spiritual confidence of every single participant.

At the outset of the project, nearly every participant had expressed doubt about “belonging” in a group whose focus was spirituality. People seemed almost embarrassed about their assumed lack of spiritual experience and expertise. They did not feel qualified to talk about prayer, and were particularly reluctant to conceive of themselves as spiritually gifted in any way. These were congregational leaders – the ones identified by

others in the congregation as their go-to people for everything from hospitality to building maintenance! They were considered by their peers to be persons of exemplary faith. Yet even they lacked spiritual confidence.

One person, a former senior warden who had very ably shepherded the congregation through the challenges of the last clergy search, demurred when asked what her ministry was. “I wonder if I have a ministry,” she said.

Yet despite their initial self-effacing attitude toward spirituality, each person noticeably grew in confidence during the course of the project, more willing both to share personal experience in prayer, spend more time in prayer, try more types of prayer and consult with their peers about their prayer lives. The long-term effects of this growth are potentially far-reaching, as the leaders in the congregation consciously root their ministry and leadership in their relationship with God, and demonstrate that rootedness to the rest of the congregation and in the spheres in which they live and move.

Comparison of Entrance and Exit Questionnaires

Participation in the Friends of St. Lawrence project in spirituality (hereafter referred to as “FSL”) had minimal effect on participants’ church attendance or time spent in religious activities such as prayer, meditation or Bible study.

Other results proved similarly ambivalent. Comparing before-FSL and after-FSL responses to “I experience the presence of the divine” four respondents indicated increased experience (from “tends not to be true” to “unsure,” “unsure” to “tends to be true”, or “tends to be true” to “definitely true of me”); while three reported decreased experience (“definitely true of me” to “tends to be true” and “unsure” to “tends not to be true.”) There was no change in responses to this question for three other respondents.

Likewise, before- and after- responses to the statement “My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life,” were unchanged for six respondents, while three moved either from “tends to be true” to “definitely true of me” or “tends not to be true” to “unsure;” and one moved from “unsure” to “tends not to be true.”

Responses to the statement “I live out my faith in my daily (secular) life and/ or my job,” showed no change for seven respondents before and after FSL participation. For one person, what was definitely true before beginning FSL only tended to be true after completing the program, and another moved from “tends to be true” to “unsure.” Meanwhile, one person for whom this statement tended to be true at the outset reported that it was “definitely true” at the conclusion.

Two persons unsure about the statement “As a baptized person I consider myself a minister of Christ” before FSL changed their response to “tends to be true” after completing the program. The responses of the other eight were unchanged. Likewise eight persons (though not exactly the same eight) answered the same way at both the beginning and end of the program to the statement: “I experience God’s call on my life.” One person changed from “definitely not” to “unsure,” while another ended up “unsure” from the other direction: “tends to be true.”

The final statement on the entrance questionnaire was “Being baptized means a lot to me.” One person moved all the way from “tends to be true” to “tends not to be true,” while another moved from “tends not to be true” to “unsure.” The rest were unchanged. Incidentally, it is notable that, counting both entrance and exit questionnaires, this statement received more “definitely true of me” responses than any other question.

There were three questions on the exit questionnaire that did not appear on the entrance version. The first of these asked participants whether their “perception of involvement in spiritual or religious activity as a result of participation in this project” increased, decreased or stayed the same. 100% of respondents who completed both Advent and Lent sessions reported that their perception of spiritual or religious involvement had increased.

Asked to respond to the statement “As a result of participating in this project I have discerned spiritual growth in myself,” two respondents were unsure, while the remaining eight responded either “tends to be true” or “definitely true of me.” The final statement “As a result of participating in this project I have noted changes in my life” produced exactly the same spread of responses: two “unsure,” the remaining eight responding “tends to be true” or “definitely true.”

In conclusion, a comparison of questionnaires completed before and after the FSL project shows no measurable difference in response to questions intended to measure awareness of baptismal vocation. My original thesis that fostering spiritual disciplines increases such awareness turns out to be a more complex matter than anticipated. However, the project clearly made a difference in the spiritual lives of the participants, 100% of whom expressed interest in continuing to meet as a group to consider spiritual matters, and who said they would recommend the series to others in the congregation. Several remarked that they would like to see everyone in the parish eventually take the course.

These conclusions are quantifiable, based on numeric values given to multiple choice questions. Other results of the FSL project are subjective and more difficult to

measure. I base my perception that participants increased in spiritual confidence on observation of the dynamic of Chapter Meetings, on interviews conducted before and after FSL, and on essays that each participant submitted at the conclusion of the project. It is to these “softer” results of FSL that I now turn.

Exit Interviews and Final Reflections

After our first chapter meeting, I noted how many members had expressed misgiving about their qualifications to participate in a program on spirituality. At least half the members voiced some variation on “I’m not sure I belong in this group.” I responded at the time that sharing openly about one’s personal experience with prayer naturally feels uncomfortable to people who don’t commonly talk about their prayer lives. Up until this point, conversation about personal prayer practice did not commonly take place in our congregation. People were sharing things they perhaps had never before told anyone.

I also perceived that people were concerned about doing spirituality “the right way.” In response to this perception I talked with participants about a person’s spirituality being as individual as a fingerprint, and how spirituality is as natural to human beings as breathing oxygen. At the outset of discussions, we established norms of honesty, mutual respect and confidentiality. In such an environment, participants began to feel safe sharing their most personal reflections, and in the process, gained what I came to call “spiritual confidence.”

Comments from participants’ closing interviews and final reflection papers illustrate the growth experienced through the FSL course. Many reported being more aware of God’s presence, and inclined to pray more:

I now think about prayer a lot. I used to say nightly prayers but now I'm more inclined to send up 'arrow prayers' during the day. It works!

I think I have a greater awareness of spirituality now... I might be more dedicated. [God] is closer than before.

There's been a change in how I feel about prayer...more of that "prayer without ceasing." I am more prayerful, more disciplined.

I'm more conscious of prayer... more consistent...more aware...more disciplined... I used to think, how can I pray for my private concerns when there's so much trouble in the world? Now I feel more like it's OK to ask for anything....I think of God as being more accessible now.

I am more frank with God. God knows all my thoughts already anyway. I seek more of a continuous conversation with God.

I feel able to be quiet and listen more than ever before.

With access to all these types of prayer I find it easy to wander off to prayer several times during the day. The experience of different kinds of prayer has made it easier to turn daily experience into prayer.

Several reported a sense of validation in their personal spirituality:

All of us are different and [God] knows exactly how different we are from each other, and so, each of us has to come to 'know" [God] in our own way.

I have become more accepting of myself – my way of relating to God is perfectly valid for me.

Knowing these parishioners share beliefs with me is a true supporting experience.

An expanded understanding of spirituality energized and inspired participants:

I loved it. It opened up for me different forms of prayer. My prayer life had become sort of stagnant. This really opened it up....I've become more God-centered and more Jesus-centered.

One person's relationship with God underwent a dramatic change:

Before FSL, God was distant, impersonal, "unreal" in the sense I had no

feeling of God's being with me in daily trials. Now, I sense that God is everywhere showing God's power and faithfulness.

A few people experiencing the course saw healing effects spill over into their home and professional lives:

Home life is better now. We are kinder to each other, have more of a spiritual connection.

My relationship with [my spouse] is definitely better. We talked a lot about the daily exercises. It brought us closer together. It's too much of a coincidence that our relationship improved at the same time we were taking this course together.

Through the exercises of prayer, etc. I seem to "see" more than I did before. I'm seeing and understanding, as much as we can, [God's] plan and [God's] influence on day-to-day experiences....And noticing these things has brought me a wonderful peace. I hope that I can share this peace with – students, friends, and [my spouse], in trying to do the work God has given me to do.

These responses indicate that, although fostering spiritual exercises did not have much of an effect on awareness of baptismal vocation, the project bore fruit of another kind. Indicators of spiritual growth are strong. Most notably, participants became sufficiently confident in their prayer that they became extremely eloquent in expressing themselves on the subject of spirituality, a subject upon which they were somewhat tongue-tied at the outset. And although their awareness of baptismal vocation specifically may not have increased as a result, participants were conscious of their growth in faith having an effect on their relationships and secular lives. This growth in spiritual confidence may be attributed to two basic factors of the program: the structure of having daily exercises, and the reinforcement of group meetings.

One person summarized the value of the structure very neatly: "Any time you do something continuously you have to learn something!" Another person's final essay emphasized how introducing structure into her prayer revolutionized her concept of

spirituality. Another said, “The structure of the lessons encouraged me to be more regular in my daily prayer.” One person was so helped by structure in her prayer life that she sought out other structured programs at the conclusion of FSL that she might continue with what she called “structured daily devotion.”

The importance of the group component was manifest in how many people reported Chapter Meetings being the best part of the course. As one person put it, “My favorite was the Chapter Meetings: the validation, the challenge, the sharing of different views, everyone open and reinforcing each other.” Another said: “The impact of the course was mostly in the group dynamic, because you can’t do this internally. To feel the trust in the group gave me a different focus. I feel like we were lifting the bushel basket off of the light.”⁴²

Being exposed to the multiplicity of spiritual experience, both among the saints studied and among the other members of the group, was particularly important in validating each person’s unique spirituality, while providing the opportunity to learn from the spirituality of others: “Each saint is reached by and reaches toward God: this suggests my own way is unique too, but (as in our Sunday discussions) I can learn useful approaches/ responses from others,” said one participant.

One comment eloquently expressed the double effect of finding both diversity and commonality in the group: “My understanding of spirituality has evolved from seeing the range of spirituality in the group. In the group I tried to be open and receptive and saw how wide a range there was. I expected to see a difference between right and left, but

⁴² The person was referring to Matthew 5:15, from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount: “No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.”

the broad range of outlooks made me feel comfortable. I do belong! Others to whom I look up seem to be in the same boat I am.”

And, of course, exposure to the different methods of prayer presented by the saints expanded people’s spiritual resources. As one person remarked, “I have tried different types of prayer and will continue experimenting. I have gone back to the workbook and will continue to go back to it.”

Conclusions

Awareness of baptismal vocation apparently is not a predictable consequence of fostering spirituality, at least within the context of two short church seasons. Baptismal vocation is sufficiently important to warrant a direct and dedicated approach, apart from (but complementary to) spiritual instruction. The two emphases of baptismal vocation and spirituality might ideally be offered in concert with each other. Or a course in baptismal vocation might profitably follow the course in spirituality.

Though this project failed to support a direct causality between spiritual training and awareness of baptismal vocation in the short term, the spiritual flowering manifest among participants of Friends of St. Lawrence was remarkable. Fostering spiritual practice seemed to fill a yawning but unspoken need in congregational leaders.

Though the leaders in this study doubted their spiritual qualifications at the outset, every one became an enthusiastic participant at the end. They seemed to discover the joys of being an “amateur” at prayer -- one who engages in activity not because of expertise in that activity, but for love of it.

Participants emerged from the study with both a vocabulary for talking about their spiritual journeys, and the confidence to do so meaningfully. This newfound spiritual

confidence has implications for the ministry of the church, which will be explored in a later chapter. Before that, however, I turn to the themes that underpinned this project, beginning with the nature of spirituality itself.

CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Both the outcome of the FSL project, spiritual confidence, and the method, spiritual practice, are obviously spiritual matters. In the next section I will therefore discuss the nature of spirituality with an eye towards providing a working definition. I will then focus on one aspect of spirituality which particularly informs this project: the subject of spiritual gifts. I then briefly survey the theology of baptism, which underpinned and inspired this project. Then, because, as I believe, baptism is both initiation into the kingdom/ reign of God, and a call to serve it, I conclude with a discussion of God's kingdom, teaching of which provides strong support for fostering spiritual confidence.

Nature of Spirituality

What exactly is spirituality? The term may not have as self-evident a meaning as it once did, owing to the recent emergence of the concept of spirituality as distinct from religion. Therefore this section will begin with a brief discussion of definitions before considering both the ubiquity and the particularity of spiritual experience, all in support of my thesis that the nurturing of spirituality is necessary to provide church leaders with the necessary confidence and vocabulary they need to be effective ministers

Defining Spirituality

When psychologist William James published his classic *Varieties of Religious Experience* in 1901, religious experience for him was nearly synonymous with what today we would consider spiritual experience.⁴³ In twenty-first century America, owing to the increasing number of people who identify as “spiritual but not religious” a definition of spirituality as distinct from religion is necessary. Spirituality no longer presupposes religion, which is commonly assumed to be something that involves dogma, liturgy and ecclesiology in addition to spirituality. For the purposes of this paper, I will now survey definitions of spirituality provided by several contemporary authors before arriving at a working definition.

Even when working from a Christian background, many scholars of spirituality today begin by identifying spirituality in general terms before defining what constitutes Christian spirituality specifically. Spiritual psychologist Larry Culliford, whose work I will explore more fully in the next chapter in the context of faith development, says: “spirituality links the deeply personal with the universal.”⁴⁴

Religious historian Philip Sheldrake defines spirituality generally as: “the deepest values and meanings by which people seek to live. In other words, ‘spirituality’ implies some kind of vision of the human spirit of what will assist it to achieve full potential.

⁴³ William James. *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (A Public Domain Book) Kindle Electronic Edition.

⁴⁴ Larry Culliford, *The Psychology of Spirituality: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2011) Kindle Electronic Edition: 20.

Sheldrake goes on to describe Christian spirituality as “the way our fundamental values, lifestyles and spiritual practices reflect understanding of God, human identity, and the material world as the context for human transformation,” and stresses the rootedness of Christian spirituality in the Holy Scriptures.⁴⁵ In a volume called *Spirituality and History*, Sheldrake particularly notes that the modern western understanding of spirituality is characterized by the merging of both interior and practical expressions. In this context Sheldrake defines Christian spirituality as “a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit and in the context of the community of believers.”⁴⁶

Catholic theologians Lawrence Cunningham and Keith Egan, after surveying dozens of definitions of spirituality conclude: “spirituality refers to that dimension or dimensions of human experience which provide the spiritual aspect of our lives by enriching and giving ‘thickness’ to our ordinary existence.”⁴⁷ Christian spirituality, specifically, is “the lived encounter with Jesus Christ in the Spirit.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Philip F. Sheldrake, *Explorations in Spirituality: History, Theology and Social Practice* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), Kindle Electronic Edition: Chapter 1, location 82.

⁴⁶ Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method* (New York: Maryknoll, 1998), 60.

⁴⁷ Lawrence S. Cunningham and Keith J. Egan, *Christian Spirituality: Themes from the Tradition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), Chapter 1, Location 100.

⁴⁸ Cunningham and Egan, *Christian Spirituality*, Chapter, 1, Location 115.

Biblical scholar Barbara Bowe defined spirituality as “the dynamic term that points to a lived experience of [the mystery of God] in the day to day.”⁴⁹ Christian spirituality for Bowe “describes a particular way of responding to the spirit of God mediated to the world and ultimately known through Jesus Christ. Christian spirituality concerns the progressive transformation that happens in us.”⁵⁰

Church historian Walter Principe says that: “Spirituality... points to those aspects of a person’s living a faith or commitment that concern his or her striving to attain the highest ideal or goal. For a Christian this would mean his or her striving for an ever more intense union with the Father through Jesus Christ by living in the Spirit.”⁵¹

There are, obviously, common themes in this briefest of surveys of spirituality definitions. What may be most striking is the prevalence of metaphorical adjectives (universal, deep, full, fundamental, thick, intense) intended to express the vast extent of reality beyond oneself. We can therefore conclude that spirituality has to do with what people consider greatest, or most fundamental reality, to which Bowe refers (as she admits, arbitrarily) as “God,” but which may more inclusively be called “the divine,” “the transcendent,” or “ultimate reality.” Secondly, spirituality involves human experience of, or connection to, the divine, the transcendent or ultimate reality. These modern authors stress that this experience is not just an interior journey, but also concerns the world

⁴⁹ Barbara E. Bowe, *Biblical Foundations of Spirituality: Touching a Finger to the Flame* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 11.

⁵⁰ Bowe, *Biblical Foundations*, 12.

⁵¹ Walter Principe, “Toward Defining Spirituality,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, Vol 12, Issue 2, pp. 127-141, June 25, 2016, [10.1177/000842988301200201](https://doi.org/10.1177/000842988301200201), 139.

outside oneself: both a person's physical context and the practical expression of spirituality in the world. In other words, all these authors imply a social and a moral dimension to spirituality. Third, the common thread in defining Christian spirituality is that the divine is understood to be the Holy Trinity: God in Jesus Christ apprehended through the power of the Holy Spirit. Finally, Christian spirituality is concerned with the transformation of the human person through relationship with the Triune God.

For the sake of this paper, I will therefore consider spirituality to be the experience of highest or fundamental reality and the practical application of that experience. Christian spirituality would then be the experience of relationship with God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, and the lived expression of that relationship, in openness to transformation, and in spiritual practice, which both has both interior and external manifestations.

Approaching Spirituality

Of course, spirituality may be approached in any of several ways. Walter Principe identifies three levels: the "real" level, based on the *lived quality* of a person's life, taking into account historical context; the formulation of *teaching* about the lived reality; and the academic *study* of spirituality.⁵² Biblical scholar Sandra M. Schneiders' breakdown of three approaches to spirituality parallels Principe's, but in reverse order: the historical, theological and anthropological approaches. According to Schneiders, the historical approach is the study of spirituality as it has been conceived and practiced over

⁵²Principe, *Defining Spirituality*, 135-136.

time by various historical figures or groups of people.⁵³ This is mainly an academic approach that was not my own primary concern in a project aimed at actively involving church leaders in spiritual practice. However, the historical approach informed my selection of figures for the Lenten study and the background I provided for church leaders to engage more meaningfully in exercises related to these figures.

The theological approach as Schneiders describes it dominated Roman Catholicism until the Second Vatican Council, making spirituality a subset of Christian theology, and describing stages in the contemplative journey toward union with God. Since the latter was a rarified state obtained only by those with the time and inclination to pursue it, the average Christian called to active life was apt to leave spiritual activity to cloistered saints. At the same time, even the great mystics of the church maintained that union with God was pure gift, not to be attained through human effort.⁵⁴

Schneiders' description of the anthropological understanding of spirituality sheds the most light on my efforts. According to this approach, spirituality is understood as an inherent aspect of the human organism. Therefore, in Schneiders' own words, "Christian spirituality is first human and then Christian."⁵⁵ Though Schneiders marks the advance of the anthropological approach to the study of spirituality over the more traditional theological approach in academic circles, I conclude from my experience at Lawrencefield that the person-in-the-pew still considers the pursuit of spirituality to be

⁵³ Sandra M. Schneiders, "Approaches to the Study of Christian Spirituality" in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, edited by Arthur Holder (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 20.

⁵⁴ Schneiders, "Approaches," 23.

⁵⁵ Schneiders, "Approaches," 26.

the province of the especially gifted (a category in which they do not consider themselves to be.) Therefore, to suggest that all humans have a capacity for spirituality was my first step in building spiritual confidence in my congregational leaders.

Spirituality is Human

Speaking from a Christian perspective, spirituality is not a special characteristic of a few especially gifted individuals but a basic human component.⁵⁶ Susan S. Phillips remarks that the Bible shows:

To be human means to deal with God. And that everything we encounter and experience—birth and death, hunger and thirst, money and weapons, weather and mountains, friendship and betrayal, marriage and adultery, every nuance and detail of it – deals with God.”⁵⁷

There is no important aspect of human life to which God (or ultimate reality) is irrelevant. Therefore, to be human is to be spiritual.

William James’ *Varieties of Religious Experience* supports this contention that spirituality is ubiquitous. James discovers a remarkable uniformity in the mystical branch of every religion: “We find the same recurring note, so that there is about mystical

⁵⁶ To establish for FSL participants that spirituality is not the exclusive province of extraordinarily gifted people was a priority in this project’s effort to build spiritual confidence. I was able to find considerable support for the basic humanness of spirituality among my Christian sources, as this section will show. I am aware this position is not itself universal and may indicate a Western bias. As my audience for the project described in this paper was exclusively Christian, and the project’s purpose was to build spiritual confidence among those who doubt their spiritual aptitude I saw small need in this context for exploring conflicting points of view on the idea of spirituality’s ubiquity among human beings, besides acknowledging that they do indeed exist.

⁵⁷ Phillips, *The Cultivated Life*, 12.

utterances an eternal unanimity.”⁵⁸ Spiritual experience tends to be consistent, from a psychological standpoint, across cultural and religious lines. James concludes:

The religious phenomenon, studied as in Inner fact, and apart from ecclesiastical or theological complications, has shown itself to consist everywhere, and at all its stages, in the consciousness which individuals have of an intercourse between themselves and higher powers with which they feel themselves to be related.”⁵⁹

This suggest that spiritual experience is common to all of humanity.

James seems to depart at only one point in *Varieties of Religious Experience* from his implied support of universal religious experience, and this is where he speaks of conversion. Conversion is a common theme in the religious experiences that James describes, although he does find that some individuals seem to be constitutionally resistant to religious conversion at least at certain points of their lives.⁶⁰ He does, however, not deny that the spiritual inclination exists even in persons resistant to religion, as consciousness of being related to powers greater than themselves. The universality of the spiritual impulse in human beings remains an underlying theme of James’ book.

James’ study of the religious experience of non-Westerners is not nearly as extensive as that of later researchers. More exhaustive cross-cultural study has fallen to more contemporary analysts, many of whom have nevertheless reached the same conclusion: that spirituality is ubiquitous and not culture-dependent. Larry Culliford, expanding upon James Fowler’s Stages of Spirituality (which will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter) comments:

⁵⁸ James, *Varieties*, 367.

⁵⁹ James, *Varieties*, 404.

⁶⁰ James, *Varieties*, 181.

Spirituality is inclusive and unifying. Each person is part of and pervaded by the sacred, by the spiritual dimension. It applies to everyone, including those who do not believe in a God, a higher being, named or unnamed, or a spiritual realm or dimension of existence. No one is exempt.⁶¹

If spirituality is indeed inherent to human beings, spiritual programming need not be restricted, in the parish setting, to those whose conscious interests tend toward the spiritual. Spirituality, at least as it understood in a Christian setting, is for everybody.

Spirituality is Individual

Spirituality is also individual and diverse. Michael and Norrissey devote an entire volume to the analysis of prayer types appropriate to the sixteen Myers-Briggs personality types,⁶² outlining not only the forms of prayer that will most naturally appeal to each type, but also the types most likely to stimulate spiritual growth. The very fact that we speak of different kinds of spirituality (“Benedictine Spirituality,” “Anglican Spirituality,” etc.) testifies to the range of spiritual experience and teaching.

As might be inferred from the author of a book called *Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James, too, emphasizes how personal and individual spirituality must be: “I imagine that these [religious] experiences can be as infinitely varied as are the idiosyncrasies of individuals.”⁶³ It stands to reason that individuals will experience the divine according to their own personalities and means of perception. Conformity of spiritual experience is therefore not to be expected. There is no point, given “varieties of

⁶¹ Culliford, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 52.

⁶² Michael and Norrissey, *Prayer and Temperament*, 9.

⁶³ James, *Varieties*, 356.

religious experience,” to expect uniformity of spiritual practice. In fact, personalization of spiritual practice is to be encouraged.

In the end, the exercise of spirituality is part of psychological health,⁶⁴ serving to integrate the individual with the universal.⁶⁵ Culliford observes that mental patients who are encouraged to develop their spirituality experience greater satisfaction while mental health care workers, similarly encouraged, work better together.⁶⁶ Regular spiritual practice produces many desirable effects: increased relaxation and sense of calm, reduced stress and anger, and improved concentration and relationships.⁶⁷

“Spirituality is about wholeness,” Culliford says, serving to reduce the “discordance between ego and the true self” that causes suffering. Spirituality involves the discovery of the “true self.”⁶⁸ It follows that if “selves” are individual, spirituality is likewise individual.

Since spirituality is personal and diverse, spiritual programming in the parish setting should take into account varieties of spiritual inclination and development.

⁶⁴ Culliford, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 61.

⁶⁵ Culliford, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 19.

⁶⁶ Culliford, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 14.

⁶⁷ Culliford, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 200.

⁶⁸ Culliford, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 25.

Spirituality is Communal

Individual spiritual experiences (that is, any experience of the divine, or of a greater reality) therefore must be respected and honored. At the same time, spiritual individuality must not be emphasized to the point of spiritual isolation. Spiritual guides and companions are helpful if not necessary. As Culliford points out, “It is possible to make progress alone, but it may be slow or more limited without proper instruction.”⁶⁹ While there may be saints out there who instantaneously achieve enlightenment through direct revelation from heaven, without both instruction and practice, most of us need a little help. Many of us need a lot.

The advantage of developing spirituality in community has been apparent at least since eremites began banding together around spiritual leaders in the desert in the early centuries of Christianity. Cunningham and Egan note: “Already in fourth century monasticism there was a semi-eremitic life that recognized that hermits needed at least a modicum of community.”⁷⁰ St. Benedict, to whom Western monasticism owes so much, famously emphasizes the community, calling Cenobites “that most valiant kind of monks.”⁷¹ Perhaps the most famous monk of the twentieth century, Thomas Merton, insisted that contemplative solitude presupposes community life: “Do not flee to solitude

⁶⁹ Culliford, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 213.

⁷⁰ Cunningham and Egan, *Christian Spirituality*, Chapter 8, Location 3000.

⁷¹ St. Benedict, *The Rule*, trans. Rev. Boniface Verheyen, OSB (Atchison, KA: PlanetMonk, 2013), Kindle Electronic Edition: Chapter 1, Location 168.

from community. Find God first in the community, then he will lead you to solitude.”⁷²

Even an anchorite lives in relationship with the church and world. How much more, then, do those of us who are not called to solitude need the company and support of other, like-minded individuals in our own journey with God.

The common modern American assumption that one’s spirituality is simply one’s own business is simply not borne out in the Christian tradition. Spirituality most definitely is a communal phenomenon. “Christian spirituality... cannot be limited to an exclusively individualistic ‘care of the soul’... The way of Christian discipleship is found in community,” say Cunningham and Egan.⁷³ Sheldrake concurs:

Christian discipleship is not individualistic but is essentially communal, within the community of believers, sustained by a common life and shared rituals, and expressed ideally in mutual love and acceptance.⁷⁴

Anglican priest, author and spiritual director Ellen Clark-King puts it this way:

Christian spirituality is not a solitary endeavor, nor one whose principal aim is our own wellbeing: it is a journey walked in companionship with fellow followers of Christ in which mutual encouragement and guidance is essential and the end of which is never reached this side of death.”⁷⁵

⁷² Thomas Merton, “The Solitary Life,” *The Monastic Journey*, ed. Patrick Hart (Garden City: Doubleday Image, 1978) 200, Quoted in Cunningham and Egan, *Christian Spirituality*, Location 3093.

⁷³ Cunningham and Egan, *Christian Spirituality*, Chapter 1, Location 326.

⁷⁴ Philip F. Sheldrake, *Explorations in Spirituality: History, Theology and Social Practice* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), Kindle Electronic Edition: Introduction Location 185.

⁷⁵ Ellen Clark-King, *The Path to Your Door: Approaches to Christian Spirituality* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011) Kindle Electronic Edition, 4.

There is thus abundant support within the Christian tradition that spirituality is communal as well as personal.

Community spirituality is not just about the practice of community as a spiritual discipline, or the spirituality of hospitality. Communities develop a corporate spirituality as part of their corporate personality: a way of collectively living into their relationship with what they consider to be ultimate reality. As Cunningham and Egan describe, “spirituality refers to that dimension or dimensions of human experience which provide the spiritual aspect of our lives by enriching and giving ‘thickness’ to our ordinary existence,”⁷⁶ and “Christian spirituality is the lived encounter with Jesus Christ in the Spirit.”⁷⁷ It follows that communal spirituality for Christians is surely the *shared* encounter with Jesus Christ in the Spirit. Both the sense of community and the lived encounter with Jesus Christ are enhanced when experienced corporately. At the very least, “we must recognize that our journey is not a solitary one.”⁷⁸

Not only is spirituality communal because the divine is commonly experienced communally, but spirituality is also communal in practice, especially in the case of liberation spirituality.⁷⁹ Clark-King points out: “Liberation spirituality sees spiritual

⁷⁶ Cunningham and Egan, *Christian Spirituality*, Chapter 1, Location 102.

⁷⁷ Cunningham and Egan, *Christian Spirituality*, Chapter 1, Location 117.

⁷⁸ Cunningham and Egan, *Christian Spirituality*, Chapter 3, Location 1179.

⁷⁹ Liberation theology, which originated in Latin America in the 1970’s, is based on “God’s preferential option for the poor.” Liberation spirituality thus involves a strong ethical element of working for justice for all people: “In addition to prayer and spiritual exercises, it entails social analysis and strategies of action. On this frontier, the life of faith commits one to discipleship in loving solidarity with all, especially the actual poor and dispossessed of the world.” Elizabeth A. Johnson, “Liberating God of Life,” *Quest*

health as impossible without us also caring for the poor and working them to improve their lives.” My concern for developing vocation in my congregation receives support from this insight from liberation spirituality. Just as individuals practice spirituality by discerning where their gifts lie and where God might be calling them, communities do the same thing collectively: “Communities together work to see where the Spirit is at work in their lives and in their neighbourhood, and put themselves at the disposal of the Spirit to continue this work.”⁸⁰ Individual Christians have personal vocations, and Christian communities have collective vocations.

One person pursuing spiritual practice in isolation can develop rather bizarre ideas. As Sheldrake remarks, “The danger is that ‘optional’ spiritualities offer personal practices to assuage spiritual hunger, yet can all too easily turn into another form of individualistic consumerism.”⁸¹ Spirituality must not be just another self-help strategy.

Spiritual isolation can even be destructive. Feelings of inferiority (“I must be doing this wrong”) as well as grandiosity (“I see it! My way is the way of ultimate truth for everybody!”) can easily arise in the individual who pursues spirituality on his or her own. Spiritual counselor P. T. Mistlberger, writing about the pitfalls inherent in pursuing the spiritual life, writes, “The problem is the nature of our mind and its remarkable ability

for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007), 87.

⁸⁰ Clark-King, *Path to Your Door*, 100.

⁸¹ Sheldrake, *Explorations in Spirituality*, Introduction: Location 83.

to sabotage efforts of inner work.” A “good teacher” will be able to identify our blind spots and help us work around them.⁸²

Without some guidance, self-delusion is possible, even probable. “We have to guard against too much isolation. We need some semblance of community however small.”⁸³ But avoiding isolation is not the only reason to seek the company of others in pursuing the spiritual life. “What matters is the demonstration of humility and willingness to move beyond our isolated (‘I’m right!’) view of reality.”⁸⁴ In other words, the quality of the guidance one receives from one’s teacher or community is secondary. Of greater importance is first, the exercise of humility in listening to the other, and secondly, the awareness of one’s connectedness with a larger reality.

For Sheldrake, among many others, Trinitarian theology itself is itself a model of communal spirituality for Christians:

While a great deal of Christian theology has been concerned with personal salvation, the theology of the Trinity reminds us that to be personal is necessarily also to be interpersonal.... In a relational model, the doctrine of the Trinity reveals a different understanding both of the nature of God and of human personhood in the image of God. The fundamental truth of existence is that to be human is to be rooted in mutual self-giving love. To exist consists of being-in-relationship.”⁸⁵

⁸² P. T. Mistlberger, *Rude Awakening: Perils, Pitfalls and Hard Truths of the Spiritual Path* (Washington: O-Books, 2011) Kindle Electronic Edition: Introduction, Location 59. Mistlberger is apparently himself a Buddhist practitioner, but takes care that his description of the spiritual path is applicable to the mystical branch of any religion.

⁸³Mistlberger, *Rude Awakening*, Chapter 6, Location 591.

⁸⁴ Mistlberger, *Rude Awakening*, Chapter 6, Location 629.

⁸⁵ Sheldrake, *Explorations in Spirituality*, Chapter 4, Location 993.

God created human beings to be in relationship with Godself and with other human beings. God's salvation of individuals is not an end in itself, but part of God's great plan to redeem creation. While it may be the calling of each person to work out his or her salvation with fear and trembling, individual salvation does not occur in a vacuum. We need help in this work, and we need to help others in this work.

Archbishop Oscar Romero's homily, quoted by Ellen Clark-King in *The Path to Your Door*, seems a fitting way to summarize this discussion of Christian communal spirituality:

A community is a group of men and women/ who have found the truth in Christ and in his gospel,/ and who follow the truth/ and join together to follow it more strongly./ It is not just an individual conversion,/ but a community conversion./ It is a family that believes,/ a group that accepts God./ In the group, each one finds that the brother or sister/ is a source of strength/ and that in moments of weakness they help one another/ and, by loving one another and believing,/ they give light and example./ The preacher no longer needs to preach,/ for there are Christians who preach by their own lives.⁸⁶

In community spirituality is guided, encouraged, modelled, strengthened, and passed on. The communal practice of spirituality is not just helpful or advisable, but intrinsic to Christianity. Therefore the development of FSL was conceived from the beginning as a group exercise.

Thanks to the emergence of persons identifying as "spiritual, not religious," we can no longer identify spirituality exclusively with religion, although the terms are obviously deeply interrelated. With a working definition of spirituality as the experience of or fundamental reality and the practical application of that experience, and the

⁸⁶ Oscar Romero, *The Violence of Love*, tr. James R. Brockman S.J., Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004, 111, quoted in Clark-King, *The Path to Your Door*, 102.

definition of Christian spirituality as finding that ultimate reality embodied in the person of Jesus Christ, I have presented spirituality as basically human, with both individual and communal aspects. I now turn to a presentation of spiritual gifts, in which the human, individual and communal faces of spirituality are evident.

Spiritual Gifts

A discussion of spirituality in the Christian context would be incomplete without a consideration of spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are given by God to individuals and communities for the purpose of building the church and furthering God's kingdom. God empowers human beings for kingdom work by giving them spiritual gifts. Whether spiritual gifts are then human abilities or ministry functions within the church is, however, a point of disagreement between writers on the subject. Episcopal priest and pastoral counselor Lloyd Edwards defines spiritual gifts thus: "'Gift' in this sense refers to the ability of an individual to perform particular acts of ministry... which are needed by the church for its mission."⁸⁷ New Testament professor Kenneth Berding challenges this view, holding that references to spiritual gifts in Pauline scripture and early patristic writings describe God-given ministries, not God-given abilities.⁸⁸

Both writers start from the same place: teaching about spiritual gifts in Paul's letters, the most extensive treatment of which occurs in 1 Corinthians 12-14. New Testament scholar Richard B. Hays points out that St. Paul's intention in his letters is not

⁸⁷ Lloyd Edwards, *Discerning Your Spiritual Gifts* (Cambridge: Cowley, 1988), 16.

⁸⁸ Kenneth Berding, "Gifts and Ministries in the Apostolic Fathers," *Westminster Theological Journal* 78 (2016): 137.

to formulate systematic theology but respond to specific, local, pastoral concerns.⁸⁹

Paul's particular interest for the Corinthians is that they "understand their corporate existence as the church."⁹⁰ But this entire issue, as with all of Paul's pastoral concerns, Paul puts into theological context.

Paul's particular concern with spiritual gifts, in the case of the Corinthians, is the place of such gifts in their worship services. The way the Corinthians are exercising spiritual gifts in worship is undermining their community. But Paul is not just concerned with curbing the Corinthians' charismatic excesses.⁹¹ In describing appropriate praxis of spiritual gifts in Corinth, Paul presents a coherent theology of spiritual gifts.

Beginning in Chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians, Paul announces his desire to inform the young church about "spiritual things."⁹² Although the NRSV translation in verse 1 reads "spiritual gifts," Hays insists that the Greek word πνευματικῶν (*pneumatikon*) in verse 1 is a more general term, and that Paul's shift in verse 4 to the word χαρισμάτων (*charismaton*), which can be more precisely identified as "gifts," is significant. Paul hereby emphasizes that the spiritual phenomena with which the Corinthians are concerned are first, God's gift, and second, are to be used for the common good:

The possession of any gift is therefore not a matter of individual merit or worthiness but of the sheer free grace of God. The implication for the spiritually

⁸⁹ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), Kindle Electronic Edition, 1.

⁹⁰ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 11.

⁹¹ "Paul is seeking to broaden the range of the Spirit's activity beyond the range of ostentatiously supernatural manifestations that the Corinthians prized." Hays, *First Corinthians*, 217.

⁹² Hays, *First Corinthians*, 207.

ambitious Corinthians should be clear: ...All manifestations of the Spirit are to serve God's purpose for the common benefit of the community.⁹³

Thus the first point in Paul's theology of spiritual gifts is that they are divine gift, not human achievement, and his second point is that they be used for the good of the Christian community.

In verse 12, Paul develops an analogy between the community and the very body of Christ. Hays points out that the body analogy was common in first-century rhetoric in support of promoting social harmony: the message was that everyone was to know their place and stay there. Paul turns the image around to argue for both diversity and interdependence among members of the Christian community. "The one Spirit has been given in overflowing abundance to everyone in the community,"⁹⁴ and thereby united the members into one. This is the next part of Paul's theology of spiritual gifts: there are all different kinds of gifts, none more important than another, and we need them all. In bestowing them the Spirit has united the individuals of the community into one body.

1 Corinthians 12 is of course followed by Paul's famous hymn to love in Chapter 13, so often read at weddings. The inclusion of this monograph here in the context of spiritual gifts emphasizes that love must always be the foundation and guide in the exercise of any gift, modest or grand.

Chapter 14 continues on the subject of spiritual gifts, now concentrating on the gift of speaking in tongues, which apparently precipitated the whole gifts controversy in

⁹³ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 212-213.

⁹⁴ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 214

Corinth. However even in this narrower context, Paul returns throughout to his “familiar refrain” that gifts are to be used to build up the church.⁹⁵

Paul also treats of spiritual gifts, albeit more briefly, in the Letter to the Romans (Chapter 12:4-8):

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Here in Rome there is no indication of a specific context of spiritual gifts abuse as there was in Corinth. However, the themes of the body of Christ, interdependence, and variety of gifts are consistent with his first letter to the Corinthians. These teachings about spiritual gifts, at least, are not situational but part of Paul’s theology.

Finally, spiritual gifts are touched on in Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16, beginning with the baptismal formula of “one body, one Spirit”:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift. The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

Here the multiplicity of gifts is again emphasized and the body of Christ metaphor repeated. Gifts are given “for building up the body of Christ.” There are many gifts, given but “one body, one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father

⁹⁵ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 236.

of all.” Whether or not Paul wrote this letter,⁹⁶ the complementary themes of unity and variety of gifts for ministry are Pauline.

Epistolary teaching on spiritual gifts can therefore be summarized as follows:

- Spiritual gifts are divine gifts, not human talents or achievements.
- Spiritual gifts are for the building up of the Christian community.
- There are many kinds of spiritual gifts.
- The one Spirit of God is the source of all gifts.
- No one spiritual gift is superior to another.
- No one has every gift.
- All spiritual gifts are necessary.
- In bestowing gifts, the Holy Spirit unites the community into one body, which may be called the Body of Christ itself.
- Members of the Body of Christ need each other.
- Love must be the motivation for the exercise of gifts.
- Every member of the body is called to “grow up in every way to him who is the head, into Christ.”

Church teaching expresses these themes in various ways. The differentiation of roles in the church, reflected in Prayer Book teaching, reflects the interaction of different gifts and ministries presented by St. Paul. The Catechism defines the “Ministers of the Church” as “lay persons, bishops, priests and deacons, explicitly tying in the doctrine of gifts in its description of the ministry of lay persons:

The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and *according to the gifts given them*, to carry on Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world, and to take their place in the life worship and governance of the Church. (Emphasis mine.)⁹⁷

⁹⁶ “Most scholars agree that the letter is pseudonymous.” Pheme Perkins, “The Letter to the Ephesians: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, Volume XI (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 351.

⁹⁷ “Catechism,” *Book of Common Prayer*, 855.

The different parts of the body are gifted for different but necessary and interdependent functions of the body. In this way may Episcopal doctrine of the twenty-first century be said to uphold the first century-biblical teachings of spiritual gifts and the Body of Christ.

There remains the ambiguity of whether spiritual gifts are human abilities to discern and apply to ministry, or the God-given ministries themselves, which show the Holy Spirit at work in different ways within the church.⁹⁸ With Berding, Church of the Brethren minister and monastic historian Joshua Brockway believes Paul was more concerned with functions within the church than with individual talents.⁹⁹

The popular manner of teaching about spiritual gifts through personal inventories of specific traits comes under particular criticism from New Testament professor Sidney H. T. Page, who identifies four false assumptions implicit in this approach. The inventories, Page says, falsely imply (1) that the traits listed by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians, Romans and Ephesians are God-given abilities rather than evidence of God's Spirit at work, (2) that the lists are comprehensive, (3) that the meaning of Paul's terms is self-evident from the text, and that (4) that gifts exist in isolation from each other.¹⁰⁰ Scholarly criticism of the type of spiritual gifts teaching favored by Edwards is therefore quite strong, though nobody disputes the importance of spiritual gifts teaching. As

⁹⁸ Sidney H. T. Page, "The Assumption Behind Spiritual Gifts Inventories," *Didaskalia* (Otterbuire, Man.) 22, 39.

⁹⁹ Joshua Brockway, "One Body, Many Parts: Reclaiming the Ecclesial Context of the Spiritual Gifts," *Brethren Life and Thought*, 59 no. 1, Spring 2014, 61.

¹⁰⁰ Page, "Assumption Behind Spiritual Gifts," 45.

Brockway comments, “Gifts are a significant part of one’s life within the whole church.”¹⁰¹

Awareness of the importance of gifts in the life of the church figured in my decision to include sessions on gifts discernment in the context of exploring God’s nearness during the Advent session of FSL. I saw this as a particular need at Lawrencefield. By contrast to the problem with which Paul dealt in Corinth and Rome, where the people had to be warned not to think too much of themselves, several FSL participants seemed to think too little of themselves. They had difficulty with the concept of themselves as gifted people. When we discussed gifts for ministry they became embarrassed and asked if they weren’t instead supposed to exercise humility.

I certainly do not want to discourage the Christian virtue of humility, but I fear that without understanding themselves as gifted by God for ministry, Christians risk assuming themselves powerless to participate as God intends in building the kingdom, or reign, of God.¹⁰² As it turned out, teaching about spiritual gifts in FSL gratifyingly bore

¹⁰¹ Brockway, “One Body,” 64.

¹⁰² The famous quotation from spiritual teacher and author Marianne Williamson (sometimes erroneously attributed to Nelson Mandela) comes to mind: “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.” Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of "A Course in Miracles"* (New York: Harper One, 1996). I used this quotation in the part of the FSL Advent Workbook dealing with “Gifts and Call.”

fruit at the conclusion of the project, when one participant reported, in her Final Reflection paper: “I’m not as embarrassed to state that I’m gifted as I was before. I realize that my gifts are about God and not about me.”

At this remove, under the influence of Berding, Brockway and Page, I am rethinking the approach I used to teach spiritual gifts in the FSL workbooks, which included an abbreviated spiritual gifts inventory. However I stand by my inclusion of teaching on spiritual gifts in a program designed to help people make the link between their baptismal identity and active ministry. I fear that too many baptized persons neglect their call to ministry by considering themselves inadequate to the task. Teaching spiritual gifts is a way to build spiritual confidence and therefore equip baptized persons to take their faith outside the four walls of the church into the world.

If the pitfalls described by Page can be avoided, teaching about spiritual gifts can be instrumental to the discernment of baptismal vocation. In the first place, spiritual gifts exercises emphasize baptismal ministry: that all baptized persons are commissioned and empowered by God for God’s work in the world. Secondly, spiritual gifts exercises can help people know where best to apply their abilities both for the kingdom/ reign of God and for personal fulfillment. Remember Frederick Buechner’s words: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”¹⁰³ God calls people to ministry in baptism by presenting them both with gifts (of all descriptions) and with opportunities to minister.

The Christian community is, among other things, the place to discern both gifts and vocation. Indeed, discernment is best done in company: under the guidance of a

¹⁰³ Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*, 135.

spiritual director or in a discernment group. Brockway stresses that gifts discernment should occur within the church setting to prevent such discernment from degenerating into a mere self-help exercise.¹⁰⁴ Page proposes that the church can be most helpful in encouraging members: (1) to recognize that anyone can make important contributions, (2) to look for ways to serve, (3) to pay attention when asked to serve by congregational leaders (the perception of gifts in oneself by others is often more reliable than self-diagnosis), and (4) to try a variety of ministries.¹⁰⁵ The church's task is to identify both needs that need to be filled and the gifts that might fill them.¹⁰⁶ Churches must help their members understand themselves as ministers of Christ, and facilitate discernment of both spiritual gifts and their application for purposes of building God's kingdom.

The concept of spiritual gifts has been formative in my ministry. Through my work in community involvement with an interfaith institution (the now-defunct Hopeful City, a Gamaliel affiliate) I came to believe that spiritual gifts build not only the church as it is usually understood, but also the kingdom of God itself. This wider emphasis is articulated by spiritual philosopher and activist Michael Dallaire, who advocates that our understanding of charisms extend beyond gifts which build up the church. Dallaire claims that people who are not church members may also receive charisms that may be manifest

¹⁰⁴ Brockway, "One Body," 60.

¹⁰⁵ Page, "Assumption Behind Spiritual Gifts," 58.

¹⁰⁶ Brockway, "One Body," 62.

in “the wider secular world.”¹⁰⁷ The church is not the only place where kingdom of God work is done, and church members are not the only people engaged in such work.

However, church members are distinguished by baptism, which according to the World Council of Churches’ seminal document, "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry" is a sign of the kingdom of God.¹⁰⁸ In the next section I will consider these two theological concepts, baptism and the kingdom of God, and the ways they, in addition to the spiritual theory summarized above, support and inform the FSL project.

Baptism

The second chapter described how awareness of baptismal vocation did not measurably increase as a result of FSL. However, baptism, baptismal identity, and baptismal vocation remain at the root of this project. As mentioned above, according to WCC’s document “Baptism Eucharist and Ministry (BEM),” baptismal vocation interlocks with another theological theme, the kingdom of God. In this section I discuss baptism’s centrality to Christian life, and how baptism’s relationship to vocation in part inspired this project. I will then focus on the kingdom of God, of which baptism is a sign, and the importance of that theological theme to the development of FSL.

Baptism, or initiation into the Church, the Body of Christ, is by definition the wellspring of every believer’s life in Christ. BEM summarized baptism’s textured meaning as follows:

¹⁰⁷ Michael Dallaire, “Holy Mischief Within Institutions: Charism and Conscience,” *CrossCurrents*, 63 no. 3, September 2013, 350.

¹⁰⁸ "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry: Faith and Order Paper no. 111 (BEM)," (World Council of Churches, Geneva, Jan. 12, 1982), II: E: 7, 2.

Baptism is participation in Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12); a washing away of sin ((1Cor. 6:11); a new birth (John 3:5); an enlightenment by Christ (Eph. 5:14); a re-clothing in Christ (Gal. 3:27); a renewal by the Spirit (Titus 3:5); the experience of salvation from the flood (1 Peter 3:20-21); an exodus from bondage (1 Cor. 10:1-2) and a liberation into a new humanity... (Gal. 3:27-28; 1 Cor. 12:13).¹⁰⁹

Indeed baptism is central to Christian experience. Yet I have observed within the Episcopal Church that baptism's very centrality can go overlooked. Many adults in the Episcopal Church do not remember their own baptism, having been baptized as infants.¹¹⁰ Having no memory of the event of baptism, this central part of their own church membership is at best an abstract concept for them.

In preparing for this project, I conceived a desire to increase people's self-awareness of themselves as baptized persons, each with a baptismal vocation. Baptismal vocation is God's call on the life of the baptized person. To answer the call of baptismal vocation is to work toward fulfillment of one's baptismal vows according to each one's unique situation and particular, God-given abilities.¹¹¹ I hoped that in recognizing the

¹⁰⁹ BEM II:2, 1.

¹¹⁰ BEM, in seeking the commonality between practitioners of infant baptism and believers' baptism, emphasizes that both practices "embody God's own initiative in Christ and express a response of faith made within the believing community." While infant baptism "emphasizes the corporate faith," believers' baptism "emphasizes the confession of the person who responds." BEM, Commentary (12), 4.

¹¹¹ Baptismal vows, in the Episcopal Church, include a statement of belief based on the Apostles' Creed, and affirmative answers to the following five questions:

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

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

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

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

Book of Common Prayer, 304-5.

signs of God continuing to work in them through the ongoing fact of their baptism FSL participants might become aware of their own baptismal vocation and thus energized to further baptismal ministry. I surmised that this recognition might grow, as it had in my own case, out of the cultivation of spiritual disciplines.

My concern that baptism may not be receiving the attention it deserves in the Episcopal Church is based on several observations. The first concerns the very architecture of a typical Episcopal Church building. Although many very recent church designs place the baptismal font prominently at the entrance, this has not always been common practice in church architecture. Someone entering a traditionally designed Episcopal nave for the first time might well have no concept that we ever practice something called baptism, never mind that it is one of our two preeminent sacraments. Even for many active Christians within the Episcopal Church, baptism drifts to the edge of consciousness, remembered only occasionally when the baptismal font is dragged from its usual hiding place to the central aisle a few times a year.

In sacramental churches such as the Episcopal Church, the Eucharist predominates in worship. Architecturally the Holy Table is usually central, while the baptismal font is often hidden away. The subtle message is that baptism is a one-time event, sort of like paying an admission fee, which once accomplished doesn't have to be reconsidered. People may recite the Baptismal Covenant at the Easter Vigil or at other people's baptisms, but like baptism itself the renewal of vows often comes across as a hurdle to get over before the real stuff begins.

Furthermore, when I have conducted youth confirmation classes, I am always struck by the young people whose parents cannot seem to locate the requisite information

about date and place of baptism. From the frequency of this experience I can only conclude that, once a baptism has taken place, families tend not to commemorate a child's baptism in any deliberate or meaningful way. Consequently older children and adults baptized as infants are not often conscious of their own baptisms, and have little frame of reference in which to reflect on their own baptisms even if they were so inclined. And few will be inclined unless explicitly invited. Without an expressed invitation, the centrality of baptism to Christian life can therefore easily be overlooked even by the most devout Episcopalian.

Yet baptism *is* central to Christian identity. Across denominational lines, baptism is identified as central to Christian life.¹¹² The Catholic Catechism says, "Baptism is the source of that new life in Christ from which the entire Christian life springs forth"¹¹³ and "the whole organism of the Christian's supernatural life has its roots in Baptism."¹¹⁴

Protestant Reformers had a heightened emphasis on baptism. Martin Luther wrote extensively on baptism's centrality to Christian life, referring to baptism as "excellent, glorious, exalted"¹¹⁵ and "truly God's own work."¹¹⁶ The "unspeakable treasure" of baptism, in which God allies Godself with the baptized, lasts a life-time. Indeed,

¹¹² The overwhelming theme of BEM is that the many points of agreement about baptism between denominations in many ways transcend differences in practice. BEM, Commentary (6), 2.

¹¹³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, November 4, 2003, <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc/index.htm>, paragraph 1254, (accessed July 27, 2015).

¹¹⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 1266.

¹¹⁵ Martin Luther, *Small and Large Catechism* (Fig Classic Series, 2012), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 1966.

¹¹⁶ Luther, *Catechism*, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 1971.

Christian life is “daily baptism, once begun and ever to be continued.”¹¹⁷ Remembering one’s baptism is especially efficacious when one falls into sin: “Nor should he despair even if he fall, but he should remember his baptism, and comfort himself joyfully with it, since God has there bound Himself to slay his sin for him.”¹¹⁸ Baptism for Luther is a “daily dress in which [one] is to walk constantly.”¹¹⁹ These are the statements of one for whom baptism is not over and done, but a continuing, life-giving reality. For Luther, baptismal faith is living faith, energizing faith. Baptismal awareness has the capacity to revitalize individual faith and stimulate that faith into action, into ministry, into kingdom-of-God work in the world.

Turning to my own Episcopal tradition, the centrality of baptism is not quite so evident. Though baptism merits its own section in the Episcopal Catechism, there is nothing in the questions and answers to indicate that baptism is central to Episcopal Christianity, although baptism is identified, along with Eucharist, as being one of the “great sacraments given by Christ to his Church.”¹²⁰ In the baptismal rubrics, the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* recommends scheduling baptisms on four occasions out of the year: the Easter Vigil, Pentecost, All Saints and The Baptism of Our Lord. While tying the observation of baptism to theologically appropriate seasons potentially serves to

¹¹⁷ Luther, *Catechism*, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 2112.

¹¹⁸ Luther, “Treatise on Baptism,” *Works of Martin Luther With Introductions and Notes (Volume 1)* (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman, 1915, Kindle Edition), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 806.

¹¹⁹ Luther, *Catechism*, Location 2143.

¹²⁰ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 858.

dignify the sacrament and emphasize its themes, for a practical matter, restricting baptism to particular days tends to remove it from the congregation's general awareness.

However, some Episcopalians at least do recognize baptism's unique importance. Episcopal priest Fletcher Lowe's language even rivals that of Luther's in placing baptism at the center of Christian life, both individually and corporately. Lowe says, "Baptism is the base sacrament which gives identity to the Christian and undergirds all s/he is and does. It is not only a single event but an all pervasive and life long process." Not only is baptism central in the life of the baptized, it is also central to the Christian community locally and collectively: "If, in fact, Baptism is the sacramental act which declares one 'to be marked as Christ's own forever,' then the process of living into that identity becomes THE primary responsibility of the Christian community."¹²¹ Here is support from within my own tradition for restoring baptism to prominence in ongoing Christian formation for persons at all stages of faith development, not only for the sake of the individual, but also for the vitality of the church and her ministries.

For various cultural reasons, baptism has evidently not held the preeminence in Episcopal life that it deserves. Without an intentional effort on the part of the church to refocus on baptism, modern Christians may not fully grasp the baptismal foundations of their liturgical and ethical lives. Therefore the church must make an intentional effort to incorporate an ongoing baptismal emphasis into sermons, liturgy and adult formation.

¹²¹ Fletcher Lowe, "Worship and the Ministry of the Baptized: On Reclaiming the Centrality of Baptism," *As We Gather to Pray: An Episcopal Guide to Worship*, 1996. The Episcopal Church/ Office of Ministry Development/ Ministry in Daily Life/ Workshops, etc. <http://www.jardigitalworks.com/mdl/workshop05a.html> (accessed July 2, 2015).

The vitality of an individual's faith journey and of the collective life of the church depends on it.

Like all sacraments, baptism is a vehicle for supernatural grace, but it is not purely spiritual or conceptual. Baptism is profoundly incarnational: an embodied state. As Professor Andrea Bieler points out in her essay "Bodies at Baptism," the sacrament itself is obviously administered to the body and is apprehended by the body, through the senses of taste, smell and touch.¹²²

Not only is the body of the baptized person involved, but the larger body, the community, is likewise changed forever, enriched by the introduction of a new member: "Baptism can thus be perceived as ritual space of Christian identity formation that is intimate, eccentric, *communal, and cosmological*" (italics mine.)¹²³ Baptism is not just a personal event, but also a multi-layered reality, emanating out from the individual in ways he or she cannot even imagine. Baptism is a cosmic thing!

Baptism is profoundly corporeal not only in the sense that it concerns the physical human body, but also in that it concerns the body of the greater church, especially the particular community into which the person is baptized. It is for this reason that the Episcopal Church, among others, has come to discourage private baptisms. Indeed, although baptism is known as "initiation" into the church, "incorporation" is a much

¹²² Andrea Bieler, "Bodies at Baptism," in *Drenched in Grace: Essays in Baptismal Ecclesiology Inspired by the Work and Ministry of Louis Weil*, edited by Lizette Larson-Miller and Walter Knowles (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 245.

¹²³ Bieler, "Bodies at Baptism," Location 153.

better word. In baptism, one becomes part of a larger body, not simply a member of an organization or even a fraternity.

In an essay exploring baptismal theology in St. Augustine's day, liturgical scholar Walter Knowles observes that "it is the body which does the baptizing, but it also the body into which one is baptized."¹²⁴ Baptism is incorporation into "the community of the Holy Spirit" and has ramifications for the whole, including "resurrection of the entire community."¹²⁵

Knowles' discussion of the community of the Holy Spirit does not reference perhaps the strongest argument for the church as one body: the biblical model of the community as the very Body of Christ, as famously described by St. Paul in I Corinthians 12:12-14: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit *we were all baptized into one body*—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many" (italics mine.)

Another facet of baptism's being fundamentally incarnational is that through baptism God calls and empowers people for ministry in the physical world. The language of the Episcopal baptism rite makes this clear, especially in the final three questions of the Baptismal Covenant:

¹²⁴ Walter Knowles, "Incorporate into the Society of the Spirit: Baptismal Practice and Ecclesiology in Augustine's North Africa," in *Drenched in Grace: Essays in Baptismal Ecclesiology Inspired by the Work and Ministry of Louis Weil*, edited by Lizette Larson-Miller and Walter Knowles (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 662.

¹²⁵ Walter Knowles, "Incorporate into the Society," Location 740.

Will you persevere in proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?
Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?¹²⁶

Proclamation “by example,” seeking and serving, striving for justice and peace: these are all actions that incarnate the vows made in baptism, making manifest in fact and relationship one’s membership in the Body of Christ. That the effects of baptism are to be manifest in the world is clear from the penultimate Prayer for the Candidate: “Send them into the world in witness to your love.”¹²⁷ Baptism is not just initiation into the Church, it is also a call to serve the world.

Of course, the Christian’s understanding of “the world” derives from New Testament references to the Greek κόσμος (*cosmos*), which does not confine itself to the physical world. The Christian exists not only in the world as we usually think of it, but in the kingdom, or reign, of God. It is to this theological theme, and its significance for baptismal vocation, that I now turn.

The Kingdom/Reign of God

As mentioned above, according the WCC’s document “Baptism Eucharist and Ministry (BEM),” baptismal vocation interlocks with another theological theme, the kingdom, or reign of God. Indeed, the kingdom or reign of God is implicit in baptismal vocation.

¹²⁶ *Book of Common Prayer*, 305.

¹²⁷ *Book of Common Prayer*, 306.

The phrase βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ (*basileia tou theo*) occurs dozens of times throughout the New Testament. The translation currently favored by scholars is “reign of God,” which avoids the pitfalls associated with maleness, monarchy and geographical location attendant upon the more traditional translation “kingdom of God.” Though sensitive to these pitfalls and cognizant of the advantages of a term that more easily transcends time, space and gender, I have not myself fully made the transition to “reign,” and find myself reverting to “kingdom” for three reasons. First, “kingdom” is used in the translation with which my congregation is most familiar. In the context of FSL, the use of “reign” would likely have been unnecessarily distracting. Secondly, even in first-century paternalistic culture where “kingdom” language was normative, Jesus totally subverted the idea of (male) monarchy as it was understood. In other words, the term was ironic even in Jesus’ day. However, since one of FSL’s main points is to remove barriers to the free exploration of Christian spirituality for the person-in-the-pew, if even one person in the FSL group had found “kingdom” language a distraction I would have modified it. For the purposes of this paper, when I refer to “kingdom of God,” or “the kingdom,” I am referring to the βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ (*basileia tou theo*), a term which should not be taken to mean that God is male or substantively comparable to a human monarch, and which should not be identified with a particular time, place or institution (including the church.)

Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ (*basileia tou theo*) occurs most often in the Gospel of Luke. A related phrase, βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (*basileia ton ouranon*) is also used by the evangelist Matthew. From the outset of his earthly ministry, Jesus declares that “The

kingdom of God is near,”¹²⁸ “has come near,”¹²⁹ or is “among you.”¹³⁰ Jesus returns to this theme throughout his ministry. Jesus never provides an explicit definition of the kingdom of God but describes it two ways: parabolically and incarnationally.¹³¹

Jesus’ kingdom of God parables are both direct and indirect. Examples of direct parables are the comparisons to the pinch of yeast that leavens the whole loaf,¹³² or the mustard seed, which though tiny grows into an accommodating and useful bush.¹³³ Both of these explicit similes convey the teaching that the kingdom of God has modest beginnings but far-reaching impact.

Other comments Jesus makes about the kingdom of God are more inferential. The kingdom of God is hard for a rich person to enter.¹³⁴ Tax collectors and prostitutes will enter it before the chief priests and elders.¹³⁵ The kingdom of God must be received as a child.¹³⁶ These references convey the teaching that the kingdom of God is not guaranteed to the powerful and self-consciously righteous, but readily available to the humble. The

¹²⁸ Luke 21:31.

¹²⁹ Matthew 4:17 (“kingdom of heaven”), Mark 1:15, Luke 10: 9.

¹³⁰ Luke 17:21.

¹³¹ Geerhardus Vos, *The Kingdom of God* (Fig Classics, 2012), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 13.

¹³² Matthew 13:33 (“kingdom of heaven”), Luke 13:21.

¹³³ Matthew 13:31 (“kingdom of heaven”), Mark 4:30-32, Luke 13:18-19.

¹³⁴ Matthew 19:23 (“kingdom of heaven”), Mark 10:25, Luke 18:24-25.

¹³⁵ Matthew 21:31.

¹³⁶ Matthew 18:3 (“kingdom of heaven”), Mark 10:15, Luke 18:17.

kingdom of God is where Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the prophets can be seen,¹³⁷ so it exists somehow beyond human time as well as being “among us.”

These few excerpts represent a mere fraction of what Jesus has to say about the kingdom of God. It suffices to say here that the kingdom of God is central to Jesus’ teaching. Jesus considers the kingdom of God to be that to which any disciple must strive, and for which every disciple must be ready to sacrifice.¹³⁸

But Jesus not only preaches about the kingdom of God, Jesus also embodies the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is known through what Jesus was and did, as well as what Jesus taught. And what did Jesus do? He healed people, he fed them, he forgave them, and he set them free, in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, which Jesus quotes in Luke 4:16-21.

Much current commentary on the kingdom of God available today comes from the Reformed tradition, which emphasizes the transcendent aspects of the kingdom over ethical implications for the here-and-now. Reformed Theologian Geerhardus Vos, in describing the kingdom of God as “the sphere in which God manifests His supreme, royal power,” warns against a purely worldly understanding of the kingdom of God. This worldly understanding was the limitation inherent in the tendency of the Jews of Jesus’ day to interpret the kingdom of God in a political sense.¹³⁹ Therefore the kingdom of

¹³⁷ Luke 13:28.

¹³⁸ Vos, *Kingdom of God*, Location 207.

¹³⁹ Vos, *Kingdom of God*, Location 180.

God may not be reduced to ethical terms only – what the disciple must do – rather than the “the divine rule exercised and carried through in the work of salvation.”¹⁴⁰

John Bolt, a Reformed theologian active today, finds the current common tendency to emphasize the ethical aspect of the kingdom of God particularly insidious, going so far as to say, “Until contemporary social ethics recovers from its preoccupation with immanent expressions of the kingdom, it is perhaps prudent to avoid using the kingdom of God symbol as the cornerstone of a Christian social vision.”¹⁴¹ Bolt finds an appropriate emphasis on the need for humankind’s need for reconciliation absent from contemporary kingdom studies that have an ethical focus.¹⁴² Bolt holds that the significance of Kingdom of God theology lies in the need to convict people of their sin and of their need for reconciliation with God. He concludes:

The Gospel is not just a way of understanding earthly vocation – it the good news that humankind and God are reconciled in Christ and that the appropriate response is to believe, be baptized and be disciplined.”¹⁴³

Evangelical theologian and professor Richard L. Mayhue, meanwhile, stresses that layers of meaning are implicit in the concept of the kingdom of God: “A biblical study of God’s kingdom would lead one to conclude that it is variegated, multi-faceted, multidimensional, multifocal, multifactorial, and multifarious. It certainly could not be

¹⁴⁰ Vos, *Kingdom of God*, Location 250.

¹⁴¹ John Bolt, “Just What Do You Mean by the Kingdom of God – Lessons from a Century (and more) of Christian Social Thought,” *Calvin Theological Journal*, Vol. 51 no. 2, November 2016, 287.

¹⁴² Bolt, “Just What Do You Mean,” 262.

¹⁴³ Bolt, “Just What Do You Mean,” 282.

considered as monolithic in character.”¹⁴⁴ D. A. Carson agrees, identifying several ways of interpreting the kingdom of God and advising that all of them must be kept in mind all the time.¹⁴⁵

Thus, while emphasizing the need never to lose the transcendent aspect of the kingdom, the Reformed tradition recognizes that the kingdom God is a thick concept with many facets. The Reformed tradition’s insistence that the social gospel implicit in the kingdom of God is first a Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ is appropriate, and may have to be weighted in many congregations. I know pastors of churches devoted to outreach whose most active members do not seem to have much of a grounding in the Gospel. That is not the problem at Lawrencefield. My concern has not been so much to make sure ethical activity is grounded in discipleship, but to make sure discipleship includes ethical activity. The implications of the kingdom of God for baptismal ministry in the world is one facet that may have been overemphasized in situations with which Bolt is familiar, but it still needs to be teased out in a context like Lawrencefield.

The Catholic tradition, especially in its involvement with Liberation Theology, is more comfortable with teaching the ethical implications of the reign of God in the here-and-now, alongside the understanding of God’s transcendent kingdom consummated beyond time and space. Roman Catholic Church historians Jakub Urbaniak and Elijah

¹⁴⁴ Richard L. Mayhue, ThD, “The Kingdom of God: An Introduction,” *Master’s Theological Journal* 23/2 (Fall 2012), 169.

¹⁴⁵ The ways of interpreting the Kingdom of God, according to Carson are: (1) God’s sovereignty; (2) a subset of God’s total reign (where God is accepted); (3) The coming reality; (4) The current situation, where the saved coexist alongside “the tares”; (5) Christ’s kingdom; (6) An entity not to be identified with the church; (7) A condition of virtue and righteousness. D. A. Carson, “Kingdom Ethics and Individual Salvation,” *Themelios* (Online) 38 no. 2 (July 2013), 201.

Otu highlight the Second Vatican Council's emphasis on relating the realization of human values of peace and justice with "their fulfillment in the reign of God."¹⁴⁶

Urbaniak and Otu see the eternal aspect of God's reign as inspiration and motive for pursuit of justice and peace on earth. Surveying the ecclesiologies of Karl Rahner, Avery Dulles and Jürgen Moltmann, Urbaniak and Otu conclude:

One may sum up these approaches by stressing that Christian mission entails a responsibility for the world; hence the church's task to introduce the values of God's reign into the whole of human society and thus prepare the world – insofar as human efforts can – for the final transformation when God will establish the new heavens and the new earth.

In these Catholic commentators, one senses a greater imperative for Christians to incarnate their belief in God's reign in their daily life and work. For me, this imperative is implicit in baptismal identity and is born out in baptismal vocation.

The kingdom of God has undergirded my whole ordained ministry and is well-described for me by teacher-theologian Verna Dozier (herself an Episcopalian) in her book, *The Dream of God*.¹⁴⁷ Dozier roots her emphasis on the kingdom of God in basic Christian theology. She notes that God lovingly created the cosmos to be good. Human pride and greed have corrupted the world, but God's plan is for restoration and redemption. God chooses to involve humans in this plan. God's ultimate victory in this effort is assured in the Incarnation of Christ. The perfection of the universe will be consummated at a time known only to God, but human beings experience the kingdom of God in the here-and-now as they participate in kingdom activities like healing, forgiving,

¹⁴⁶ Jakub Urbaniak and Elijah Otu, 2016, "How to Expect God's Reign to Come: From Jesus' through the Ecclesial to the Cosmic Body," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 72 no. 4, a3380, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3380>, 1.

¹⁴⁷ Verna J. Dozier, *The Dream of God: A Call to Return*. (New York: Seabury, 2006) Kindle Electronic Edition: Chapter 5, Location 1644.

feeding and standing with the poor as Jesus did. By being baptized in Christ, we dedicate ourselves to this work. In short, baptism represents, among other things, a vocation to kingdom work.

The following quotation from *The Dream of God* goes to the heart of the matter of kingdom-of-God work being the essence of baptismal vocation:

It is the task of the church, the people of God, to minister within the structures of society. It is the role of the church, the institution, to support that ministry.... The people of God with kingdom-of-God ideas about money need to work in the financial and economic structures of our society....The people of God with kingdom-of-God ideas about power need to work in the political structures of our world, the governments of town and city, state and nation....The people of God with kingdom-of-God ideas about prestige need to work in all the structures of society that serve others....The people of God with kingdom-of-God ideas about human solidarity need to be in all the structures of society where people find meaning—in the arts, in journalism, in universities, in city planning, in the sciences. There is no place where the people of God should not be, and wherever they are they are called to witness to another possibility for life.... That is ministry, being about God’s business.¹⁴⁸

This link between being the people of God and being kingdom-of-God ministers is absolutely foundational to why I undertook a project to coach spiritual awareness.

The kingdom of God is not just a place we go when we die, but, to use Dozier’s term, it is “God’s dream.” In God’s dream, people are invited to participate *now*, in this life, in their own particular situations, empowered by baptism and by the individual gifts for ministry with which they have been endowed by the Holy Spirit. Awakening spiritual confidence is a means to the end of encouraging people with kingdom-of-God ideas to incarnate these ideas in their daily lives. In baptism, God thus publicly calls people to ministry. With spiritual gifts, God equips them for ministry.

¹⁴⁸ Dozier, *Dream of God*, Location 1652.

Baptism, the kingdom of God, spiritual gifts and the nature of spirituality itself all support the FSL experiment: to cultivate spirituality in the company of a small group of like-minded individuals in support of individual and collective vocation. These doctrines represent the theological underpinnings of this project. In the next chapter, I survey what behavioral science has to say on the matter.

CHAPTER 4
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE FOUNDATIONS

In support of the thesis that fostering spirituality provides church leaders with the confidence and vocabulary they need to be effective ministers, I now move on to the subject of how behavioral science informs my project. I will first summarize some relevant theories of faith development and adult learning, then comment on how recent neurological research supports the notion of inherent spirituality.

Faith Development Theory

Theologian James W. Fowler's classic *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* provides a helpful framework for understanding how human beings develop spiritually. Fowler draws primarily on three sources: Jean Piaget and his work on the development of thinking and reasoning, Erik Erikson on the "growth and crises of the healthy personality," and Lawrence Kohlberg's study of moral development. With a nod to Paul Tillich's definition of faith as "ultimate concern," Fowler defines faith (independently of religion) as "one's way of responding to transcendent value and power"¹⁴⁹ and states that "faith is a human universal."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: Harper Collins, 1981), 9.

¹⁵⁰ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, xiii.

Fowler posits six stages of faith development, following the “pre-emergent” faith of infancy, which is characterized simply by trust and mutuality.¹⁵¹

1. Intuitive-Projective Faith. Typical of Early Childhood, this stage is characterized by fluidity and imagination, “uninhibited by logical thought,” and embraces a child’s first awareness of such existential phenomena as self, death and sex.¹⁵²
2. Mythic-Literal Faith. Associated with Adolescence, faith at this stage becomes more concrete and literal, associated with narrative, relationship, rules, fairness, and a sense of belonging. The concept of God tends to be anthropomorphic.¹⁵³
3. Synthetic-Conventional Faith. This stage commonly emerges in Young Adulthood, as a person develops the abilities to conceive of the ideal and “step outside” the self. Outside authority on faith matters is generally accepted. Beliefs may be tacitly held, and assumed to be normative for the entire community.¹⁵⁴
4. Individuative-Reflective Faith. This stage is associated with maturity as the person takes on increased personal responsibility and no longer accepts an identity imposed from outside the self. While the person becomes more aware

¹⁵¹ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 121.

¹⁵² Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 133.

¹⁵³ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 149.

¹⁵⁴ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 167.

of social systems, absolute reliance on outside authority weakens. What was tacitly held becomes conscious. Symbols can be distinguished from the meaning behind them.¹⁵⁵

5. **Conjunctive Faith.** At this stage, which tends to occur in mid-life or later, the individual is able to see multiple sides of an issue and can tolerate ambiguity, paradox, mystery and vulnerability. In this context Fowler speaks of “dialogical knowing” and “detachment.” The person comes to realize that “the conscious ego is not master in its own house,”¹⁵⁶ and typically becomes open to other traditions. This stage exists in a sort of tension “between an untransformed world and a transforming vision.”¹⁵⁷
6. **Universalizing Faith.** This stage overcomes the tension of Stage Five. In Stage Six the present life is seen as a partial reality reflecting a deeper truth. The vision of transformation exceeds concern for the self. Selflessly open to “the power of the future” the person can conceive of self-sacrifice for the sake of transforming reality. Few reach this stage, and society as a whole is uncomfortable with those who do. These are our martyrs, subversives, radicals, and those who identify profoundly with the exploited.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 182.

¹⁵⁶ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 186.

¹⁵⁷ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 198.

¹⁵⁸ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 211.

A person can remain at any stage indefinitely. Fowler emphasizes that consciously attempting to progress to the next stage is not as helpful as fully realizing and integrating “the strengths and graces” of the stage at which one happens to find oneself.¹⁵⁹ The progress Fowler envisions is clearly organic and not to be forced.

Groups as well as individuals go through faith stages. The “modal development level” is the level of development the average adult may achieve in a given community. Persons typically may grow to the modal development level of their particular community but will rarely progress further. Fowler observes that most American faith communities are at Level 3: the level of Synthetic-Conventional Faith.¹⁶⁰ At the same time, the community has enormous potential to stimulate and nurture individuals’ faith, by observing rites of passage and providing ministry opportunities.¹⁶¹ Clearly the community can have a profoundly influential role in the faith development of the people who populate it.

Fowler’s system is expanded by Larry Culliford in the latter’s book *The Psychology of Spirituality: An Introduction*. In particular, Culliford further explores community spirituality. Spiritual growth in communities does not depend on mass conversion, Culliford says, but rather on a critical mass of individuals within the group making spiritual progress.¹⁶² Culliford becomes an ardent evangelist for spiritual development, claiming

¹⁵⁹ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 274.

¹⁶⁰ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 294.

¹⁶¹ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 296.

¹⁶² Culliford, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 25.

...as many people as possible should learn how to enquire into their spiritual nature and discover their true selves. Spiritual development should therefore be restored as the bedrock of education, healthcare, social care, and therefore also of commerce, of local, national and international politics. Then all will be better off. It follows too that spiritual development should be given more emphasis than has generally come to be the case at the heart of every religion. More people than at present will then find religious teachings and practices relevant, even useful, in the search for personal spiritual maturity.¹⁶³

There could hardly be a stronger testimony for the value of individual spiritual development in transforming communities and social structures.

Some of Culliford's most insightful comments concern the transition beyond Fowler's Third Stage of Faith Development, which Culliford agrees is dominant in today's culture. Stage Three's emphasis on conformity inhibits spiritual growth unless its tendency toward exclusivity, which is counter to the holistic heart of spirituality, can be overcome.¹⁶⁴ Stage Four emerges with independence from conformity, but does not, in itself, represent mature spirituality.¹⁶⁵

Progress toward Stages Four and Five (the latter of which recognizes the interrelatedness of all creation) is facilitated through meditation, contemplation, spiritual reading and other spiritual practices, and also through cultivating supportive relationships with other spiritual seekers.¹⁶⁶ Approaching spiritual development in total solitude,

¹⁶³ Culliford, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 31.

¹⁶⁴ Culliford, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 145.

¹⁶⁵ Culliford, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 155.

¹⁶⁶ Culliford, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 243.

Culliford says, is possible but likely to be limited. Some sort of instruction, support and accompaniment is almost always beneficial.¹⁶⁷

Culliford's arguments in favor of cultivating spiritual development border on the imperative: "More spiritually minded and mature people are urgently needed in our communities."¹⁶⁸ Here I find resonance with my concept of being in the "export business" at Lawrencefield Parish Church: building on our strengths of faith, hope and love among individuals within this small community in the hope of spreading these virtues abroad in the areas outside church in which our members live, move and have their being.

Considering Fowler's and Culliford's observation that many faith communities collectively operate at the Third Stage of faith development appears to be borne out, historically, at Lawrencefield Church. People here have no trouble stepping out beyond their own personal experience and conceiving of the supernatural. The church's authority, and mine, are respected. What appears to be true of the congregation as a whole was apparent in the early stages of FSL.

In Chapter meetings, I was clearly seen as the authority in matters of faith, belief and spirituality. As ambiguities arose, as they inevitably did, participants would often appeal to me for definitive answers. It was apparent that participants might be for the first time critically examining habitual practices and beliefs that had previously been tacitly held.

¹⁶⁷ Culliford, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 213.

¹⁶⁸ Culliford, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 243.

Judging from Fowler and Culliford, what happened during FSL was progress from Stage Three faith development toward and into Stage Four, and possibly beyond. Participants were given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own spirituality rather than accepting another's prescription for the "right way" to approach prayer and devotions. Social assumptions were intentionally examined, making tacitly held beliefs conscious.

Even some aspects of Stage Five were in evidence, as individuals learned to value different spiritual outlooks and practices. Since I, as the authority figure, normally declined to define the one "correct" answer to spiritual problems, people were forced to deal with ambiguity, paradox, mystery and vulnerability. Curiosity about other traditions emerged even as participants found affirmation for their own belief and praxis.

Educational Theory

Andragogy

Any adult education program must take into account the particular needs of adult learners, who do not respond to the same teaching methods children do. The teaching of adults is called andragogy, as opposed to pedagogy, the teaching of children. The classic andragogical analysis comes from educators Malcolm Knowles, Elwood Holton and Richard Swanson, who surveyed and synthesized countless authorities on how adults learn and came up with the following six-point andragogical model:

1. "Adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it." Since adults are past the stage of being motivated by needing to

progress in school, they are motivated to learn only when they can see what the learning will add to their lives.

2. Since adults conceive of themselves as being independent and responsible for their own decisions, they resist passively accepting instruction unless allowed some self-direction in their learning.
3. Adults have a much wider range of experience than children. Therefore any group of adults will comprise a wider variety of temperaments, backgrounds and interests than the average class of children. This range of experience can be a rich resource in the adult classroom. On the other hand, adults may have unhelpful habits or be stuck in their ways. Educators of adults need to be able to adapt to a variety of learning styles and help adults examine their habits and biases. Adult education must emphasize the learner's own experience because with adults, "experience is who they are" rather than something that happens to them, which is the case with children.
4. Adults become ready to learn in stages as the demands of their lives evolve. However, readiness can be stimulated "through exposure to models of superior performance, career counseling, simulation exercises, and other techniques."
5. As opposed to children, whose learning tends to be subject-oriented, adult learning is "life-centered." Adults learn best when they can see the applicability of what they are learning to their own specific tasks and problems.
6. While motivation to learn in adults can come from influences outside themselves, their strongest motivations are internal. Internal motivation however can be blocked by both internal barriers like "negative self-concept as a student," and

external factors such as “inaccessibility of opportunities or resources, time constraints, and programs that violate principles of adult learning.”¹⁶⁹

These principles undergirded the planning of FSL.

Adults Need to Know Why They Need to Learn

The need of many in the congregation to learn more about spirituality has been expressed in many ways over several years. Sessions on prayer and meditation have been well received, and there is hunger for more. The 2015 Institutional Study uncovered a deep undercurrent of faith, often unexpressed until that point. The Institutional Study Team found the sharing of personal stories to be the most rewarding part of the survey, suggesting that my parishioners’ accustomed reticence in sharing stories about prayer life may have been due to an absence of opportunity.

The entrance questionnaires indicated a desire for spiritual learning. Respondents expressed that they would like to grow spiritually in the following ways: “noticing when God is present,” “communication with God,” and “Daily prayer and meditation.” It is safe to conclude that members of the FSL group were aware of a need to know more about prayer, and were eager to find out what spiritual learning might add to their lives.

Adults Need Self-Direction

Having identified a need to know, designing the program required allowance for self-direction on the part of these adult learners. As I explained in an earlier chapter, my

¹⁶⁹ Malcolm S. Knowles, Elwood F. Holton III, and Richard A. Swanson, *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development* (New York: Routledge, 2015) Kindle Electronic Edition: 43-47.

initial concept was a “Third Order” model: having participants covenant to pursue their own spiritual explorations on a daily basis and convene to share experiences at weekly Chapter meetings. It was clear from my Planning Team’s reaction that this was too much self-direction! However a purely didactic approach would not have been suitable in a group of adult learners. In between the poles of total self-direction and pure teaching we hit upon the idea of workbooks, which people could follow at their own pace but in which they would receive guidance and encouragement. In practice, this balance worked perfectly.

The Individual Life Experiences of Adults Need to Be Acknowledged and Appreciated

In terms of respecting the individual experience of participants, I knew from the Institutional Study that participants were persons of deep faith with valid and varied spiritual experiences behind them. I was also aware of a range of spiritual and learning styles. In FSL, by scheduling a “sharing circle” at the beginning of each Chapter session where each participant was able to talk as long as he or she wanted without interruption or commentary, we were able to establish an environment where everyone’s experience was respected and valued.

Individual participants benefitted from hearing about the experience of their peers, and felt individually validated even when their own experience differed from those of the others. As one person put it: “My idea of spirituality has expanded from listening to others. In addition to actions, spirituality involves feelings. Sometimes it’s deeply personal, sometimes spirituality is a group thing. You don’t have to do it by yourself.” Respect for others in the group was stimulated even as people felt affirmed in their own spirituality.

The very variety of spiritual experience, accepted uncritically, made commonalities all the more visible. One person said, “It seemed that all of us struggled with our prayer life and were uncomfortable discussing that fact, but we did, and with that [came] the realization that we were not the only one with feelings of inadequacies, but maybe we were normal. There was no criticism of the response that others in the group gave, but reflection, acceptance and support, and at times, guidance.” In respect for individual differences, awareness of common ground was able to emerge.

Adults Need to Be at a Receptive Stage

The willingness of FSL participants to participate in a course billed as spiritual learning indicated receptivity to spiritual learning. But as the course progressed, readiness for spiritual progress was clearly further stimulated. The “exposure to models of superior performance” to which Knowles et al. refer was provided in the form of the Lent FSL workbook’s focus on learning about spiritual giants of the Christian tradition. This exposure to multiple experiences of spirituality was affirmed by listening to others in the group as they told their own stories.

Progress in the Faith Stages described by Fowler and Culliford was stimulated for FSL participants through the program. FSL cultivated receptivity to this spiritual learning by providing examples of those whom Christian tradition has recognized as being especially spiritually aware, as well as the opportunity to recognize spiritual strengths in their peers as they shared from their own experience.

Adults Need Practical Application

As I prepared the daily exercises for each workbook, I made a concerted effort to apply the day's learning to the person's real life. For example, in an Advent exercise on How God Acts, I asked participants to use a Psalm to identify ways in which God is known to act, and then reflect on how and when God has acted this way in the person's life. In a Lenten exercise on St. Francis deSales' virtue of Gentleness with Oneself, one question was to ask if it is easier to forgive others than to forgive oneself. In an exercise based on Mark 10:17, where Jesus says, "Come, follow me," participants were asked to pray for the grace to discern what it means for them personally to leave all and come follow Jesus.

In the exit interviews, several participants reported how the effects of taking the course have spilled over into their personal and professional relationships. This represents proof of practical application that in some cases was even unconscious and non-intentional.

Adult Learners are Primarily Self-Motivated but May Be Discouraged by Internal and External Factors

Clearly FSL could not control all internal factors that discourage learning. It was clear when we started that several participants had, to some extent, "negative self-image as a student," as they expressed feelings of inferiority when approaching spiritual practice. However, providing vocabulary and opportunity for spiritual self-expression, as well as exposure to others who felt similarly, was an effective treatment against this internal barrier to learning.

We were also sensitive to removing external barriers and twice moved our meeting space to provide adequate privacy and comfort.

The Whole-Part-Whole Learning Model

In addition to providing general guidance in andragogical principles, Knowles, Holton and Swanson offer more specific guidance for lesson planning. Specifically, they recommend a “Whole-Part-Whole Learning Model,” based on the observation that “there is a natural whole-part-whole rhythm to learning.”¹⁷⁰

According to this model, learners are first introduced to the content of the instruction by being allowed to form an organizational framework for it in their minds. This presentation of framework, the first “Whole” represents the first segment of any learning process. Subsequent segments introduce additional components of the instructional content. These are the “Parts.” When learners have achieved “performance criteria” for each part, the instructor ties everything together in the “Second Whole.”¹⁷¹

Although I was unfamiliar with this model when devising the exercise booklets for FSL, I unconsciously conformed to it by providing a “First Whole” before introducing the Parts or segments. At the very beginning, the FSL group discussed, in the first Chapter meeting, their own concepts of what spirituality is in general, and why it is important for each person to develop his or her own spirituality.

Subsequently, the weeks of the Advent Booklet provided basic exercises in spirituality. The first three sections of the Advent Booklet were “Abiding in Love,” to

¹⁷⁰ Malcolm Knowles, *Adult Learner*, 233.

¹⁷¹ Malcolm Knowles, *Adult Learner*, 234.

introduce the concept of simply waiting on God; “God’s Presence in You,” to introduce the concepts of Giftedness and Consolation in prayer; and “Where are you, God?” on spiritual dryness. These represent the “Parts” of the Advent Program.

Earlier I described how these Parts parallel parts of the Ignatian Examen. I decided to present these components separately rather than as an integrated unit on the Examen as a whole because understanding them as distinct phenomena provided a basic vocabulary (particularly “consolation” and “desolation”) for later discussions of specific spiritual writers. I wanted to be sure that the subtleties of these concepts were not only understood but also experienced personally by FSL participants. A further goal was to avoid simplistic notions of consolation being “good stuff” and desolation being “bad stuff.” I particularly wanted participants to understand that both consolation and desolation could factor into their giftedness.

The Fourth Week of the Advent Booklet was intended as the “Second Whole” in this process, but this part of my plan was less than entirely successful. Several participants in exit interviews said they felt the conclusion of the Advent program was too abrupt. Part of the problem was that the fourth week of Advent that year was a short week, ending in Christmas, and there were only three in-depth daily reflections rather than the usual five.

But the major issue obstructing a presentation of the “Second Whole,” was that we did not have a concluding Chapter meeting until well after the Christmas holiday. Those who continued in FSL to participate in the Lenten program eventually felt a sense of whole-part-whole closure, but the ending of the Advent program somewhat

compromised its potential effectiveness. In future essays of an FSL-style program, I would be sure to supply a discreet summation to provide the “Second Whole.”

Having been introduced to the basic components of waiting on God, consolation and desolation in the Advent session, FSL participants clearly felt prepared to look at specific spiritual writers in the Lenten session. In presenting these “Parts,” however, my purposes diverged somewhat from those anticipated by Knowles et al. In presenting five different spiritual writers, my purpose was not that participants meet “proficiency criteria” in each type of prayer, but that they would have exposure to different approaches that they might then incorporate into their own spiritual practices.

I expected, since members of the group had different temperaments, life experiences and learning styles, that some forms of spirituality would appeal to some participants and not to others. I realized that some participants might be positively turned off by the spirituality of one or the other writer. I had neither the training nor the time to analyze what spiritual style would appeal to each participant and tailor an individual approach for each. Therefore my goal was to present several styles, in the hopes that everyone would find something to enrich their spiritual lives. This turned out to be the case, as evidenced by the concluding interviews.

Multiple Intelligences

My expectation of deep differences in individuals’ receptivity to different spiritual sources was based in part on an awareness of individual differences in learning styles. I had been exposed, in a previous career, to developmental psychologist Howard Gardner’s theory of Multiple Intelligences. Although Gardner’s system has been challenged and

modified since its initial presentation, the idea that people have different ways of learning is self-evident.

According to Gardner's seminal work *Frames of Mind*, originally published in 1983,¹⁷² human beings exhibit seven different "intelligences."

1. Verbal intelligence. People with this intelligence learn well from being taught through the medium of language. This has been the most common form of teaching in American schools.
2. Musical intelligence. People with this intelligence obviously have a high musical aptitude, but can excel in other areas that depend upon the apprehension of pattern. Like verbal aptitude, musical aptitude is aurally based.
3. Logical-Mathematical intelligence. People with this intelligence learn best when the material can be given numerical value or proven through logical progressions. Calculation and problem-solving are particular gifts. This type of learner tends to succeed in math and science as they are commonly taught in schools. Rather than depending upon aural stimuli, logical-mathematical learners draw upon the "world of objects."¹⁷³
4. Spatial intelligence. People with this intelligence learn based on physical orientation and relative spatial relationships. This aptitude depends on

¹⁷² Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 2011) Kindle Electronic Edition.

¹⁷³ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 135.

accurate visual apprehension, but has been observed in blind subjects who learn tactilely. Excellence in the visual arts depends on spatial intelligence.

5. Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence. People with this intelligence learn through movement of the body. Historically, kinesthetic learners have been challenged by school environments that require sitting still, but they often excel at acting, sports or dance.
6. Intrapersonal intelligence. People with this intelligence are extremely self-aware and tuned into how external stimuli make them feel. This forms their apprehension of the world.
7. Interpersonal intelligence. This intelligence is similar to intrapersonal intelligence, but the person with this intelligence is primarily tuned into the feelings of others and to personal relationships.

Gardner's critics say his theories lack empirical proof, that the limitation to seven intelligences is artificial,¹⁷⁴ and that in attempting to teach to different intelligences classroom resources are squandered.¹⁷⁵ However, the general principle that people learn in different ways is abundantly clear to this former teacher, and foundational to FSL's workbook-and-group-discussion teaching model.

¹⁷⁴ To these original seven, Gardner himself later suggested additional intelligences might be added, particularly a "Naturalistic intelligence" by which persons are particularly attuned to, and learn through, apprehension of the natural world (1995).

¹⁷⁵ Jay Mathews, "21 Years Later, 'Multiple Intelligences' Still Debated: Educator Pushes Appealing To All Types Of Learners (*Washington Post*, Tuesday, September 7, 2004), A09<http://www.Washingtonpost.Com/Wp-Dyn/Articles/A1337-2004sep6.html>, (accessed January 27, 2017).

I knew that linguistic learners would respond well to the verbal teaching in the booklets and the conversation of chapter meetings. However the selection of a variety of spiritual approaches, plus the “hands-on” exercise format significantly broadened the accessibility of spiritual learning to a variety of different learning styles beyond those who might have responded to a lecture format.

The step-by-step approaches of St. Benedict and Ignatius Loyola appeal to the mathematical-logical intelligence. Meanwhile, St. Francis de Sales’ focus on the cultivation of virtues resonates with intrapersonal intelligence. St. Francis of Assisi, with his focus of relationship to God, to the world and to all of humanity speaks to those with interpersonal intelligence.

Interestingly, Evelyn Underhill appealed to a member of the group whom I would assume to have both spatial and kinesthetic aptitudes, given his affinity for both fixing things and physical fitness. I don’t usually think of Underhill’s spirituality as being physical, but some of the preliminary workbook exercises that presented her form of mysticism involved relating to a physical object. This one spatial, kinesthetic learner responded very positively to that approach.

There was no discreet appeal to musical learners in the FSL project as originally conceived. However, the original FSL group has continued to meet without workbooks to discuss spiritual topics of common interest, and most recently is in the middle of a unit on *The Spirituality of Music*.

Providing a variety of spiritual authorities is an effective way to present spirituality to a variety of learning styles and intelligences. As always in teaching to multiple intelligences, willingness to adapt method to audience is critical.

Neuroscience of Spirituality

Some psychologists and neurologists go so far as to hold that spirituality is biologically based in the human organism. In Culliford's words: "People are bio-psycho-spiritual in nature. The body, mind and spiritual essence are one, indivisible."¹⁷⁶ Not only is spirituality an inherent human characteristic, it may not be divorced from the physical and mental.

Two similar but ultimately divergent contemporary views of the biological basis of spirituality have been proposed by author Matthew Alper on the one hand and the team of Andrew Newberg, Eugene D'Aguioli and Vince Rause (a neuroscientist, a research psychiatrist and a writer, respectively) on the other. Both Alper and the Newberg team hold that humankind is naturally spiritual owing to the structures and function of the human brain itself.

Alper posits that spirituality evolved as a survival mechanism: an actual case of natural selection. The function that spirituality serves in the survival of the human organism is to help it deal with the anxious and potentially paralyzing knowledge of its own mortality. Those with a higher spiritual capacity were better equipped to deal with humanity's awareness of inevitable death, Alper contends, thereby passing their "spiritual" genes onto the next generation:

Our species' awareness of inevitable death placed such a strong pressure on our cerebral (cognitive) evolutions that at some point during the latter stages of hominid evolution, nature selected those lineages which possessed a built-in predisposition to believe in or perceive an alternate reality, one that supersedes

¹⁷⁶ Culliford, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 46.

the limitations of this finite physical realm which can only offer us pain, suffering and ultimately death.¹⁷⁷

Thus does Alper conclude that spiritual consciousness in humans is both natural and inborn.¹⁷⁸ However, Alper goes further. Because, as he believes, spirituality is actually neurological in origin, he concludes that spirituality is *purely* neurological in origin. In other words, what people call “God” is unprovable by science and therefore no more than a projection of the human mind. At this stage in human history, he believes, religion as we understand it should be abandoned, especially because of the atrocities committed in its name. In all integrity, humankind should dispense with religion and refocus its inborn spiritual energy “from the hereafter to the here and now, to deter intolerance, antipathy, and war, thereby minimizing our pain and maximizing our chance of obtaining the greatest amount of happiness in life.”¹⁷⁹

Alper’s findings about a neurological basis for spirituality are convincing. It does not follow, however, that if God exists in the human brain, God exists nowhere else. James has pointed out that “As a matter of psychological fact, mystical states of a well-pronounced and emphatic sort ARE usually authoritative over those who have them....It is vain for rationalism to grumble about this.”¹⁸⁰ In other words, empirical science will

¹⁷⁷ Matthew Alper, *The “God” Part of the Brain: A Scientific Interpretation of Human Spirituality and God* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc., 2008) Kindle Electronic Edition: 123.

¹⁷⁸ Whether spirituality is unique to humans, as Alper contends, remains unproven, as the workings of the non-human (animal) brain remain necessarily a partially closed book to science!

¹⁷⁹ Alper, *The God Part*, 247.

¹⁸⁰ James, *Varieties*, 369.

never convince those who have experienced God in some way that God is only a projection of the brain.

In fact, Newberg, D'Aguili and Rause have conducted neurological research that seems at least as "scientific" as Alper's, and reached a similar conclusion to Alper's, that spirituality has a biological basis. But they have done so without ruling out the outside existence of God.

For Newberg et al., as for Alper, the structure and functions of the brain show the neurological basis of spirituality, thereby showing that spirituality is common to all humans: "Spiritual experience at its very root is intimately interwoven with human biology. That biology in some way compels the spiritual urge."¹⁸¹ The research reported in their book, *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief*, centers around the mapping of spiritual activity in the brain. The human brain contains a "quiescent system" and an "arousal system" that tend to function "antagonistically," that is, when one is active the other tends to be suppressed. However in "states of heightened consciousness" both systems function at a high level. Religious activity is one of only a few conditions that stimulate this simultaneous high functioning of both systems.¹⁸²

There are other points of agreement between Newberg and Alper. Like Alper, the Newberg team believes that humans evolved mind structures "to reduce the intolerable anxiety that is the brain's way of warning us that we are not safe."¹⁸³ Also like Alper, the

¹⁸¹ Andrew Newberg, M.D., Eugene D'Aquili, and Vincent Rause, *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002) Kindle Electronic Edition: 8.

¹⁸² Newberg, *Why God Won't Go*, 39.

¹⁸³ Newberg, *Why God Won't Go*, 59.

Newberg team associates mystical states with the suppression of the parts of the brain that enable the organism to distinguish itself from what is not itself. There is a part of the human brain, in other words, that develops early in childhood and helps a person distinguish between “me” and “not me.” When people meditate, whether they are Buddhist practitioners or Franciscan nuns, their brain scans show a sharp decrease of activity in this part of the brain.¹⁸⁴

The Newberg Team does say “what we think of as reality is only a rendition of reality that is created by the brain.”¹⁸⁵ At first blush this appears to be exactly what Alper says, but Newberg and his team stop short of concluding that God exists only in the human brain, claiming instead that God can only be *manifest* to humans being through the workings of the human brain, which is something else entirely. Indeed it is hard to imagine any awareness that human beings may have that does not involve the brain. It does not follow that everything of which human beings are aware exists *only* in their brains.

The Newberg team says “tracing spiritual experience to neurological behavior does not disprove its realness.”¹⁸⁶ This sounds quite a lot like James’ claim that God is real because God has real, observable effects on people. Further, the Newberg team says: “We have no rational reason to declare that spiritual experience is a fiction that is ‘only in the mind.’ Dismissing spiritual experience as *purely neurological* is no more logical than dismissing any other perception of the material world.” They go on to suggest that

¹⁸⁴ Newberg, *Why God Won’t Go*, 7.

¹⁸⁵ Newberg, *Why God Won’t Go*, 34.

¹⁸⁶ Newberg, *Why God Won’t Go*, 37.

science, no less than religion, itself is based on “foundational myths” such as the assumption that what cannot be measured cannot be real.¹⁸⁷

Newberg, D’Aquili and Rause conclude by holding that although neurological evidence cannot prove God’s existence, it does prove the reality of spiritual experience. They propose the further investigation of what they call “neurotheology,” the science of linking mystical experience with observable brain function.

Alper and Newberg through their research have established that spirituality in humans is biologically based and that the human brain has observable, naturally-occurring, spiritual functions associated with specific neurological structures. Alper concludes that God is simply a projection of the human brain. Newberg et al. leave God’s existence an open question, and suggest by the concept of “neurotheology” that belief and neurobiology are not only compatible but potentially mutually informative. Of course, I find myself more sympathetic to Newberg’s conclusions. But what is most useful, for the sake of the study under discussion here, is that scientists on both sides of the divide between believers and non-believers have been able to offer proof for the inherency of human spirituality. Spirituality is not for the exceptionally gifted, but can be practiced, and developed, by anyone. Human beings are, by definition, spiritual.

¹⁸⁷ Newberg, *Why God Won’t Go*, 171.

CHAPTER 5

ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW: ANALYSIS

In pastoral counseling I am often telling people who are going through difficult times that “God wastes nothing.” By this I mean that God can use even what seems bad to us to work out God’s purposes in the world, just as God brought good out of the cruel action of Joseph’s brothers in the Book of Genesis.¹⁸⁸ God’s capacity for redemption is limitless.

Thus, even though my project failed to find the expected causal relationship between nurturing spirituality and awareness of baptismal vocation, other learnings abounded. Considering the results of FSL in light of theological and behavioral science reflection, three main conclusions emerge:

1. Teaching about baptismal vocation warrants explicit, dedicated attention.
2. Fostering spirituality in the context of regular group meetings fosters spiritual confidence in congregational leaders.
3. Spiritual confidence builds the kingdom of God.

In this chapter I will focus on each point in turn.

¹⁸⁸ Joseph’s jealous brothers sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt, where he rose to be a powerful minister who was eventually able to avert the disastrous effects of a great famine. At the end of the story, Joseph receives his repentant brothers, saying, “Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good...” (Genesis 50:20.)

Teaching About Baptismal Vocation Warrants Explicit, Dedicated Attention

Chapter 3 of this paper established that being baptized is central to Christian identity, and that every baptized person has a personalized vocation to serve the kingdom of God, according to each person's unique situation and constellation of God-given gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of building God's kingdom. This project was in part inspired by the desire to focus attention on baptism and baptismal vocation. I had observed that baptism's importance does not receive the attention it deserves in church-as-usual. I was concerned that adult Christians may not, unless given the opportunity, reflect on the extensive implications of a possibly unremembered event on their current lives.

Through the initial screening process, described in Chapter 2, I discovered that several participants did indeed value their baptized status, whether or not they had conscious memories of their own baptism. However, awareness of being uniquely gifted ministers by virtue of baptism was, as expected, not well-developed. By the time the project concluded, participants were at least considering the possibility of being gifted by God, but had not generally made a strong connection between being gifted and being called to baptismal ministry through the exercise of their spiritual gifts. For these reasons I had to conclude that my original thesis, that fostering spirituality increases awareness of baptismal ministry, was not conclusively proved.

Progress had been made, however, on the awareness of being spiritually gifted. The reason for this was probably due to the fact that week 2 of the Advent Workbook explicitly featured exercises about spiritual gifts.

Awareness of baptismal identity *did* increase among FSL participants who also attended the Cluster Series on baptism that was offered simultaneously to FSL during the

weeks of Lent. This suggests that dedicated instruction about baptism is indeed profitable to adults baptized as children. Direct, explicit baptismal instruction is likely needed for this to happen. Awareness of baptismal vocation does not automatically happen as a result of nurturing spiritual disciplines, as it had in my own spiritual journey. Awareness of baptismal identity generally happens as a result of nurturing baptismal identity.

Awareness of baptismal *identity*, however, is not necessarily awareness of baptismal *vocation*. Rediscovery and exploration of one's own baptism may not by itself mean that one is able to discern one's baptismal vocation any more clearly than by being coached in spiritual disciplines. Awareness of baptismal vocation likely requires yet another step beyond teaching about baptism's centrality to one's Christian life.

Baptism and baptismal vocation are both important enough to be taught on their own. However, the spiritual disciplines cultivated in FSL are invaluable complements to such instruction. The workbook-and-weekly-meeting format has definitely proved effective. Perhaps the next step at Lawrencefield will be another workbook-based group explicitly dedicated to the centrality of baptism, only then proceeding on to discernment of baptismal vocation by employing the practices and prayer techniques explored in FSL.

At any rate, indications are strong that spirituality should continue to be intentionally nurtured at Lawrencefield. Participants themselves insisted on continuing to meet. It is possible that awareness of baptismal vocation will indeed evolve from spiritual exploration given enough time. The four weeks of Advent and five weeks of Lent may be insufficient for the full flowering of baptismal vocation, but perhaps the seeds have been sown.

Fostering Spirituality Increases Spiritual Confidence

The most dramatic result of the FSL experiment was that people who initially doubted their qualifications to belong to a group focused on spirituality became enthusiastic participants, eloquent in freely describing their own prayer lives, benefitting from both their study of the tradition and the sincere sharing of their fellows, and eager to continue spiritual exploration. I have chosen to call this development *spiritual confidence* and from this project believe that it is a worthwhile, if not necessary, focus for nurturing ministry potential in congregational leaders.

Foundational to building spiritual confidence is the teaching that spirituality is both inherently human and specific to the individual. The theological analysis of Chapter 3 and the behavioral science analysis of Chapter 4 of this paper explore this dual assertion.

Every human being is by nature spiritual. Every human being's spirituality is as unique to them as their fingerprint. Making this plain to those who question their spiritual worthiness absolutely opens doors to new growth. Therefore, the establishment of the axiom that spirituality is both inherently human and individual was a necessary first step in FSL Chapter meetings, a prerequisite to individuals who doubted the validity of their own spiritual experience. As facilitator I needed to back up this explicit teaching by not only presenting a variety of spiritual forms, but also by modeling acceptance of each person's experience, providing an unpressured opportunity for each person to share, and insisting upon an atmosphere of mutual respect and confidentiality in Chapter meetings.

To those interested in promoting spiritual confidence in their congregational leaders, this foundational principle must be established early on: everyone's spiritual – no exceptions! – and everyone's spiritual experience must be respected.

Thus a safe group environment proved essential to bring home the didactic teaching that spirituality is both inherently human and individual. Norms of respect and confidentiality were established at the outset of FSL. The ongoing management of the group then came into play.

I chose to begin each session with a “sharing circle,” where each person had a chance to respond to the workbook exercises of the preceding week without interruption. All participants were given the option of “passing,” but this almost never happened. During sharing circle, “cross-talk” was discouraged. When people were moved to respond during another’s sharing circle talk, they were encouraged to save their remarks until everyone had had a chance to share.

When discussion opened it was always lively, sometimes passionate. People discovered common ground, especially the common experience of lacking confidence in prayer. At the same time, participants were encouraged to acknowledge when their own experience differed from others’ experiences. This they did. In the Lenten segment of FSL, when we studied on the spiritual practices offered by different saints, people were free to comment when a particular approach proved ineffective or unattractive to them personally. However, after hearing others comment, a frequent remark was, “Hmm. Maybe I should give this another chance.”

A second sharing circle closed each Chapter session. This time brevity was especially encouraged. Each person was asked to offer a single word or phrase which summed up the week for them. These words were recorded on a sheet of newsprint, which remained displayed until the following Chapter meeting. The idea behind this was

for each participant to leave the group with a lasting, easily remembered image, but it also served as closure ceremony for each session.

Those experienced with leading groups will have their own techniques for building trust in a group setting, but these FSL practices proved extremely effective: setting norms of respect and confidentiality: sharing circle (during which each person speaks uninterrupted), encouragement to share divergent experiences, and closure with a single take-away word from each participant.

Another necessary component to building spiritual confidence was the provision of structure. The idea of meeting simply to discuss prayer-life was clearly too vague for my parishioners. Workbooks provided both the needed guidance, and a springboard for group discussion.

The workbooks remained the private property of FSL participants. I never reviewed them and in Chapter meetings participants only shared what they chose to from their own writing. In this way participants were able to be as honest as possible with themselves without concern for how their responses would be received. I had made it clear that they would profit from the exercises to the extent they were able to invest in them, and left to each member the responsibility of doing the work. Participants rose to meet this level of trust.

Each exercise was brief so as not be burdensome to people with busy schedules. With an exercise for each day, participants were able to sustain energy and develop continuity. That individuals conducted each exercise privately but simultaneously with others provided common experience while encouraging individual exploration.

The original FSL group has continued to meet every few weeks at their own insistence following completion of the Lent workbook. As of this writing we have met an additional ten times over nine months. Currently the structure of our meetings is much looser than it was during the original course of study. We simply publish ahead of time a theological topic for discussion like “death,” “angels,” or “forgiveness.” This more recent experience has supplied a basis of comparison between using a formal structure for meetings based on the workbook exercises, and the more casual topical approach.

There is no way of knowing whether a loose structure would have worked with this group without the prior experience of workbook-based FSL and the trust previously established in more formal Chapter meetings. My suspicion is that it would not. At any rate, the looser, topical approach we currently use does seem to leave participants with less sense of having a kernel of learning to take away from the meetings.

I conclude that structure, at least initially, is useful in forming a group for spiritual exploration when the participants have little previous experience with such groups. Those who stand to grow in spiritual confidence benefit greatly from a program in spiritual exploration with some kind of formal structure. Knowing something of what to expect in meetings alleviates anxiety and enables the growth of mutual trust, encouraging honest sharing and sincere willingness to experiment with unfamiliar spiritual disciplines.

As people become familiar with a variety of spiritual disciplines, they naturally acquire a spiritual language. This is necessary for persons who may never before have discussed their prayer life, this most private part of themselves, with another person, never mind with a small group. Acquaintance with how other people have articulated their spirituality gives people permission to do the same.

If at first the names given to spiritual experience by the saints are unfamiliar, personal engagement enables spiritual seekers to make this language their own. In the FSL exercises, people searched their own lives for what related to the concepts expressed. They often found that saints we studied had described what they themselves had already experienced. One person, who previously had struggled with traditional dogma but had found God in nature, expressed herself thus after completing the unit on St. Francis of Assisi:

The grandeur of nature has always touched me deeply. Now, I have name for it: 'Oneness with Creation.' I have found myself reading the *Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon* many times. This has become a prayer for me.

This individual is representative of how participants in FSL, after learning to trust their own spiritual experience in the respectful atmosphere of Chapter meetings, were further empowered to discover that the very saints of the Church in many cases had been where they found themselves now.

Through St. Francis of Assisi, FSL participants learned the language of "Oneness"; through St. Benedict, the language of *lectio divina*; through St. Francis deSales, the language of virtues; through Evelyn Underhill the language of Recollection and modern mysticism; through St. Ignatius, consolation and desolation. With a larger spiritual vocabulary, people had much more to say about spirituality, and they had the confidence to say it. Having a spiritual vocabulary is fundamental to spiritual confidence.

In sum, I found the operative components for a program in building spiritual confidence to be: an emphasis on both the universality and individuality of spirituality, a safe group environment based on mutual respect and trust, a clear structure, and the

provision of a spiritual vocabulary with which participants can identify and make their own.

Spiritual Confidence Builds the Kingdom of God

This growth in spiritual confidence has implications for kingdom-building. Larry Culliford asserts, “Spiritual development should therefore be restored as the bedrock of education, healthcare, social care, and therefore also of commerce, of local, national and international politics.”¹⁸⁹ To me this inevitably recalls Verna Dozier’s clarion call to the people of God, which I quoted in Chapter 3 of this paper. As I proposed in that context, awakening spiritual confidence is a means to the end of encouraging people with kingdom-of-God ideas to incarnate these ideas in their daily lives. The FSL project made significant progress in this effort, based on evidence of faith development (using the Fowler-Culliford scale), and participants’ own reports of improved relationships.

Of all the faith transitions described by Fowler and Culliford, the movement from Stage Three to Stage Four seems to involve the greatest growth in confidence. Stage Three has progressed beyond the literal to the point of some conception of the ideal. The person is conscious of his or her own faith, but at Stage Three, faith tends to be based on unquestioned assumptions and the acceptance of external authorities. Stage Three faith thus tends to be conventional and may become exclusive, if the person takes his or her own faith experience to be normative. Faith communities as well as individuals collectively go through faith stages, and as both Fowler and Culliford have noted, most faith communities in America today operate at a Stage Three level of faith development.

¹⁸⁹ Culliford, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 31.

At Stage Four, the person takes on more personal responsibility for the content and practice of faith, rather than relying exclusively on external authorities. The person becomes conscious of the filters through which wisdom is received and feels freer to question his or her own beliefs. This newfound freedom can only emerge from a spring of growing spiritual confidence, as the person learns more about the received tradition, as well as more about himself or herself. The FSL workbooks and Chapter meeting provided the opportunity to do both these things.

My own faith community, Lawrencefield Parish Church, shows evidence of Stage Three, and initially FSL Chapter meetings did likewise. Participants would reference their Sunday School learnings, and appeal to me for the official Church teaching for things they didn't know. In many cases they demurred in offering personal opinions about spirituality, not feeling themselves qualified to comment. They were shy in sharing about their prayer-lives.

As the vast range of Christian spirituality began to unfold for FSL participants, they found their voice. People who were unsure whether they were praying "the right way," found validation. As the person quoted at the end of Chapter 2 discovered, "My approach works for me... God will work through whatever spiritual profile a person has." At the same time participants began to reach beyond the habitual for a richer prayer experience. As another respondent at the end of the program reported: "I'm not in the same place, after observing the spirituality of others. ...I've wanted to know more." In an atmosphere of trust, new knowledge and experience were not threatening, but stimulating.

Participants not only learned more about the tradition, they learned more about themselves. Self-awareness inspired humility, patience and renewed commitment:

My understanding of spiritual development is now focused on the operative word – development. Faith and spirituality are on a growth continuum that I recognize as a God-driven, God-given process where the closer I am to God through prayer – and my prayer life has evolved into a more continuous conversation rather than a series of scheduled events – the more aware of my path and the more patient I am in the presentation of its mysteries and its direction and progress.

While recognizing the “God-driven, God-given process” participants also recognized their own responsibility in maintaining a relationship with God. One person said, “It’s on me to be receptive ‘soil’ and attend to the ways in which God may be trying to break through, if I let God do it.” This is the language of someone who is progressing into Stage Four, finding spiritual authority within himself or herself rather than appealing to an external source.

If, as Larry Culliford suggests, a difference can be made in the world by individuals making progress in faith development, the faith progress made by FSL alumni from Stage Three to Stage Four has kingdom-of-God potential. As noted in Chapter 2 of this paper, the exit interviews and final papers of FSL participants indicated that their personal spiritual growth indeed appeared to have beneficial effects on their relationships outside the group.

One person experiencing conflict at home reported: “With family discord front and center in my daily life, I could not have managed day to day in the solitude of just my own prayer life....the exercises have been life-saving. Without this happening right now I might have been a puddle. I am calmer, more at peace, patient.” Another person, a teacher, noticed her relationships with both her principal and her students had improved. Additional responses of this sort appear in Chapter 2.

Unfortunately, there was no practical way within the scope of this project to measure, quantifiably and objectively, the extent and durability of these improvements. The results of this study prove only that FSL participants themselves clearly felt more able to deal with family and professional issues in their lives by virtue of guided spiritual activity. This is evidence of growing spiritual confidence bearing fruit in personal and professional life.

If there is no objective way to quantify the effects of spiritual development on relationships, there really is also no way for human beings to gauge the extent to which our behavior builds the kingdom of God. Evidence for kingdom-of-God growth is likely to be anecdotal. That does not absolve baptized persons of responsibility for kingdom-of-God work. We have a baptismal commission to build the kingdom of God, and, as we mature spiritually, a responsibility to cultivate receptivity to the kingdom of God. Insofar as the FSL program cultivates this receptivity (and questionnaire responses indicated that it does), such a program promotes the spiritual confidence that indeed builds the kingdom of God.

Perhaps, in addition to developing another workbook on baptismal identity, yet another expressly devoted to kingdom-building is in order. In both cases, nurturing spiritual confidence has a part to play. Therefore any future workbooks, like the ones used in FSL, will encourage spiritual disciplines. Fostering spiritual disciplines nurtures spiritual confidence, enabling faith development and kingdom-of-God work in the world.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS OF THIS DESIGN

The FSL project shows that combination of workbooks of daily spiritual exercises and weekly chapter meetings is an effective way of stimulating spiritual growth, increasing spiritual confidence, and encouraging congregational leaders of a variety of temperaments and spiritual styles in gifted ministry, setting the stage and whetting the appetite for further spiritual growth. In addition, as we have seen, fostering spiritual disciplines combined with chapter meetings over the short term has a healing effect on participants' relationships outside the group. This suggests that sustained and intentional fostering of spirituality may have the potential for healing in ever-widening circles outside the group.

The project described in this paper thus demonstrates that *guided spiritual exercises and group support provide congregational leaders with needed confidence for speaking meaningfully about their prayer lives, growing spiritually and sharing with others about their faith.* The process outlined in the Friends of St. Lawrence program does this by providing two basic tools for ministry: a spiritual vocabulary and an opportunity to practice spiritual sharing. Short-term covenant groups like FSL give lay people both the “grammar” they need to discuss their own and others' spiritual practices with confidence, and the opportunity to do so safely in community with other group members.

This finding has implications for evangelism, Christian formation, and strengthening the community through story-telling. Because an FSL-style program is

relatively low-structure and low-cost, it could also represent a possible model for the post-monied church: a way for congregations to move toward a point at which they are less dependent on traditional church buildings and clergy support.

Evangelism

In one sense, evangelism should be the easiest thing in the world. People naturally talk with friends and acquaintances about what they're doing and what is important to them. They share the books they enjoy and the meaningful experiences they have had. Religion and spirituality are what church people do and find important and meaningful. If church people are not talking with friends and acquaintances about their church and spirituality, why not?

Insofar as the reason for not sharing with friends and acquaintances about church and spirituality is lack of confidence or an insufficient vocabulary, the FSL program provides both. This is not to say that FSL makes people evangelists. Evangelism is undoubtedly no more causally related to fostering spirituality than it is to awareness of baptismal vocation. Teaching about evangelism, as teaching about baptismal vocation, warrants a specific, dedicated program. However, as with baptism, nurturing spirituality supports and enhances evangelism. With the grammar to describe their spiritual experiences, and the practice of sharing about those experiences in the safe environment of a circle of trust, church members receive some basic tools that they need if they are to evangelize.

Adult Christian Formation

The Friends of St. Lawrence plowed no new ground in the field of teaching adult learners, but affirmed andragogical principles accepted in the secular world. The success of FSL in supporting adults in spiritual development suggests that those who teach adult Christian formation do well to learn and follow these principles.

Speaking as a some-time educator, I know that presenting material in lecture form is undoubtedly easier than arranging for the interactive, self-directed, experiential, life-centered sessions that make clear the need to know and take into account both readiness to learn and internal motivations. Yet, these are clearly qualities that enhance the learning experience for adults in church no less than in the world. In fact, in approaching subjects as personal as spirituality and prayer, hands-on experience that respects each person's personality and situation is essential. FSL's combination of personal workbooks and weekly group meetings served admirably in meeting the needs of adult learners. I would use this method again and recommend it to others involved in adult Christian formation.

Strengthening Community through Story Telling

One of the inspirations for this project emerged in the preliminary Institutional Study of Lawrencefield Church. Those who assisted me in interviewing parishioners to develop a collective narrative for the church found special energy in listening to the personal stories of individuals. The experience of my interview team is not surprising, given recent theories about the power of story in both secular and sacred contexts. John Capecci and Timothy Cage write about using personal story for the purposes of advocacy

in *Living Proof: Telling Your Story to Make a Difference*.¹⁹⁰ The Alban Institute's *Finding Our Story: Narrative Leadership and Congregational Change* advocates the promotion of story-telling as a resource in congregational development¹⁹¹

The value of story-telling in the building of community among FSL participants is hard to overstate. In listening to others articulate their own faith journeys, participants found common ground. In sharing their own stories in an atmosphere of trust they were able to own their own uniqueness and giftedness. Both experiences contribute to spiritual confidence, and both enforce community awareness.

The workbooks provided a context for both individual exploration and common experience. The subject matter provided a common vocabulary. The sharing on such an intimate subject as personal spirituality created intimacy between group members. For pastors desiring to strengthen relationships within the congregation both elements of FSL, individual work on the workbooks and group discussion within the trust-circle of Chapter Meetings are effective and complimentary instruments of community building.

Another Way of Doing Church?

Long-term trends that show church attendance and membership dropping have church planners looking to the “church of the future” where the traditional model of a propertied congregation presided over by full-time clergy may no longer be the norm.

¹⁹⁰ John Capecci and Timothy Cage, *Living Proof: Telling Your Story to Make a Difference* (Minneapolis: Grandville Circle Press, 2015).

¹⁹¹ Larry A. Goleman, editor, *Finding Our Story: Narrative Leadership and Congregational Change* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2010.)

Meanwhile, while surveys of propertied, clergy-led parishes have shown that innovation in worship style, worship time and ways of doing ministry is associated with growth, traditional parishes are left somewhat at a loss in relating these findings to their own situation. In such places radicalizing the worship and ministry experience stands to alienate the entire membership.

Yet even in traditional parishes, growth and, yes, even innovation are possible, especially in a parish gifted with stability, cooperation, an extraordinary sense of fellowship, deep spiritual curiosity, and a strong faith in the Christian God. Such a description fits the congregation that forms the basis of this study. In this context, a program like FSL, designed around promoting spiritual growth and building spiritual confidence, had a simulating effect, at least upon those who participated in the program. If, as suggested by current FSL participants, other members of the congregation join future FSL sessions, this vitalization can be expected to spread amongst the entire membership of the parish.

Because this project was conducted within a parish that has a traditional building and clergy arrangement, the potential effectiveness of a project like this in the absence of building or clergy is clearly unproven. However, there is nothing intrinsic to the project that requires a church building or professional clergy. It would be interesting to test the viability of this project in a non-propertied, non-clergied context.

Friends of St. Lawrence was born from a passionate interest in instilling in my parishioners a sense of their role in God's great plan of salvation. From that interest came a thesis that fostering spiritual disciplines builds awareness of baptismal vocation, and a project that proved that fostering spiritual disciplines builds spiritual confidence, which

has ramifications, however humble, in the kingdom of God, stimulating faith development and awareness of giftedness and bearing fruit in the improvement of personal and professional relationships.

Spirituality is inherent in humanity. Spirituality is also personal. Any program to promote spiritual practice, along with observing the basic principles of adult learning does well to emphasize this dual nature of spirituality.

This done, FSL provided the two necessary components of spiritual confidence: vocabulary and opportunity. With its combination of personal workbooks and regular group meetings, this program built spiritual confidence through both its content and its method, by providing access to a variety of spiritual resources along with an environment of trust in which to explore them.

At Lawrencefield Parish Church, we started with “foundational dirt” and made some “bricks for ministry.” It remains to be seen what these bricks may build, but the possibilities are manifold. It is my hope that the FSL model, with its implications for evangelism, community building, adult formation, and “church-without-walls,” may provide a framework for any church leader hoping to inspire spiritual confidence in the congregation. I will certainly use it again.

APPENDIX A

ADVENT WORKBOOK

FRIENDS OF ST LAWRENCE

SPIRITUALITY WORKBOOK -- ADVENT 2015

WEEK 1:
Abiding in Love

Always, every day, begin your session with a prayer that God will guide you in your daily spiritual exercise, leading you to what God wants you to experience.

Always, every day, end your session with a prayer of thanks to God.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT – November 29, 2015

WORD

When you go to church this Sunday*, listen carefully to the Scripture readings and the sermon. When you have a quiet moment after church think back over the Scripture and the sermon. What word, phrase, or concept has stuck with you?

RESPONSE

Where does this word, phrase or concept touch your life right now?

REFLECTION

What, in love, might God be trying to communicate to you through this word, phrase or concept?

PRAYER

On the basis of your reflection, what is your prayer for how you want to be with God this week, or how you want God to be with you?

*If you are unable to go to church, watching a broadcast or webcast service is acceptable, as is reading the lectionary leaflet for this Sunday.

FIRST MONDAY OF ADVENT – November 30, 2015

Calling for God

WORD

[Jesus] said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible.”

Mark 14:36

When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Romans 8:15-16

Because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

Galatians 4:6

RESPONSE

The Aramaic word “Abba” connotes both intimacy and respect. It is more mature than “Daddy” but not as formal as “Father” ... a form of address used by an adult child. “Abba” is one of many names used for God in Jewish and Christian tradition. What are some other names you have heard used for God?

Which of these names do you use? Why does that one appeal to you?

REFLECTION

How would you describe your relation to God – child, creature, suppliant, sinner, servant, other?

Is there a name on your list that better describes your relationship to God? Is there perhaps another name not on the list that best describes your relationship? Write your name for God here.

PRAYER

Set a timer (a kitchen timer or your phone will do) for at least one minute. Spend the time repeating your name for God with every inhaled breath.

God is as close to you as your own breath.

FIRST TUESDAY OF ADVENT – December 1, 2015

How God Acts

WORD

Open your Bible to the Psalms. You can either:

- turn directly to your favorite Psalm OR:
- start at the beginning with Psalm 1 and read forward, start at the back with Psalm 150 and read backwards (a lot of the Psalms of joy and praise are here at the back), OR you can open at random. Keep reading till you find a Psalm you like. Write the number here:

RESPONSE

Go through your Psalm and highlight or write down all the verbs (action words) for which God is the subject. For example, the God verbs for Psalm 23 (NRSV) would be: **is** (my shepherd), **makes** (me lie down), **leads, are** (with me), **comfort, prepare** (a table), **anoint**. Write the verbs here:

REFLECTION

Choose one or more of the verbs, and reflect how and when God has acted this way in your life. For example, “I felt that when I got sick, it was God **making me lie down**, stop all my frantic activity and look at my life.”

PRAYER

“If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”

John 14:14

Having reflected on the ways God is known to act, how do you want God to act in your life right now? If you are comfortable, ask this of God now, using the name for God you discovered yesterday.

FIRST WEDNESDAY OF ADVENT – December 2, 2015

God's Name for You

WORD

No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. Genesis 17:5

You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans and have prevailed. Genesis 32:28

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church. Matthew 16:18

In the Bible, names are particularly significant. To know someone's name imparts a certain power. When you know someone's name, you can summon him or her. In each of the examples above, God changes a person's name to signify a new call on his or her life.

RESPONSE

What names have you answered to? Write them down. If a name was used only by a few special people put their names in parenthesis afterwards.

REFLECTION

In your memory, call up the sound of people you have loved saying their name for you. What sensations do you experience when recalling these memories?

PRAYER

What is God's name for you? Rest assured that God knows you by name!

Set a timer (a kitchen timer or your phone will do) for at least one minute. Spend the time imagining God calling you by this name with every inhaled breath.

FIRST THURSDAY OF ADVENT – December 3, 2015

Looking at God Looking at You

WORD

I will stand for the space of an *Our Father*, a step before the place where I am to meditate or contemplate, and with my mind raised on high, consider that God our Lord beholds me, etc. Then I will make an act of reverence or humility.

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, 76.3

RESPONSE

Think of someone you love and whom you know well. Call their image to mind. What do you see when you look at this person?

REFLECTION

Imagine what you look like to someone who loves you. How might their image of you differ from the image you have of yourself?

PRAYER

On the basis of your reflection, imagine God looking at you in love. What does God see in you?

How might what God sees in you differ from what you see in yourself? Try to see yourself as

God sees you.

FIRST FRIDAY OF ADVENT – December 4, 2015

Beloved of God

WORD

My beloved is mine and I am his.

Song of Solomon 2:6

How beautiful you are, my love, how very beautiful!

Song of Solomon 4:1

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of one's house, it would be utterly scorned.

Song of Solomon 8:6-7

RESPONSE

Song of Solomon is the one book in the Bible that does not name God. For all the world this book resembles nothing more than simple love poetry. In some places it is downright erotic! Why do you think the compilers of the Bible wanted to include this book in Holy Scripture?

REFLECTION

What does the romantic love described in Song of Solomon have in common with the love between God and God's people? Can you possibly imagine that God might love you with all the fervor described in Song of Songs?

PRAYER

On the basis of your reflection, what might you want to say in response to God's love for you?

FIRST SATURDAY OF ADVENT – December 5, 2015

WORD

Review your workbook entries for the last week, under the theme of “Abiding in Love”:
Calling for God, How God Acts, God’s Name for You, Looking at God Looking at You, and Beloved of God.

RESPONSE

Which exercise meant the most to you? Why and how?

REFLECTION

How might your experience with this exercise be an answer to the prayer you conceived on Sunday?

PRAYER

Think of what is on tap for you in the coming week.
What from this week do you want to take forward with you into the days and weeks ahead?
How will you remind yourself of how God has been present with you this past week?

WEEK 2:

God's Presence in You

Always, every day, begin your session with a prayer that God will guide you in your daily spiritual exercise, leading you to what God wants you to experience.

Always, every day, end your session with a prayer of thanks to God.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT – December 6, 2015

WORD

When you go to church this Sunday*, listen carefully to the Scripture readings and the sermon. When you have a quiet moment after church think back over the Scripture and the sermon. What word, phrase, or concept has stuck with you?

RESPONSE

Where does this word, phrase or concept touch your life right now?

REFLECTION

What, in love, might God be trying to communicate to you through this word, phrase or concept?

PRAYER

On the basis of your reflection, what is your prayer for how you want to be with God this week, or how you want God to be with you?

*If you are unable to go to church, watching a broadcast or webcast service is acceptable, as is reading the lectionary leaflet for this Sunday.

SECOND MONDAY OF ADVENT – December 7, 2015

Your Cloud of Witnesses

WORD

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us...
Hebrews 12:1

Who populates your personal “cloud of witnesses”? Who are your heroes and heroines in the faith? If you have other heroes whom you might not exactly call “heroes *in the faith*,” list them too:

RESPONSE

What is the chief characteristic of each of your heroes? What do you admire in them or wish to emulate?

REFLECTION

Get ready for a shock. “Your heroes and heroines bear in them the gifts which are latent in you. They use in full measure what you probably use only partially. The fact that you have identified them as heroes and heroines of yours is an indication that you and they share significant gifts.”
Lloyd Edwards, *Discerning Your Spiritual Gifts* (Cambridge: Cowley) 1988, 59.

How does that make you feel? What attributes might you share with some of your heroes?

PRAYER

Imagine you are at the manger, bringing a gift of yourself to the Christ Child. This should be something you carry within yourself. What is it? Could it be the attribute you recognize in your heroes? Consider this possibility before God in humility and gratitude.

SECOND TUESDAY OF ADVENT – December 8, 2015

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

WORD

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. *Genesis 1:27*

What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. *Psalms 8:4-5*

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. *Psalms 139:14*

RESPONSE

In what ways are you fearfully and wonderfully made? How do you bear the image of God?

REFLECTION

In the left column below list six events in your life when you did something well or felt especially fulfilled. On the right, list the talents or personal characteristics you exercised in this event. (Edwards, 63-64.)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

PRAYER

Review the gifts and talents you have identified in this exercise. Consider that these are God's intentional gifts to you. Setting all false modesty aside, humbly thank God for making you fearfully wonderful and ask for God's guidance in the exercise of these precious gifts.

SECOND WEDNESDAY OF ADVENT – December 9, 2015

Spiritual Gifts

WORD

To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. Romans 12:6-8

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers... Ephesians 4:11

RESPONSE

Read through the passages above and underline the gifts that the Spirit gives people to accomplish God's work in the world.

REFLECTION

Which of these do you recognize in yourself, even if just a little? No fair saying "None." It simply isn't possible that someone made in God's image, as you are, has not been spiritually gifted in some way. If you have a gift not mentioned in the Bible passages, like "handy" or "good with communications," or "artistic," list it if you think God can use it.

PRAYER

A Spiritual Gift is a God-given characteristic that God uses to build the Kingdom of God. What are your spiritual gifts? Humbly and gratefully, say a prayer of dedication of your gifts to God.

SECOND THURSDAY OF ADVENT – December 10, 2015

Taking Inventory

WORD

Follows a brief description of some of the classic spiritual gifts referred to in the Bible. This list is edited from a list compiled by the Rev. Dr. Robert Noble and condensed by the Rev. Lloyd Edwards.

- ___ Administration -Planning, setting goals, making decisions, giving directions, delegating
- ___ Apostleship -Exercising authority in the larger church
- ___ Discernment of Spirits -Reliable intuition as to whether something is from God or not
- ___ Evangelism -Proclaiming the Gospel or demonstrating Gospel living winningly
- ___ Exhortation -Encouraging others in faith
- ___ Faith - Inspirational steadiness of belief in God regardless of circumstances
- ___ Giving - Cheerful and ready generosity
- ___ Healing -Tendency to leave situations better than you found them, to God's glory; includes physical and spiritual healing
- ___ Helping -Responsiveness to easing another's burden or strengthening their ministry
- ___ Hospitality -Welcoming strangers, making people feel at home
- ___ Intercession -Dedication in praying effectively for others
- ___ Knowledge -Understanding and communicating information for the edification of God's people
- ___ Leadership -Managing and inspiring others' ministry, while concerned for their welfare
- ___ Mercy -Compassionate service to the suffering and/ or marginalized
- ___ Pastoring -Shepherding others in faith, willingness to take some responsibility for their spiritual health and growth
- ___ Serving -Readiness to take a secondary role, doing what needs doing in support of ministry
- ___ Teaching -Communication of the Gospel in such a way as to bring understanding
- ___ Wisdom -Insight into the ways of God, bringing understanding to life situations

RESPONSE

Look over this list and put a check to the left of any trait that is at all characteristic of you. Then, go back over what you have checked and put a second check next to traits that seem more than slightly characteristic of you. Of your "two-checked" gifts, which do you think is the strongest?

_____.

If you have secondary gifts, list them here _____, _____, _____.

REFLECTION

Has anyone ever remarked on having observed any gifts in you? If so, how do these observed gifts coincide with the gifts you have identified above?

PRAYER

Once again, humbly and gratefully, say a prayer of dedication of your gifts to God.

SECOND FRIDAY OF ADVENT – December 11, 2015

Gifts and Call

WORD

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12: 4-7

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. *1 Corinthians 12:12-27*

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of "A Course in Miracles"*

The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.

Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*

RESPONSE

How have this week's exercises about your giftedness made you feel? Affirmed? Challenged? Uncomfortable? How do the quotations cited above address your feelings?

REFLECTION

God gives spiritual gifts to be used in cooperation with other people's gifts for the building of God's kingdom. Where and/ or how might God be calling you to use your gifts?

PRAYER

Recall God's name for you from last week. Imagine God calling you by that name and formally giving you the gifts you have identified in yourself. Humbly thank God for these gifts, using your name for God and ask for God's guidance in exercising your gifts.

SECOND SATURDAY OF ADVENT – December 12, 2015

WORD

Review your workbook entries for the last week, under the theme of “God’s Presence in You”:
Your Cloud of Witnesses, Fearfully and Wonderfully Made, Spiritual Gifts, Taking Inventory, Gifts and Call.

RESPONSE

Which exercise meant the most to you? Why and how?

REFLECTION

How might your experience with this exercise be an answer to the prayer you conceived on Sunday?

PRAYER

Think of what is on tap for you in the coming week.
What from this week do you want to take forward with you into the days and weeks ahead?
How will you remind yourself of how God has been present with you this past week?

WEEK 3:

Where are you, God?

Always, every day, begin your session with a prayer that God will guide you in your daily spiritual exercise, leading you to what God wants you to experience.

Always, every day, end your session with a prayer of thanks to God.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT – December 13, 2015

WORD

When you go to church this Sunday*, listen carefully to the Scripture readings and the sermon. When you have a quiet moment after church think back over the Scripture and the sermon. What word, phrase, or concept has stuck with you?

RESPONSE

Where does this word, phrase or concept touch your life right now?

REFLECTION

What, in love, might God be trying to communicate to you through this word, phrase or concept?

PRAYER

On the basis of your reflection, what is your prayer for how you want to be with God this week, or how you want God to be with you?

*If you are unable to go to church, watching a broadcast or webcast service is acceptable, as is reading the lectionary leaflet for this Sunday.

THIRD MONDAY OF ADVENT – December 14, 2015

Where? Why? How Long?

WORD

O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger, or discipline me in your wrath. Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror. My soul also is struck with terror, while you, O LORD—how long? *Psalm 6:1-3*

Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? *Psalm 10:1*

I lift my eyes to the hills – from where will my help come? *Psalm 121:1*

RESPONSE

So far, we have been considering God’s closeness to us, even God’s presence within us. But sometimes God doesn’t seem close or present. Recall a time when God did not seem close to you. What did you sense at that time? (Loneliness, confusion, frustration, anger, fear, sadness, flatness, fatigue, numbness?)

You may have just described a major event in your life. Now, let’s look at everyday experience. Consider the day just past. During what part of this past day did God seem least present? What does your sense of this moment have in common with the experience you described above?

REFLECTION

In each of the Psalms cited above, the psalmist goes on to discover God’s presence and advocacy (Check this out in your own Bible, if you like.) On the basis of this observation, consider if a person’s perception of God’s distance is always reliable. How does this question change your view of your own desert experiences?

PRAYER

Imagine submitting the events you described earlier to God for God’s blessing. Accept God’s sanctification of all your times of both lightness and darkness.

THIRD TUESDAY OF ADVENT – December 15, 2015

Consolation and Desolation

WORD

I call it consolation when an interior movement is aroused in the soul, by which it is inflamed with love its Creator and Lord.... I call consolation every increase of faith, hope, and love, and all interior joy that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one's soul by filling it with peace and quiet in its Creator and Lord.

St. Ignatius Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, 316.3.

I call desolation...darkness of soul, turmoil of spirit, inclination to what is low and earthly, restlessness rising from many disturbances and temptations which lead to want of faith, want of hope, want of love. The soul is wholly slothful, tepid, sad, and separated, as it were, from its Creator and Lord.

St. Ignatius Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, 317.4.

RESPONSE

When Ignatius was a young soldier, he sustained a grave injury in battle and had to spend months convalescing. During this protracted and painful recovery he discovered that reading the romances he had enjoyed previously left him feeling flat and dispirited, whereas the spiritual reading he turned to as a last resort gave him peace and hope. This experience contributed to his understanding of consolation and desolation. Ignatius came to believe that God communicates through both consolation and desolation, and that a daily review of the day's consolation and desolation can reveal God's direction on a person's life. He called this daily review the *Examen*. The Examen has been used for centuries by all kinds of Christians.

REFLECTION

Under what circumstances might a desolation sensation of distance from God be a good thing?

PRAYER

Undergirded by the love you explored in Week 1, and aware that God is working within you through your gifts (Week 2), humbly ask God's help in understanding periods of spiritual dryness or the sensation of distance from God. See if you can find something to be grateful for in these desert times.

THIRD WEDNESDAY OF ADVENT – December 16, 2015

The Wounded Healer

WORD

An addict fell in a hole and couldn't get out. A businessman went by and the addict called out for help. The businessman threw him some money and told him to buy himself a ladder. But the addict could not buy a ladder in the hole he was in. A doctor walked by. The addict said "Help! I can't get out!" The doctor gave him some drugs and said, "Take this. It will relieve the pain." The addict said thanks, but when the pills ran out, he was still in the hole. A well-known psychiatrist rode by and heard the addict's cries for help. He stopped and asked, "How did you get here? Were you born there? Did your parents put you there? Tell me about yourself, it will alleviate your sense of loneliness." So the addict talked with him for an hour, then the psychiatrist had to leave, but he said he'd come back next week. The addict thanked him, but he was still in the hole. A priest came by. The addict called for help. The Priest gave him a Bible and said, "I'll say a prayer for you." He got down on his knees and prayed for the addict, then he left. The addict was very grateful, he read the Bible, but he was still stuck in the hole. A recovering addict happened to be passing by. The addict cried out, "Hey, Help me. I'm stuck in this hole!" Right away the recovering addict jumped down in the hole with him. The addict said, "What are you doing? Now we're both stuck here!!" But the recovering addict said, "Calm Down. It's okay. I've been here before. I know How to get out."

Internet story, author unknown

The great illusion of leadership is to think that man can be led out of the desert by someone who has never been there.
Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*

I believe that many—perhaps all—of our gifts may be understood in terms of our suffering. The relation is simple: if we did not have the specific set of wounds we have, we would not have the specific set of gifts we have.
Lloyd Edwards, *Discerning Your Spiritual Gifts*

RESPONSE

When have you been ministered to by someone who “has been here before”?

REFLECTION

What wounds are you aware of in yourself? How might God use them to do God's work?

PRAYER

“Through God's grace, our own wounds may help to heal those of others; our sufferings may find their meaning in the possibility of healing of others.” (Lloyd Edwards)
Pray that God may reveal if and how this may be true of your own sufferings.

THIRD THURSDAY OF ADVENT – December 17, 2015

What Do You Want?

WORD

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way. Mark 10: 46-52

Want / wānt, wōnt/ *verb* 1. Have a desire to possess or do (something); wish for. “I want an apple”
2. (*archaic*) Lack or be short of something desirable or essential. “You shall want for nothing while you are with me.”

RESPONSE

First, consider “want” in the sense of “desire.” What do you want from God? Don’t be demure about this. St. Paul tells us to make our wants and desire known to God (Ephesians 4:6.)

REFLECTION

Now, consider “want” in terms of lack or need. Our culture discourages us from admitting lack or need, but Christians believe that human beings were created with an enduring need for God: what St. Augustine calls “the God-shaped hole” within each of us. How do you experience the deepest needs of your heart?

PRAYER

The “want” of God can never be satisfied, until, in the fullness of time, God gathers all to Godself. On the other hand, God is everywhere and always available, here and now. Offer your neediness to God and prayer and ask God to fill you.

THIRD FRIDAY OF ADVENT – December 18, 2015

God Wastes Nothing

WORD

Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good. Genesis 50:19

God is working his purpose out ... that the earth may be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. Arthur Campbell Ainger (*The Hymnal 1982*, Hymn 534)

All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.
St. Julian of Norwich

RESPONSE

Can you remember a time when a misdeed or misfortune later resulted in something good?
Describe that experience.

REFLECTION

Describe a recent or current experience of confusion, anxiety, guilt, sorrow or lack of closure.

PRAYER

Commit that experience to God's redemptive power, and pray for the grace to see, in God's good time, God's hand at work in the experience.

THIRD SATURDAY OF ADVENT – December 19, 2015

WORD

Review your workbook entries for the last week, under the themes “*Where Are You, God?*”, “*Where? Why? How Long?*”, “*Consolation and Desolation*”, “*The Wounded Healer*”, “*What do You Want?*” and “*God Wastes Nothing*”.

RESPONSE

Which exercise meant the most to you? Why and how?

REFLECTION

How might your experience with this exercise be an answer to the prayer you conceived on Sunday?

PRAYER

Think of what is on tap for you in the coming week.
What from this week do you want to take forward with you into the days and weeks ahead?
How will you remind yourself of how God has been present with you this past week?

WEEK 4:

God is Moving in You

Always, every day, begin your session with a prayer that God will guide you in your daily spiritual exercise, leading you to what God wants you to experience.

Always, every day, end your session with a prayer of thanks to God.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT – December 20, 2015

WORD

When you go to church this Sunday*, listen carefully to the Scripture readings and the sermon. When you have a quiet moment after church think back over the Scripture and the sermon. What word, phrase, or concept has stuck with you?

RESPONSE

Where does this word, phrase or concept touch your life right now?

REFLECTION

What, in love, might God be trying to communicate to you through this word, phrase or concept?

PRAYER

On the basis of your reflection, what is your prayer for how you want to be with God this week, or how you want God to be with you?

*If you are unable to go to church, watching a broadcast or webcast service is acceptable, as is reading the lectionary leaflet for this Sunday.

FOURTH MONDAY OF ADVENT – December 21, 2015

A Healing Meditation

WORD

Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.” Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

John 5:2-9

RESPONSE

To experience this guided meditation, you may want to record the following, reading it slowly, and play it back to yourself. This should take about five minutes or more (You may want to set a timer). Sit comfortably, with both feet on the floor, back straight. You may want to close your eyes. Imagine yourself beside the Beth-zatha pool. What sensations do you experience—what do you see? Hear? Taste? Smell? Feel? Jesus approaches, makes eye contact with you. Sense that he knows why you are at the pool at this time. He asks, “Do you want to be made well?” How do you respond? Imagine what happens next. Do you converse further with Jesus? Do you go into the pool together? Once again, use your senses – what do you see, hear, taste, smell, feel? When you are ready, in your imagination, bring the encounter to a close. Imagine how you and Jesus take leave of each other. Returning to normal consciousness, thank God for what you have experienced. Regardless of what it is.

REFLECTION

In the space below or on a separate sheet, or, if you have one, in your journal, describe your experience.

PRAYER

Contemplate how God wills for you to be whole, and pray for openness to God’s healing Spirit.

FOURTH TUESDAY OF ADVENT – December 22, 2015

Waiting for Something Wonderful

WORD

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. Luke 2:29-32, KJV

For such a King I've waited all my life.
Mother, Amahl and the Night Visitors by Giancarlo Menotti

RESPONSE

The first reading above is the ancient canticle called the *Nunc Dimittus*, traditionally chanted at Evening Prayer. The words are those of the elder Simeon, who was at the Temple in Jerusalem on the day that Mary and Joseph first brought the newborn Jesus there. A man of great faith, Simeon instantly recognized the baby Jesus as the Messiah and, according to Luke, uttered this hymn of joy, ostensibly saying that he could now die satisfied.

Try to identify with the intense expectation and longing of Simeon, and the Mother from *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. Can you describe such an experience in your own life?

REFLECTION

Now, remember the deep longing you got in touch with last Thursday. In Christ, God promises the fulfillment of this deep longing. Allow yourself to believe this promise, if just for a minute.

PRAYER

Try writing your own *Nunc Dimittis* –your own prayer for (or thanksgiving for, if you are so moved) the fulfillment of your deepest longing. If no words come, copy out and pray Simeon's words. Can you believe they may become true for you?

FOURTH WEDNESDAY OF ADVENT – December 23, 2015

The Still Small Voice

WORD

And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? 1 Kings 19:11-13, KJV

RESPONSE

There are, obviously, many ways to experience God. List some of the words, experiences, images that evoke God’s presence for you (For example, great music, nature, a baby’s smile.)

REFLECTION

Try to conceive of a God that can’t be contained even by those wonderful things you just called to mind. This is actually a trick, because if you were able to conceive an idea of God, it would not be God. God is always “broader than the measure of the mind” (Frederick William Faber, *The Hymnal 1982*, Hymn 469.) Ponder the love of a God so great who also desires a relationship with you.

PRAYER

This time, set your timer for five minutes, and see if you can listen for “the still small voice” of God. If your mind wanders, as is bound to happen, don’t fret. Just say “Still small voice” and go back to waiting on God.

When the five minutes are over, describe what the experience was like for you.

CHRISTMAS EVE – December 24, 2015

Tying It All Together

WORD

Review all your experience with this workbook these past few weeks.

RESPONSE

When have you felt closest to God during these exercises? Or, when were you happiest, or most at home with yourself?

When have you felt most distant to God during these exercises, or most uncomfortable?

REFLECTION

On the basis of your responses, where do you think God may be leading you?

PRAYER

Tomorrow is Christmas. What is your prayer for how Christ might be born anew in you?

APPENDIX B

LENT WORKBOOK

A CLOUD OF WITNESSES

PRAYING WITH THE SAINTS

SPIRITUALITY WORKBOOK -- LENT 2016

WEEK 1:

Praying With Francis Of Assisi

Always, every day, begin your session with a prayer that God will guide you in your daily spiritual exercise, leading you to what God wants you to experience.

Always, every day, end your session with a prayer of thanks to God.

SUNDAY OF 1 LENT – February 14, 2016

WORD

When you go to church this Sunday*, listen carefully to the Scripture readings and the sermon. When you have a quiet moment after church think back over the Scripture and the sermon. What word, phrase, or concept has stuck with you?

RESPONSE

Where does this word, phrase or concept touch your life right now?

REFLECTION

What, in love, might God be trying to communicate to you through this word, phrase or concept?

PRAYER

On the basis of your reflection, what is your prayer for how you want to be with God this week, or how you want God to be with you?

*If you are unable to go to church, watching a broadcast or webcast service is acceptable, as is reading the lectionary leaflet for this Sunday.

MONDAY OF 1 LENT – February 15

Oneness with Creation

WORD

Most high, all-powerful, all-good Lord, all praise is yours, all glory, all honor and all blessings. To you alone, most high, do they belong, and no mortal lips are worthy to pronounce your name. Praised be you my Lord with all your creatures, especially sir brother sun, who is the day through whom you give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor; of you, most high, he bears the likeness. Praised be you, my Lord, through sister moon and the stars, in the heavens you have made them bright, precious and fair. Praised be you, my Lord, through brothers wind and air, and fair and stormy, all weather's moods, by which you cherish all that you have made. Praised be you my Lord through sister water, so useful, humble, precious and pure. Praised be you my Lord through brother fire, through whom you light the night, and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong. Praised be you my Lord through our sister, mother earth who sustains and governs us, producing varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs. Praise be you my Lord through those who grant pardon for love of you and bear sickness and trial. Blessed are those who endure in peace, by you, most high, they will be crowned. Praised be you, my Lord through sister death, from whom no-one living can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin! Blessed are they she finds doing your will. No second death can do them harm. Praise and bless my Lord and give him thanks, and serve him with great humility. *St. Francis of Assisi, Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon (as quoted by www.catholic.org)*

RESPONSE

St. Francis of Assisi delighted in the created world, and everywhere found evidence of God's grandeur and loving providence. Not only was Francis constantly aware of the Creator's mark on the world, he believed in the fundamental unity of creation, including humans. Hence his conception of sun, moon, stars, wind and fire as his brothers and sisters. Where and when have you experienced God in nature? When, if ever, have you experienced oneness with creation?

REFLECTION

Take a short walk, or sit outside for a bit. Be aware of God around you. Following Francis' example, see if you can identify with natural phenomena as family

PRAYER

Write your own canticle of praise. Think of what saw when you went outside and put it into the formula Francis used: "Praised be to you, my, lord through _____ [*trees, the sunset, the clouds... whatever you saw!*]"

TUESDAY OF 1 LENT – February 16, 2016

Oneness with humanity

WORD

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.
Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. *Amen.*

A Prayer attributed to St. Francis, The Book of Common Prayer

RESPONSE

Part of St. Francis' vision of oneness with creation is, of course, the oneness of humanity. When have you felt a profound connection with the people around you? Describe this experience below. Have you ever felt this way even with people you don't know personally or have never met?

REFLECTION

Connection with other human beings is the beginning of compassion. Compassion is the beginning of participating in God's plan of redemption, in Francis' words, "being an instrument of the Lord's peace." Bring to mind a current situation in your experience where there is hatred, injury, discord, darkness or sadness. Write down a few words to fix this situation in your mind.

PRAYER

Pray to be an instrument of God's peace in this situation.

WEDNESDAY OF 1 LENT – February 17, 2016

Oneness with the “least”

WORD

One day he was riding his horse near Assisi, when he met a leper. And, even though he usually shuddered at lepers, he made himself dismount, and gave him a coin, kissing his hand as he did so. After he accepted a kiss of peace from him, Francis remounted and continued on his way. He then began to consider himself less and less, until, by God’s grace, he came to complete victory over himself. After a few days, he moved to a hospice of lepers, taking with him a large sum of money. Calling them all together, as he kissed the hand of each, he gave them alms. ...With the help of God’s grace, he became such a servant and friend of the lepers, that, as he testified in his Testament, he stayed among them and served them with humility.

The Legend of Three Companions

RESPONSE

Francis’ spirituality is characterized by his willingness to identify with the poor and marginalized. The name of the order he founded, “Order of the Friars Minor,” brings out this emphasis. St. Francis himself was known as “Il Poverello,” the little poor man, for his humility and voluntary poverty. How do you respond to the story above? Do you identify with it, or find Francis’ holiness to be completely foreign to you?

REFLECTION

Find a current news story from the headlines. Identify the least attractive person in the story. See if you can pray for that person. Remember that Christ directs us to pray for our enemies.

(Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:27.)

PRAYER

Pray for the grace to recognize the presence of God in all persons. If you have difficulty, remember that God is patient and compassionate with you.

THURSDAY OF 1 LENT – February 18, 2016

Oneness with Christ

WORD

As he was drawn aloft through ardent longing for God one morning near the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, and was praying on the mountainside, he saw what appeared as a seraph with six bright wings gleaming like a fire descending from the heights of heaven. As this figure approached in swift flight and came near the man of God it appeared not only winged but also crucified. The sight amazed Francis and his soul experienced joy mingled with pain. He was delighted with the sight of Christ appearing to him so graciously and intimately and yet the awe-inspiring vision of Christ nailed to the cross aroused in his soul a joy of compassionate love. When the vision vanished after a mysterious and intimate conversation it left Francis aglow with seraphic love in his soul. Externally, however, it left marks on his body like those of the Crucified.

Legenda Minor of St. Bonaventure

RESPONSE

St. Francis' compassion for all humankind was based on his extraordinary desire to identify with Christ. Francis looked upon the crucifixion as the ultimate expression of God's love. That the crucified Christ appeared to him was likewise an indication to him of God's great mercy. Once again, is this something you can identify with, or does Francis' piety seem out of reach to you?

REFLECTION

Contemplate a crucifix, either a picture or a dimensional cross with the corpus (Christ's body) on it. Examine it closely, feel it, even kiss it. Try to identify with Jesus' suffering. Why did Christ subject himself to this?

PRAYER

By returning good for evil, Jesus interrupts the cycle of violence and initiates a new way of being. Say a prayer of gratitude for love so deep, so broad, so high. Pray for the grace to meet Christ's love with love of your own.

FRIDAY OF 1 LENT – February 19, 2016

Oneness with oneself

WORD

All the brothers must apply themselves to follow the humility and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ; and they should remember that we are to have nothing else of the whole world except, as the apostle says, having food and sufficient clothing, with these we are content.

The First Rule of St. Francis

RESPONSE

Not everyone is called to the extremes of humility and poverty observed by St. Francis and his followers. But what of his call to simple living is relevant to a faithful Christian living in the world?

REFLECTION

Try to think of one way that simplifying your life would allow you to be more aware of God's presence. Although Lent has already been going on for more than a week, taking this one step of simplification may be the Lenten discipline to which God is calling you. Reflect on this possibility.

PRAYER

Pray for the grace of simplicity.

SATURDAY OF 1 LENT – February 20, 2016

WORD

Review your workbook entries for the last week, under the theme of “Praying with St. Francis of Assisi”: *Oneness with Creation, Oneness with Humanity, Oneness with the “Least,” Oneness with Christ, and Oneness with Oneself.*

RESPONSE

Which exercise meant the most to you? Why and how?

REFLECTION

How might your experience with this exercise be an answer to the prayer you conceived on Sunday?

PRAAYER

Think of what is on tap for you in the coming week.
What from this week do you want to take forward with you into the days and weeks ahead?
How will you remind yourself of how God has been present with you this past week?

WEEK 2:

Praying with Benedict of Nursia

Always, every day, begin your session with a prayer that God will guide you in your daily spiritual exercise, leading you to what God wants you to experience.

Always, every day, end your session with a prayer of thanks to God.

SUNDAY OF 2 LENT – February 21, 2016

WORD

When you go to church this Sunday*, listen carefully to the Scripture readings and the sermon. When you have a quiet moment after church think back over the Scripture and the sermon. What word, phrase, or concept has stuck with you?

RESPONSE

Where does this word, phrase or concept touch your life right now?

REFLECTION

What, in love, might God be trying to communicate to you through this word, phrase or concept?

PRAYER

On the basis of your reflection, what is your prayer for how you want to be with God this week, or how you want God to be with you?

*If you are unable to go to church, watching a broadcast or webcast service is acceptable, as is reading the lectionary leaflet for this Sunday.

MONDAY OF 2 LENT – February 22, 2016

Introduction to Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a method of prayer based on Holy Scripture. Although not original to Benedictine spirituality, this method is particularly associated with St. Benedict, who incorporated this method into the spirituality that bears his name. *Lectio Divina* consists of four parts: *Lectio* (reading the Word), *Meditatio* (reflecting on the Word), *Oratio* (responding to the Word), and *Contemplatio* (internalizing the Word). In a way, although our terminology is somewhat different, this four-part study has been our method thus far in these spirituality workbooks. This week we will be reading the daily Gospel lectionary for the Second Week of Lent 2016, using the Benedictine method of *Lectio Divina*. If you have access to a commentary on the Gospel of Mark, feel free to consult it as you read each excerpt, but this is purely optional.

Call to apostleship

LECTIO (READING)

He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him, and he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons. *Mark 3:13-15*

MEDITATIO (REFLECTING)

Despite his power as the Son of God, Jesus elected to enlist the help of ordinary people to help him in his ministry. In so doing, he reveals that we ordinary folk have a role in Jesus' mission of bringing about the kingdom of God. Just as Jesus called the twelve, Jesus continues to call ordinary people like us to help in his ministry.

ORATIO (RESPONDING)

Respond to the call of Jesus to follow him and help him in his mission of bringing about the kingdom of God. Admit any self-doubts and ask for grace to respond as whole-heartedly as you can to Jesus' call. Ask for clarity as to the specific work Jesus may be calling you to.

CONTEMPLATIO (INTERNALIZING)

Sit in silence for a few minutes and be open to how Jesus may be calling you, and how Jesus may be responding to any of your doubts or concerns.

TUESDAY OF 2 LENT – February 23, 2016

Family love

LECTIO (READING)

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!” Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Mark 3:31-35

MEDITATIO (REFLECTING)

It’s natural for people to feel special attachment to their immediate family, but Jesus, the Son of God, is brother (and son) to all humankind. It’s not that he doesn’t love his natural mother and siblings, it’s that he loves all people as if they are family. This type of indiscriminate love may not be possible for most of us, but it is the love that characterizes the kingdom of God preached by Jesus. We may not ever be able to fulfill Jesus’ command to love one another this way, but we are called to hold this universal love as an ideal toward which to strive with God’s help and Jesus’ example.

ORATIO (RESPONDING)

Mentally engage Jesus in conversation about his declaration that his mother and siblings are everywhere. Think about your own family and claim Jesus’ help in understanding what qualities of your regard for them that you may, with God’s help, extend to persons outside your family. Ask for the grace to expand your circle of loved ones.

CONTEMPLATIO (INTERNALIZING)

Sit in silence for a few minutes and be open to how Jesus may be leading you to a greater love of neighbor.

WEDNESDAY OF 2 LENT – February 24, 2016

God's extravagance

LECTIO (READING)

The sower sows the word. These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive with joy. But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And other are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.

Mark 4:14-20

MEDITATIO (REFLECTING)

It's tempting to read this parable and apply it to yourself, trying to determine what kind of "soil" you have been in receiving the seed of God's word. Instead, think about the sower – someone so extravagant that he sows seed indiscriminately on all kinds of ground, content to wait and see how productive it is. Think also about a thirty or sixty or hundredfold yield. What an incredible outcome! God is generous with us. Even when we fail to live up to the gifts God gives us, God sows God's word and God's grace extravagantly among us. When we focus on the action of God in scripture rather than on ourselves, we are more likely to respond with wonder and gratitude.

ORATIO (RESPONDING)

Think of the seed God has sown in your life. Think of any fruit God's gifts have produced in your life. Respond with gratitude. Pray for the grace to be productive with the gifts God has given you.

CONTEMPLATIO (INTERNALIZING)

Sit in silence for a few minutes and be open to God's extravagant gifts to you; and how these gifts have been productive, or may be so.

THURSDAY OF 2 LENT – February 25, 2016

The seed of the kingdom

LECTIO (READING)

He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” *Mark 4:30-32*

MEDITATIO (REFLECTING)

The kingdom of God is mighty, but Jesus does not compare it to a great oak or giant sequoia. The kingdom of God is like a bush with a tiny seed. From very modest beginnings, it grows beyond all expectation, becoming useful and hospitable and sheltering. Many people have wondered how to remain humble while claiming the power of God as a follower of Jesus. Perhaps the mustard bush provides a model: something relatively modest among the great trees, but growing into its full potential, becoming useful to God... a conduit for God’s love and hospitality.

ORATIO (RESPONDING)

Ponder how the kingdom of God dwells within you as a tiny mustard seed. Pray that that seed within you may reach its fullest potential. Pray that through you God may extend God’s kingdom to other creatures.

CONTEMPLATIO (INTERNALIZING)

Sit in silence for a few minutes and imagine God’s kingdom within you growing quietly, modestly, wondrously.

FRIDAY OF 2 LENT – February 26, 2016

Who is this?

LECTIO (READING)

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on a cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” *Mark 4:35-41*

MEDITATIO (REFLECTING)

From talking about a tiny mustard seed germinating in the quiet, moist darkness of the earth, we go to the opposite extreme, seeing Jesus address the immense forces of nature. Up to now in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus’ miracles have all had to do with healing people’s bodies. Now he demonstrates that he has power over not only forces that afflict humans, but forces that afflict creation. This is no mere faith healer.

ORATIO (RESPONDING)

Reflect on Jesus’ deeds of power. Consider that Jesus is at work in the world in ways far beyond your own body, your own imagining. Consider also that the almighty Lord whose purpose is to redeem the universe also cares about you. Say a prayer of humble thanks.

CONTEMPLATIO (INTERNALIZING)

Sit in silence for a few minutes and be open to how Jesus may be at work in the world and also within you to increase your faith.

SATURDAY OF 2 LENT – February 27, 2016

WORD

Review your workbook entries for the last week, under the theme of “Praying with Benedict of Nursia”: *Call to apostleship, Family love, God’s extravagance, The seed of the kingdom and Who is this?*

RESPONSE

Which exercise meant the most to you? Why and how?

REFLECTION

How might your experience with this exercise be an answer to the prayer you conceived on Sunday?

PRAYER

Think of what is on tap for you in the coming week.
What from this week do you want to take forward with you into the days and weeks ahead?
How will you remind yourself of how God has been present with you this past week?

WEEK 3:

Praying with Francis de Sales

Always, every day, begin your session with a prayer that God will guide you in your daily spiritual exercise, leading you to what God wants you to experience.

Always, every day, end your session with a prayer of thanks to God.

SUNDAY OF 3 LENT – February 28, 2016

WORD

When you go to church this Sunday*, listen carefully to the Scripture readings and the sermon. When you have a quiet moment after church think back over the Scripture and the sermon. What word, phrase, or concept has stuck with you?

RESPONSE

Where does this word, phrase or concept touch your life right now?

REFLECTION

What, in love, might God be trying to communicate to you through this word, phrase or concept?

PRAYER

On the basis of your reflection, what is your prayer for how you want to be with God this week, or how you want God to be with you?

*If you are unable to go to church, watching a broadcast or webcast service is acceptable, as is reading the lectionary leaflet for this Sunday.

MONDAY OF 3 LENT – February 29, 2016

St. Francis de Sales

St. Francis de Sales was a spiritual director in the early 1600's, who corresponded with laypeople who were attempting to lead a holy life. Central to his spirituality is the cultivation of virtues. This week we will be considering five virtues treated by St. Francis in his masterpiece, *Introduction to the Devout Life*.

Patience

WORD

Be patient, not only with respect to the main trials which beset you, but also under the accidental and accessory annoyances which arise out of them.

Gaze often inwardly upon Jesus Christ crucified, naked, blasphemed, falsely accused, forsaken, overwhelmed with every possible grief and sorrow, and remember that none of your sufferings can ever be compared to his, either in kind or degree, and that you can never suffer anything for Him worthy to be weighed against what he has born for you.

Consider the pains which martyrs have endured, and think how even now many people are bearing afflictions beyond all measure greater than yours, and say, "Of a truth my trouble is comfort, my torments are but roses compared to those whose life is a continual death, without solace or aid or consolation, borne down with a weight of grief tenfold greater than mine."

On Patience, Francis de Sales

RESPONSE

In which situations is patience most difficult for you –major trials or the little things that annoy you on a daily basis?

REFLECTION

Call to mind a particular situation in your life right now that demands your patience. If you follow Francis' advice and contemplate either the sufferings of Christ or the suffering of other people in the world, what happens when you turn back to considering your situation?

PRAYER

Repeat the prayer recommended by St. Francis, above, ("Of a truth my trouble...") End your prayer by remembering that God is much more patient with you than you are with yourself.

TUESDAY OF 3 LENT – March 1, 2016

Humility

WORD

Of a truth, nothing so tends to humble us before the Mercy of God as the multitude of his gifts to us. *On Interior Humility*, Francis de Sales

Any one who will calmly consider what he has done without God, cannot fail to realise that what he does with God is no merit of his own; and so we may rejoice in that which is good in us, and take pleasure in the fact, but we shall give glory to God Alone, who Alone is its Author.

On Interior Humility, Francis de Sales

RESPONSE

To begin to cultivate humility, as Francis suggests, make a list of God’s gifts to you. You may want to set a timer and quit after five minutes!

REFLECTION

Now, make a list of what is good in you. Spend a few moments with each item on your list, acknowledging that everything that is good in you is God’s gift to you.

PRAYER

Give glory and thanks to God for everything on both lists. Dedicate anything you have accomplished with these gifts to God, recognizing God as the “Author.” Pray for awareness that exercising these gifts gives glory to God.

WEDNESDAY OF 3 LENT – March 2, 2016

Gentleness (with others)

WORD

If you are like the Psalmist, ready to cry out, “Mine eye is consumed for very anger,” go on to say, “Have mercy upon me, O Lord;” so that God may stretch forth His Right Hand and control your wrath. I mean, that when we feel stirred with anger, we ought to call upon God for help, like the Apostles, when they were tossed about with wind and storm, and he is sure to say, “Peace, be still.” *Gentleness towards others and Remedies against Anger, Francis de Sales*

When there is nothing to stir your wrath, lay up a store of meekness and kindness, speaking and acting in things great and small as gently as possible. *Gentleness towards others and Remedies against Anger, Francis de Sales*

RESPONSE

Francis here provides advice for maintaining a gentle attitude both when angry and aggravated, and when at peace. In which condition do you find yourself right now? Describe how that feels to you.

REFLECTION

If at peace, make a conscious effort to act gently for the next few hours. If aggravated, call on God for help, specifically envisioning Christ directing the wind and waves, “Peace, be still.” In either case, jot down some notes on the effects and the affect (how it feels) of this exercise.

PRAYER

If at peace, pray for your future self at such time as you may be aggravated or angry, that Christ may still the storm. If aggravated, pray for your future self at such time as you are at peace, that you may speak and act gently in all things.

THURSDAY OF 3 LENT – March 3, 2016

Gentleness (with oneself)

WORD

One important direction in which to exercise gentleness, is with respect to ourselves, never growing irritated with one's self or one's imperfections; for although it is but reasonable that we should be displeased and grieved at our own faults, yet ought we to guard against a bitter, angry, or peevish feeling about them.

On Gentleness towards Ourselves, Francis de Sales

Instead of taking myself to task as abominable and wretched, for breaking so many resolutions, calling myself unfit to lift up my eyes to Heaven, as disloyal, faithless, and the like, I would deal pitifully and quietly with myself. "Poor heart! So soon fallen again into the snare! Well now, rise up again bravely and fall no more. Seek God's Mercy, hope in Him, ask Him to keep you from falling again, and begin to tread the pathway of humility afresh. We must be more on our guard henceforth."

On Gentleness towards Ourselves, Francis de Sales

RESPONSE

Is it easier for you to forgive others than to forgive yourself? Think of an instance where you were very angry with yourself. Would you have been as unforgiving with another person?

REFLECTION

Reflect that part of loving your neighbor as yourself is being as forgiving of yourself as, at your best, you are forgiving of someone you love. Think of a time you really forgave someone. Can you be this generous with yourself?

PRAYER

Read aloud St. Francis' prayer of self-forgiveness ("Poor heart! So soon...") Resolve that next time you are disappointed in yourself, to use this prayer and be as gentle with yourself as you are with the person you love best in the world.

FRIDAY OF 3 LENT – March 4, 2016

Temperance

WORD

At all times a constant habitual moderation is better than occasional excessive abstinence, alternated with great indulgence. *On the Practice of Bodily Mortification*, Francis de Sales

Great occasions for serving God come seldom, but little ones surround us daily; and our Lord Himself has told us that “he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.” If you do all in God’s Name, all you do will be well done, whether you eat, drink or sleep, whether you amuse yourself or turn the spit, so long as you do all wisely, you will gain greatly as in God’s Sight, doing all because He would have you do it.

We must be Faithful in Things Great and Small, Francis de Sales

RESPONSE

St. Francis’ pronouncement on “constant habitual moderation” seems to argue against the popular practice of giving something up for Lent, but resuming indulgence in it when Lent is over. How does Francis’ advice affect your own understanding of Lenten disciplines?

REFLECTION

Reflect on something routine you have done in the past day. Was it well and wisely done? If so, think of this small thing as service to God, as Francis suggests. If not, remember to be gentle with yourself, as God would have you be!

PRAYER

Pray for the grace to do little things as service to God. "We cannot all do great things, but we can do *small things with great love*." (St. Therese of Lisieux)

SATURDAY OF 3 LENT – March 5, 2016

WORD

Review your workbook entries for the last week, under the theme of “Praying with St. Francis de Sales”: *Patience, Humility, Gentleness with others, Gentleness with oneself, and Temperance.*

RESPONSE

Which exercise meant the most to you? Why and how?

REFLECTION

How might your experience with this exercise be an answer to the prayer you conceived on Sunday?

PRAYER

Think of what is on tap for you in the coming week.
What from this week do you want to take forward with you into the days and weeks ahead?
How will you remind yourself of how God has been present with you this past week?

WEEK 4:

Praying with Evelyn Underhill

Always, every day, begin your session with a prayer that God will guide you in your daily spiritual exercise, leading you to what God wants you to experience.

Always, every day, end your session with a prayer of thanks to God.

SUNDAY OF 4 LENT – March 6, 2016

WORD

When you go to church this Sunday*, listen carefully to the Scripture readings and the sermon. When you have a quiet moment after church think back over the Scripture and the sermon. What word, phrase, or concept has stuck with you?

RESPONSE

Where does this word, phrase or concept touch your life right now?

REFLECTION

What, in love, might God be trying to communicate to you through this word, phrase or concept?

PRAYER

On the basis of your reflection, what is your prayer for how you want to be with God this week, or how you want God to be with you?

*If you are unable to go to church, watching a broadcast or webcast service is acceptable, as is reading the lectionary leaflet for this Sunday.

MONDAY OF 4 LENT – March 7, 2016

Ordinary Mysticism

WORD

The essence of mystical contemplation is summed in these two experiences – union with the flux of life, and union with the Whole in which all lesser realities are resumed – and these experiences are well within your reach.... More, it is probable that you are, or have been, an actual contemplative too. Has it never happened to you to lose yourself for a moment in a swift and satisfying experience for which you found no name?

Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People*

RESPONSE

Evelyn Underhill was a British laywoman and spiritual director who was active about a hundred years ago. She wrote *Practical Mysticism* as Britain was engaged in the horror of World War I. She believed a contemplative approach to life is available to all people regardless of their vocation, and that in fact, more people participating in contemplative prayer would have a healing effect on the needy world. She wrote *Practical Mysticism* to encourage “normal people” to recognize that they are already experiencing mysticism without realizing it, and to encourage them to undertake this form of prayer more intentionally.

REFLECTION

Recall a moment in your life when you “lost yourself for a moment in a swift and satisfying experience for which you found no name.” You might have “lost yourself” in an activity or something you saw, heard, or felt; or you might have felt inexplicably happy or at peace for no apparent reason. Jot down a few notes to fix this experience in your mind.

PRAYER

Ask God to reveal to you what made this experience so special and memorable. Make some notes here as to what that might have been. Pray that you may be open to such experiences in the future.

TUESDAY OF 4 LENT – March 8, 2016

Re-Collection

WORD

The purified and educated will can wholly withdraw the self's attention from its usual concentration on small useful aspects of the time-world, refuse to react to its perpetually incoming messages, retreat to the unity of its spirit, and there make itself ready for messages from another plane. This is the process which the mystics call Recollection: the first stage in the training of the contemplative consciousness.

Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People*

RESPONSE

Underhill believed that normal human consciousness is so inundated by various stimuli in the modern era that it usually does not perceive the underlying reality, which is God. If this was true a hundred years ago, it is certainly even more so now, in the electronic age! Is this something with which you identify? Do you agree that modern culture presents us with many distractions from the true meaning of life? Write a few lines about how the constant stimulation of images and information, not to mention managing the particular details of your own life leaves you. Fulfilled? Frustrated? Frazzled? Like you're missing something?

REFLECTION

Re-collect yourself: Acknowledge the distractions in your life and temporarily set them aside. They will be there when you get back! Reflect that there is a reality deeper than your own concerns, and the concerns with which popular media presents you at every turn. Allow yourself, insofar as you are able, to leave your immediate concerns and just abide with that deeper reality for a few minutes. What is that like?

PRAYER

Pray that God may reveal to you what is most real. Go through the major and minor concerns of your life and consider how they look to God, in the grand scheme of things: in the context of what God wants for you and for your life. Are you able to achieve some perspective?

WEDNESDAY OF 4 LENT – March 9, 2016

Practicing Recollection

WORD

Take, then, an idea, an object, from amongst the common stock, and hold it before your mind. It must be brooded upon, gazed at, seized again and again, as distractions seem to snatch it from your grasp.

Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People*

RESPONSE

Evelyn Underhill suggests the exercise described above as an introduction to meditation. Concentrating on an object or an idea, and defending your attention to this object from wanderings of mind over a quarter of an hour or so, is an exercise in resisting the constant assault on our senses from a variety of sources, and a preparation for self-knowledge and reaching toward the reality underlying all of our experience (God). Choose something upon which to direct your attention. An icon or cross suggests itself, but you can choose a secular object if you wish. You are not looking for the particular meaning of this object: you are practicing the art of attention to something. Set a goal for how long you think you can direct your attention to this object, at least five minutes, no more than fifteen. Write your goal here. Example: “I will attend to this icon for ten minutes to exercise my ability to attend to something.”

REFLECTION

Set a timer for the amount of time you have chosen. Acknowledge that your mind is likely to wander. Resolve to be gentle with yourself. When you find yourself thinking of something other than the object of your meditation, simply draw your attention back to it. What you are experiencing is what every human being experiences, especially in the current age of incessant sensory stimuli.

Underhill says, “the subject of your meditation begins, as you surrender to its influence, to exhibit unsuspected meaning, beauty, power....As your meditation becomes deeper it will defend you from the perpetual assaults of the outer world.... You have set a ring of silence between you and it; and behold! Within that silence you are free.”

PRAYER

At the end of your time, compose a prayer to God. Whatever you have experienced offer it to God and ask for God’s enlightenment and blessing.

THURSDAY OF 4 LENT – March 10, 2016

The real “You”

WORD

By this voluntary painful act of concentration, this first step upon the ladder which goes—as the mystics would say—“from multiplicity to unity,” you have to some extent withdrawn yourself from that union with unrealities, with notions and concepts, which has hitherto contented you.... You, in this preliminary movement of recollection are saying your first deliberate No to the claim which the world of appearance makes to a total possession of your consciousness: and are thus making possible some contact between that consciousness and the World of Reality.”

Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People*

RESPONSE

The meditation Underhill recommends is the first step toward self-knowledge and the awareness that you exist in relation to the ultimate Reality.

Once again, direct your attention to an object or idea with the goal of defending your attention from outside distractions. Once you feel your attention focused (“purified,” as Underhill puts it), see if you can turn your attention from the object to yourself: “Observe your own being in a fresh relationship with things, and surrender yourself willingly to the moods of astonishment, humility, joy—perhaps of deep shame or sudden love—which invade your heart as you look.” When you turn your focused attention from the object of your meditation to yourself, what do you “see”? Astonishment, humility, joy, shame, love?

REFLECTION

Underhill contends that the regular practice of this focused attention will impart “a sense in which this real *You* is distinct from, an alien within, the world in which you find yourself, as an actor has another life when he is not on the stage.... When you have achieved this power of withdrawing yourself, of making this first crude distinction between appearance and reality, the initial stage of the contemplative life has been won.” How do you react to this? As a result of your experience, does this practice make any sense to you, or does Underhill’s approach seem alien and abstract?

PRAYER

Ask God to reveal to you something of value that you may take away from this exercise. What is that thing?

FRIDAY OF 4 LENT – March 11, 2016

The Natural World

WORD

With attention no longer frittered amongst the petty accidents and interests of your personal life, but posed, tense, ready for the work you shall demand of it—stretch out by a distinct act of loving will towards one of the myriad manifestations of life that surround you: and which, in an ordinary way, you hardly notice unless you happen to need them. Pour yourself out towards it, do not draw its image towards you... As to the object of contemplation, it matters little. From Alp to insect, anything will do, provided that your attitude be right: for all things in this world towards which you are stretching out are linked together, and one truly apprehended will be the gateway to the rest.

Such a simple exercise, if entered upon with singleness of heart, will soon repay you. By this quiet yet tense act of communion, this loving gaze, you will presently discover a relationship—far more intimate than anything you imagined—between yourself and the surrounding “objects of sense”; and in those objects of sense a profound significance, a personal quality, and actual power of response.

Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People*

RESPONSE

Choose something from God’s creation upon which to direct your attention. Set a goal for how long you think you can direct your attention to this object, at least five minutes, no more than fifteen. Set a timer, if you like, for the amount of time you have chosen.

REFLECTION

Mentally stretch out to your object in love as Underhill describes. When your time is up, jot down a few notes to fix the experience in your mind.

PRAYER

You have been introduced in these lessons to a type of prayer that can be pursued and practiced, though rarely mastered, over an entire lifetime. If this type of prayer speaks to you, you may want to contact your facilitator for additional resources, as we have only scratched the surface here. Pray for God’s direction on whether you are called to this type of prayer. If you are not, write a prayer of thanksgiving for your learning and leave this type of prayer without regret.

SATURDAY OF 4 LENT – March 12, 2016

WORD

Review your workbook entries for the last week, under the theme of “Praying with Evelyn Underhill”: *Practical Mysticism, Re-collection, Practicing Recollection, The Real “You” The Natural World*.

RESPONSE

Which exercise meant the most to you? Why and how?

REFLECTION

How might your experience with this exercise be an answer to the prayer you conceived on Sunday?

PRAYER

Think of what is on tap for you in the coming week.
What from this week do you want to take forward with you into the days and weeks ahead?
How will you remind yourself of how God has been present with you this past week?

WEEK 5:

Praying with Ignatius Loyola

Always, every day, begin your session with a prayer that God will guide you in your daily spiritual exercise, leading you to what God wants you to experience.

Always, every day, end your session with a prayer of thanks to God.

SUNDAY OF 5 LENT – March 13, 2016

WORD

When you go to church this Sunday*, listen carefully to the Scripture readings and the sermon. When you have a quiet moment after church think back over the Scripture and the sermon. What word, phrase, or concept has stuck with you?

RESPONSE

Where does this word, phrase or concept touch your life right now?

REFLECTION

What, in love, might God be trying to communicate to you through this word, phrase or concept?

PRAYER

On the basis of your reflection, what is your prayer for how you want to be with God this week, or how you want God to be with you?

*If you are unable to go to church, watching a broadcast or webcast service is acceptable, as is reading the lectionary leaflet for this Sunday.

MONDAY OF 5 LENT – March 14, 2016

Introduction to Ignatian Prayer

Like *Lectio Divina*, this form of Ignatian Prayer is a method of prayer based on Holy Scripture. Ignatian prayer employs the imagination to project oneself into biblical scenes, trying then to derive some “practical fruit” relevant to one’s current situation. Think of it as “You are There” Prayer. For the next few days, we will again be using the Daily Lectionary, this time for the week of 5 Lent.

Last of all

WORD

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”

Mark 9:30-41

RESPONSE

Imagine yourself as one of Jesus’ disciples, walking behind him on the road to Capernaum. You are talking with a colleague and engaging in a little one-up-man-ship. When you arrive at where you are staying for the night, Jesus asks you what you were talking about. Experience what that feels like. Now, hear Jesus say that whoever wants to be first must be “last of all and servant of all.” Experience what that feels like. Jot down any notes here.

REFLECTION

In what respects, if any, have you been representing yourself or thinking of yourself as greater than another person? What light, if any, does your reflection on being one of the disciples shed on your present-day situation?

PRAYER

Pray for understanding as to how being last of all and servant of all may apply in this situation.

TUESDAY OF 5 LENT – March 5, 2016

Whoever is not against us

WORD

John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” But Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.” *Mark 9:38-41*

RESPONSE

Put yourself in John’s place, asking Jesus what to do about a person who invokes the name of Jesus but is not part of your little band. Hear Jesus’s response, “Do not stop him.” How do you take this? Perhaps you feel confusion, perhaps you want to argue, perhaps you want to work it out, perhaps you need more explanation, perhaps you accept what Jesus says outright. How do *you* react to what Jesus says?

REFLECTION

What “practical fruit” can you draw from this exercise? Is Jesus telling you about a particular situation where you don’t think a fellow Christian is acting Christian enough? Is Jesus challenging your assumptions about how a Christian behaves? Or are you simply being invited to consider how startling Jesus’ teachings are, given the way people usually behave?

PRAYER

Pray for the grace to recognize that “whoever is not against us is for us.” How would this outlook change your attitude towards other people?

WEDNESDAY OF 5 LENT – March 16, 2016

As a little child

WORD

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will not enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them and blessed them. *Mark 10:13-16*

RESPONSE

First imagine yourself as a parent in this story. What is your motivation in bringing your children to Jesus? What does it feel like to be turned aside by the disciples? Hear Jesus’ teaching and watch him embrace the children. Now imagine yourself as a disciple. What is your motivation in turning the parents away? How do you hear Jesus’ teaching? Now imagine yourself as a child being held and blessed by Jesus. Jot down some notes about each experience.

REFLECTION

Try to think of times in your life when you have behaved in each of these three ways. Think of Jesus responding to you in those situations as he does in this situation.

PRAYER

Pray for the grace to enter Jesus’ presence as a little child. What does that mean to you?

THURSDAY OF 5 LENT – March 17, 2016

Then come, follow me

WORD

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and your mother.’” He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. *Mark 10:17-22*

RESPONSE

Put yourself in the place of the man in the story. How would you react when Jesus told you to sell all you own? Would you go away grieving as he did, or would you at least consider Jesus’ proposal? You might want to “try out” both scenarios to see which one feels more like you. Whichever road you take, remember that Jesus has looked at you and loved you. Then, try to imagine what the rest of the man’s life might have been like.

REFLECTION

Try to avoid the simplistic assumption that Jesus is actually giving you, in your current situation, the exact same advice he gave to the man in the story. What is the “practical fruit” God invites you to take from this exercise?

PRAYER

Pray for the grace to discern what it means for you to leave all and come and follow Jesus.

FRIDAY OF 5 LENT – March 18, 2016

Drinking Jesus' cup

WORD

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." *Mark 10:35-40*

RESPONSE

Remember the situation here. Jesus is returning to Jerusalem. Prior to this exchange, Jesus has shared with the disciples the foreknowledge that in Jerusalem he will be handed over and condemned to death. The disciples are clearly having a hard time taking this all in. Imagine yourself as James or John, coming to Jesus with your brother for special consideration. Imagine Jesus as he responds to your request. Is he reproving or gentle? What effect do his words have on you? Are you confused, disappointed, intrigued? What thoughts cross your mind as James or John?

REFLECTION

This appears to be the first time the disciples are made to think of the consequences of following Jesus. Following Jesus is not going to guarantee them an easy time or universal respect. Can you think of a time in your life when following Jesus (forgiving an injury, loving the unlovable, suffering for another) was hard? Write a few notes to fix that experience in your imagination.

PRAYER

Pray for the grace to hear Jesus' words to James and John. Pray for the grace to follow Jesus, even when it is painful or hard to do so.

SATURDAY OF 5 LENT – March 19, 2016

WORD

Review your workbook entries for the last week, under the theme of “Praying with Ignatius Loyola”: *Last of all, Whoever is not against us, As little child, Then come follow me and Drinking Jesus’ Cup.*

RESPONSE

Which exercise meant the most to you? Why and how?

REFLECTION

How might your experience with this exercise be an answer to the prayer you conceived on Sunday?

PRAYER

Think of what is on tap for you in the coming week.
What from this week do you want to take forward with you into the days and weeks ahead?
How will you remind yourself of how God has been present with you this past week?

WEEK 6
(Holy week):
Walking with Jesus

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Please do not go on with these exercises unless you intend to attend Easter services. The horrors of Holy Week always culminate in the Resurrection, and must ultimately be understood in that context. However, by the same token, the Resurrection is best appreciated and understood in the context of Holy Week. Pray for guidance, and proceed if you are so moved.

**Always, every day, begin your session with a prayer that God will guide you in your daily spiritual exercise, leading you to what God wants you to experience.
Always, every day, end your session with a prayer of thanks to God.**

PALM /PASSION SUNDAY – March 20, 2016

WORD

The Gospel reading in Church today tells the whole story of Holy Week all at once. Those who assign Sunday Bible readings combined everything on this day, since so few people observe the separate weekday events of Jesus' Passion between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday. The joy of the Resurrection means little outside the context of Jesus' suffering and death, so it is essential that all Christians hear the whole story, especially if they don't attend Holy Week services.

At the same time, there are drawbacks to hearing the whole Passion sequence all at once. It's hard on the psyche to move so quickly from the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem to his brutal death. Also, the significance of Palm Sunday itself gets short shrift when combined so closely with the Crucifixion.

This year, supported by the exercises you have done in this workbook, make an effort to experience all the themes of Holy Week. You will have heard the whole Passion story in church today, but for the purposes of this exercise, go back and concentrate for now just on Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. You can do this if you commit to considering the later events of Holy Week on the weekdays that follow.

Plan to attend Holy Week services later in the week if you are able. At least read the Gospel lessons for each day. Think about what was going on in Jesus' life each day of his final week in Jerusalem. With this frame of mind your Holy Week is likely to be especially meaningful.

After telling a parable to the crowd at Jericho, Jesus went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They said, "The Lord needs it." Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Luke 19:28-40

PRAYER

Set your timer for five minutes. "Pray" this passage by thinking about it for the time allotted, calling upon any of the prayer practices you have experienced this Lent, if desired. If you are moved to form a prayer or reflection in words, do so here.

MONDAY IN HOLY WEEK – March 21, 2016

WORD

As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will cross you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.

Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there, and he said, “It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer’; but you have made it a den of robbers.”

Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him; but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard.

At night he would go out and spend the night on the Mount of Olives, as it was called. And all the people would get up early in the morning to listen to him in the temple.

Luke 19:41-48, 21:37-38

RESPONSE

There are a lot of different pictures in this passage: Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, a judgment prophecy against those who did not recognize God in Jesus, the cleansing of the temple, teaching in the temple, the conspiracy against Jesus, the people being “spellbound,” and Jesus retiring to the Mount of Olives at night. In what part of the story do you see yourself?

REFLECTION

Spend a few minutes thinking of yourself in that part of the story. What might God be trying to tell you?

PRAYER

If you are moved to form a prayer or reflection in words, do so here.

TUESDAY IN HOLY WEEK – March 22, 2016

WORD

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.” They asked him, “Where do you want us to make preparations for it?” “Listen,” he said to them, “when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters and say to the owner of the house, ‘The teacher asks you, “Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’” He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there.” So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal. *Luke 22:7-13*

RESPONSE

Ponder this: Had Jesus made prior arrangements with the owner of the house, or did he know what the disciples would find in the city, just as he knew he was going to be betrayed? What other questions does this passage raise for you?

REFLECTION

The theme here is preparation. Think about preparing yourself for what is to come later this week. What one thing can you do now to prepare yourself to spend the rest of the week with Jesus?

PRAYER

Spend at least one minute in silence, waiting on God. Then, if you are moved to form a prayer or reflection in words, do so here.

WEDNESDAY IN HOLY WEEK – March 23, 2016

WORD

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it^[e] until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!” Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this. *Luke 22:14-23*

RESPONSE

Here is another instance of veering wildly from one mood to another: the quiet joy of the first Eucharist, to the shock and horror of Jesus’ prediction of betrayal. Where are you in this story? Where are you most uncomfortable?

REFLECTION

This story comes directly after yesterday’s, with its theme of preparation. Could Jesus, in the Eucharist, be preparing his disciples for what is to come? How might Jesus be preparing you for what is to come?

PRAYER

Spend at least one minute in silence, waiting on God. Then, if you are moved to form a prayer or reflection in words, do so here.

MAUNDY THURSDAY– March 24, 2016

WORD

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.” Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.” Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, ⁴⁶and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.” While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, “Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?” When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, “Lord, should we strike with the sword?” Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, “Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!”

Luke 22:47-53

RESPONSE

If you are able, attend Maundy Thursday services. If not, slowly read the whole Maundy Thursday account from Luke in your Bible, Luke 22:1-65.

REFLECTION

These things are difficult to consider, likely to arouse deep feelings that may be distressing. If you are able, let yourself experience whatever feelings come to you and offer them to God without judgment, knowing that by the grace of God you are still in God’s hands. If you need help processing your feelings, consult your clergy.

PRAYER

The time for words is past. See if you can just be with Jesus for the time being.

GOOD FRIDAY – March 25, 2016

WORD

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun’s light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, “Certainly this man was innocent.”

Luke 23:32-47

RESPONSE

If you are able, attend Good Friday services. If not, slowly read the whole Crucifixion account from Luke in your Bible, Luke 23:1-56.

REFLECTION

Once again, if you are able, let yourself experience whatever feelings come to you and offer them to God without judgment knowing that by the grace of God you are still in God’s hands. If you need help processing your feelings, consult your clergy.

PRAYER

Sometimes the words of the Prayer Book are a great comfort. Here is the Collect for Good Friday: *Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

HOLY SATURDAY– March 26, 2016

WORD

Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment. *Luke 23:50-56*

RESPONSE

We have been through a lot together this past week. Now it is Sabbath, time to rest. Give yourself permission to relax. Take a nap. Do something you enjoy. Be gentle with yourself and with others. You may want to do a physical inventory, intentionally letting go of the tension in each part of your body.

REFLECTION

Unlike the characters in the story from Luke, you know what to expect. Tomorrow is Easter. Jesus will rise! You may actually begin to celebrate tonight at sundown, at the Easter Vigil. How has your entering into Holy Week affected your expectation of Easter?

PRAYER

Pray for the Easter rebirth of joy, faith and love in your heart. Tomorrow, insofar as you are able, give yourself over to celebration and thanks. If you are able to put your thoughts into words, do so here.

APPENDIX C

ENTRANCE QUESTIONNAIRE

How often do you attend church or other religious meetings? (Check one)

- Never
- Once a year or less
- A few times a year
- A few times a month
- Once a week
- More than once a week

How often do you spend time in religious activities such as prayer, meditation or Bible study? (Check one)

- Rarely or never
- A few times a month
- Once a week
- Twice or more a week
- Daily
- More than once a day

THE FOLLOWING SECTION CONTAINS STATEMENTS ABOUT RELIGIOUS BELIEF OR EXPERIENCE. PLEASE MARK THE EXTENT TO WHICH EACH STATEMENT IS TRUE OR NOT TRUE FOR YOU.

In my life, I experience the presence of the Divine.

- Definitely not true
- Tends not to be true
- Unsure
- Tends to be true
- Definitely true of me

My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life.

- Definitely not true
- Tends not to be true
- Unsure
- Tends to be true
- Definitely true of me

I live out my faith in my daily (secular) life and/ or my job.

- Definitely not true
- Tends not to be true
- Unsure
- Tends to be true
- Definitely true of me

As a baptized person I consider myself a minister of Christ.

- Definitely not true
- Tends not to be true
- Unsure
- Tends to be true
- Definitely true of me

I experience God's call on my life.

- Definitely not true
- Tends not to be true
- Unsure
- Tends to be true
- Definitely true of me

Being baptized means a lot to me.

- Definitely not true
- Tends not to be true
- Unsure
- Tends to be true
- Definitely true of me

ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 5 WITH 1 BEING LEAST SATISFIED AND 5 BEING MOST SATISFIED HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE RIGHT NOW? (CIRCLE 1)

1 2 3 4 5

OPTIONAL: Complete one or more of the following sentences and say what you would like to see happen in that regard:

An area of my life where I would like to grow spiritually is:

OR:

An area of my life where I would to see enlightened by my faith is:

OR:

The most challenging relationship or situation in my life right now is:

What I would like to see happen is this:

APPENDIX D

ENTRANCE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

How would you define “spirituality”?

Tell me about someone you have known whom you think or thought of as a person of deep spirituality.

What do you have in common with that person?

Describe any spiritual practice you currently observe on a regular basis. How has that changed over time?

Describe a time when you felt especially close to God.

What is your relationship with God like right now?

What do you see as your particular gifts? How has God used them to God’s purposes?

What do you feel you have to offer to God?

What image(s) or name(s) for God are most meaningful to you? How has this changed over time?

What is your ministry? What might God calling you to do?

What does your baptism mean to you? When did your baptism become meaningful to you?

Describe an area of your life that you would like to see enlightened by your faith. What would you like to see happen in this situation?

If you could ask God one question what would it be?

APPENDIX E

EXIT QUESTIONNAIRE

How often do you attend church or other religious meetings? (Check one)

- Never
- Once a year or less
- A few times a year
- A few times a month
- Once a week
- More than once a week

How often do you spend time in religious activities such as prayer, meditation or Bible study? (Check one)

- Rarely or never
- A few times a month
- Once a week
- Twice or more a week
- Daily
- More than once a day

My perception of my involvement in spiritual or religious activity as a result of my participation in this project is that it has: (Check one)

- Increased
- Decreased
- Stayed about the same

THE FOLLOWING SECTION CONTAINS STATEMENTS ABOUT RELIGIOUS BELIEF OR EXPERIENCE. PLEASE MARK THE EXTENT TO WHICH EACH STATEMENT IS TRUE OR NOT TRUE FOR YOU.

In my life, I experience the presence of the Divine.

- Definitely not true
- Tends not to be true
- Unsure
- Tends to be true
- Definitely true of me

My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life.

- Definitely not true
- Tends not to be true
- Unsure
- Tends to be true
- Definitely true of me

I live out my faith in my daily (secular) life and/ or my job.

- Definitely not true
- Tends not to be true
- Unsure
- Tends to be true
- Definitely true of me

As a baptized person I consider myself a minister of Christ.

- Definitely not true
- Tends not to be true
- Unsure
- Tends to be true
- Definitely true of me

I experience God's call on my life.

- Definitely not true
- Tends not to be true
- Unsure
- Tends to be true
- Definitely true of me

Being baptized means a lot to me.

- Definitely not true
- Tends not to be true
- Unsure
- Tends to be true
- Definitely true of me

As a result of participating in this project I have discerned spiritual growth in myself.

- Definitely not true
 - Tends not to be true
 - Unsure
 - Tends to be true
 - Definitely true of me
- OPTIONAL: Comment how?

As a result of participating in this project I have noted changes in my life.

- Definitely not true
 - Tends not to be true
 - Unsure
 - Tends to be true
 - Definitely true of me
- OPTIONAL: Comment where?

ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 5 WITH 1 BEING LEAST SATISFIED AND 5 BEING MOST SATISFIED HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE RIGHT NOW? (CIRCLE 1)

1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX F

EXIT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

[These questions were asked at the conclusion of the Advent Session and again at the end of the Lent Session.]

PERSONAL SPIRITUALITY

How has your understanding of spirituality evolved as a result of your participation in this project? How would you define “spirituality” now?

Describe any changes in your regular spiritual practice as a result of your participation in this project.

What is your relationship with God like right now?

Describe any changes in how you envision or speak to God as a result of your participation in this project.

AWARENESS OF GIFTEDNESS AND MINISTRY

How has your understanding of yourself as a gifted person evolved?

What do you feel you have to offer to God?

What is your current understanding of how God may be using your particular gifts to God’s purposes?

What is your ministry? What might God calling you to do?

How has your understanding of yourself as a baptized person evolved? What does your baptism mean to you now?

PRACTICAL EFFECTS

During your entrance interview, you were asked to describe an area of your life that you would like to see enlightened by your faith. What is that situation like now? If there has been movement, to what extent can you attribute it to your exercises in spirituality?

If you could ask God one question what would it be?

PROCESS

What was your favorite component of this project? Your least favorite?

- Private interviews with facilitator
- Weekday exercises
- Weekly reflection on exercises (Saturdays)
- Weekly reflection on Sunday lessons and/or sermon (Sundays)
- Chapter meetings

Which daily lesson or weekly theme meant most to you?

What suggestions do you have for improving this curriculum?

Would you recommend this curriculum to someone else?

(At the end of the Advent Session): Are you willing to participate in the Lenten series, following a similar model?

(At the end of the Lent Session): Are you interested in continuing to meet as a group? If so, what might that look like?

APPENDIX G

QUESTIONS ADDED TO THE LENT EXIT QUESTIONNAIRE

[The Lent Exit Questionnaire consisted of the Questions in the Advent Exit Questionnaire with the following added]:

If you are able, write a page or so about what this experience has meant to you. Below are some ideas to get you started. You don't have to take any of these suggestions, but thinking about them might lube the pump!

- Tell about your favorite part of the course, or the single lesson that made you think the most.
- Describe your current prayer practice, highlighting anything that may have evolved over the time you were involved in this project. (Example: I used to pray for all the people I love. I still do that, but now I ask God to just be with me for a little bit.)
- Describe yourself in the third person at the beginning of the FSL experience as regards your relationship to God. (Example: "She was always sure that there's a God, but was never sure God heard her prayers.") Then describe yourself now as to your relationship with God.
- Write a letter to God describing your experience. Imagine God's response to you.
- Draw a graph of your spiritual life, labelling the ups (when you felt closest to God) and downs (when you felt farthest from God). Where are you now? Include a brief narrative describing how you got here.
- Make a list of some ten things you are aware of now, that you were not aware of, or less aware of, when you began this project. These don't have to be profound things – they can

be like, “I became more aware that baptism isn’t just something that happened to me once; it’s part of who I am,” or “Talking about my prayer life is really hard.”

- Write about your favorite hymn, or favorite Bible passage, and describe what, if any, light this course shed on your understanding of it.
- Take any one of the quotations in the exercise booklet and say what it means to you.
- Describe how your understanding of your own spirituality has evolved.
- Where do you want to go from here? How has your experience with this project contributed to that?
- Imagine a close friend sees your workbook hanging around and asks you what it was all about. What would you say?
- Write a letter to the saint whose teaching meant the most to you, thanking him or her, and saying where and how their teaching was meaningful. Feel free to include any questions, or ask for advice.

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