Media Art in Worship:
The Potential for a New Liturgical Art,
Its Pastoral and Theological Challenges

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Greetings to you all, my colleagues in liturgy, my sisters and brothers in Christ! The black-and-white photography we encountered as part of our liturgy in the Chapel of the Resurrection yesterday and today represent *art*, meditation art that can stir our imaginations and refresh our souls. Professor Aimee Tomasek of Valparaiso University asked her students to create these for us based on their reading of yesterday's gospel and hymn of the day. Students' work is always refreshing. So, too, are all the water metaphors in which we have been steeped in our liturgies here during this institute.

Let me now offer you some additional visual refreshment related to the word that has been proclaimed and sung in our midst. A Union Theological Seminary colleague of mine in New York, Reverend Dr. Troy Messenger, produced this video meditation on the living water into which we were plunged at baptism and again this Easter. Let us take a moment now to put into dialogue all of our scriptural imagery and stories with this footage entitled, "Thresholds." Let us discover what may rise up and flow within us.

VIDEO EXAMPLE: Edited montage of water flowing in streams, rapids, and rivers, down water falls, and rising up from water fountains.

How might this footage serve as a call to worship or set the mood for a baptismal festival? I offer this footage to stimulate your imaginations and to challenge your assumptions about media in worship. Much that we hear about media in worship centers around PowerPoint thematic and scriptural graphics, pre-produced song lyrics ready for projection, and purchased photographs and videos for backgrounds and stories. I wish to open you up to another facet of media in worship—media that is created by the members of the worshiping community themselves. Our assemblies are filled with spiritually and creatively imaginative people. What a gift they are, yet so often we do not invite them to share those gifts.

I am especially pleased to be among you, because I have had the gift of reflecting on worship in the Evangelica Lutheran Church in America in the past, thanks to the late Paul Nelson of blessed memory and Scott Weidler

of the ELCA Division for Worship. They asked me to create a video series to accompany *The Use of the Means of Grace*. Perhaps some of you know that series. It's entitled *These Things Matter: Word, Baptism and Communion*. A second video series I helped develop was a Lenten series of reflections on worship entitled *God is Here!* Because of these projects, I have had wonderful opportunities to worship with ELCA assemblies, where pastors and members alike were convinced that worship did indeed matter. In my interviews with worshipers in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Freemont, Nebraska, I heard poignant testimony to God's grace abundantly flowing in the lives of Lutheran worshipers. I come to you today to speak of a new way in which worshipers may experience that God is truly here, now, present in their liturgy and in the rest of their lives. It is through a new liturgical art, media art.

Most of you know that many Christian churches have incorporated media in their worship. Perhaps some of you are leading communities where this has already happened. In most cases, churches use media to improve communications in one or all of the following three ways: to convey information, to encourage participation, or to enhance and enrich oral communications. Typically, they use PowerPoint or some other presentation software to help them project lyrics, prayers, scripture, images, or video segments. Often, the ways media in worship function are little different from the ways media is used in schools, corporations, conferences, and other public settings. Media is used for *communication* and for *education.*

Today, though, I want to stretch your imaginations, to invite you to see media in worship in a new light—as *art.* As sociologist Robert Wuthnow reports, the arts matter in our lives.

> Music and poetry, painting and sculpture, drama and dance play a powerful role in many Americans' spiritual journeys. Music and art are closely wedded with spiritual experience. They draw people closer to God, often by expressing what cannot be put into words. They spark the religious imagination and enrich personal experience of the sacred.[1]

He points out that individual's involvement with the arts "becomes a path to personal growth. For many churches, it has also been a dynamic source of new vitality."[2] Yes, the arts matter in our daily lives, including in our churches.

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[1] Robert Wuthnow, *All in Sync: How Music and Art are Revitalizing American Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), xiv.

[2] Ibid., viv-xv.

Since the late 1960s, artists have been using all kinds of media—slides, film, graphics, video, computer art and animation—in various combinations that are collectively known as media art. Art historian Michael Rush gives us a term for this marriage of arts and technology. He calls it "New Media." In that way he distinguishes it from other forms of visual and plastic arts—music, dance, and other performing arts. These we might call "Old Media." However, more often than not, New Media actually builds upon, reflects, incorporates, or is integrated with the Old Media.

I'm here today to share with you a vision: this New Media—now in many of our churches—has the potential to be a new form of *liturgical art.* I call it liturgical media art. This liturgical art is different. It's not merely the incorporation of media technology, sights, and sounds in worship. This liturgical art is media *of* worship. It is not just media *in* worship, but rather it is media integral to the liturgical *actions* and *interactions* of the faith community. When it is also intentionally created in artful ways that pay attention not only to its functions in worship but also to its aesthetic qualities, it is *media art* of worship. And, from my research and reflections on this new liturgical art, I am convinced that how we create this new art matters. Just as liturgy is understood to be the work of the people, so too liturgical media art ideally is the work of the people. The more local is the creation of this new art, the greater are the spiritual fruits for that worship community.

I know this is a pretty big vision to ask you to digest in a short time. So let me summarize what I'm talking about when I use the term liturgical media art. Ideally, 1) liturgical media art is **created by the worshipers,** because liturgy is their work; 2) it is integrated in ways **appropriate to their liturgical actions and interactions**; otherwise it may be media art, but it is not liturgical; 3) this new art is born of a **combination of New and Old Media**; 4) it needs to be **seen in relationship to all the other liturgical arts** in worship, old and new, and certainly in relationship to the **entire worship context; 5) and, finally, liturgical media art is just one option**—just an option! Let me be very clear from the start. No worship requires the incorporation of New Media. Only local pastors and assemblies can determine whether is it needed and where and how it might be appropriate in their worship life. But it is an option, and it is one that has been used for more than a century! New Media in worship actually started with the use of silent movies by an evangelist in 1898. Pastors from 1910 to the mid-1920s experimented not only with silent movies, but also with projected images and text that they made integral to their worship.

Over the last half century, the availability and decreasing costs of overhead projectors, slide projectors, video projectors, and computers has made media in worship a viable option. And increasing numbers of churches have experimented with that option and have used media in a variety of ways. I'd love to share with you the fascinating history of this phenomenon, but we haven't time. You'll just have to read about that in other sources, including my own views![3] Suffice it to say, although we may think New Media in worship is a new idea that has suddenly come onto the church scene, we need to think again. It's actually a practice more than a century old!

During the next forty-five minutes, though, I want to concentrate on today's use of media. I am going to share stories and show you examples of liturgical media art in our churches. Then I will reflect with you on the pastoral and theological challenges this new liturgical art presents.

The Story of Good Shepherd

My first example of liturgical media art comes from the Catholic Community of the Good Shepherd, a suburban church in northwest Cincinnati that, since 1977, has grown from 150 families to more than 6,000 families. When its founding families paid for the construction of their very contemporary worship space, they did not have money to buy much liturgical art. But it did occur to them that they could have their own version of a stained glass window for the twentieth century. Above their altar, they built into the wall a nine-foot by eighteen-foot glass multimedia screen onto which projections would appear from a booth behind the glass. One of parishioners who was part of that decision recalls: "The thought here was that we could have all kinds of inspirational images through the media." Since 1977, volunteers have produced—every Sunday, for every Mass—slide meditations for a post-communion mediation that is coordinated with live music. The leaders of this ministry early on invited members of the community to contribute their own slides.

Throughout the past three decades, parish volunteers have created media meditations for reconciliation services, Stations of the Cross, Holy Week services, the many readings of the Easter Vigil, first communions, confirmations, and weddings. Twelve teams of volunteers take turns

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[3]See Terry Lindvall, *The Silents of God: Selected Issues and Documents in Silent American Film and Religion: 1908–1925* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001); and Eileen D. Crowley, *A Moving Word: Media Art in Worship* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006).

producing the media meditations for Sunday. Their creations are informed by the liturgical season, the day's scripture, and the post-communion mediation song itself. Every Sunday, after communion, lights dim in their church, the presider comes down from his chair to sit with the people, and together they all experience the media, not as media for communication or education, but as media for meditation. This is not media used "in search of attendance," as Bishop Rimbo earlier described some worship practices in his keynote address, but rather it is media inviting transcendence.

The first short clip from an Easter Vigil will give you a quick look at their overall space and where the screen is located above the altar. Then you will see part of one of the post-communion media meditations produced for a Sunday shortly after the events of September 11, 2001.

VIDEO EXAMPLE: Catholic Community of the Good Shepherd's live music with still images dissolving from one to the other.

The Story of Trinity Lutheran Church

My next story comes from Willard, Ohio, a small town of about six thousand people. There Pastor Kent Wilson leads the flock at Trinity Lutheran Church. Since 1998, Pastor Wilson and members of his church have worked together to incorporate media within their traditional Lutheran liturgy. They have developed a multimedia ministry that involves the volunteer efforts of a technology coordinator and a weekly worship planning team. Their worship team has most recently included a first grade teacher, two high school teachers, two teenagers, a college student skilled in graphic and video arts, a professional baseball scout and coach, a respiratory therapist, a factory worker, a school bus driver, and, for a while, a prison inmate who contributed via mail. Church council members take turns sitting in on the worship planning and in pitching in, as well.

Pastor Wilson was first inspired to consider using media because of a multimedia conference given by the Methodist Ginghamsburg megachurch in Ohio. However, Pastor Wilson has adapted the concept of media in ministry in a way appropriate for his assembly of approximately 240 worshipers. For the first nine months they experimented with media in worship using borrowed equipment. They intentionally started small. They carefully and slowly experimented in their worship, respecting the possibilities and limits of their worship space. They communicated and

engaged members in dialogue about their experiences. The making of media for worship became a community matter.

Unlike the Ginghamsburg Church, where a professional media staff creates the graphics and video for worship, lay members of Trinity Lutheran Church reflect together on the Sunday lectionary passages, discern an overall theme, and develop media based on that scripture theme. They do use media in the basic ways seen in many churches: for the projection of pre-service announcements, texts for the liturgy, and song lyrics. Projection of worship responses and lyrics has had a profound effect, the pastor reports, in increased participation and greater congregational volume in prayer and song. Church members—as young as age eight—use two cameras to record and project images that enhance the assembly's ability to see what is happening up front. This video magnification is especially helpful during baptisms, children's messages, choir anthems, confirmation, and in focusing attention on inspirational symbolic and artistic elements of the worship environment. Members videotape the entire service. Afterward, others bring a VHS copy of the taped service to members who are shut-in and cannot otherwise be with the assembly.

What is most significant about Trinity Lutheran's use of media is how it is created. The *people* create it. They rarely use movie clips, a common practice in many churches. They prefer to create their own video clips that share a member's faith story, highlight a ministry, lift up the service of a particular member, provide an "on the street" interview as a segue into a sermon, dramatize a biblical story or, as Pastor Wilson notes, just plain have fun.

The examples I am about to show you illustrate this very important feature of the media ministry at Trinity Lutheran, their commitment to *local* creation of liturgical media art. The first short clip is a silent computer animation used as the call to worship one Easter Sunday. Its creator was a sixteen-year-old boy who had previously been using his computer skills to create a website. Using simple South Park-style cartoon animations, the teen had developed stories that featured characters who got annihilated every time. Adults seeing this consistent theme were concerned. The pastor, though, saw a teen with talent who could use that talent for a life-filled purpose. He asked him to create an animation for worship.

VIDEO EXAMPLE: Trinity Lutheran's Easter Animation of two stick figures that walk over to a cave, discover the stone rolled away, are puzzled, then exclaim in cartoon-style dialogue bubble "He is Risen!"

This next animation was also created by a youth for Christmas Eve. It's called "Lasting Word" based on Hebrews 11:1, "in many and various ways God spoke to the people of old, but now in these last days he has spoken by his Son." The pastor reports that the young man "who created this video spent most of his Christmas break putting it together, whereas the previous year … his mother could barely get him to church for Christmas at all"!

VIDEO EXAMPLE: Trinity Lutheran's "Lasting Word" animation, with "Silent Night" instrumental underscoring, that indicates by simple animated symbols evolution over the ages; the images lead ultimately to reveal a ceramic nativity scene—all the while the words "Lasting Word" remains in some portion of the scene and closes with this title in full frame.

The Story of Church of the Apostles

My third story comes from a mission church in the Northwest. Pastor Karen Ward in Seattle, Washington, has devoted herself to reaching out to young people in their twenties and thirties. With the support of the local ELCA and Episcopal bishops, she has begun a Lutheran-Episcopal church plant in Seattle's inner city. Her mission is to the unchurched, as well as to six disaffected preacher's kids working in the area and five seminarians representing different denominations. Through creative graphics and imaginative communications efforts, the church draws in young people, some of whom describe themselves as "rappers and taggers."

The Church of the Apostles has no official church building, but they do have an "internet tea lounge" that they call "the living room" in which they gather for weekly Eucharist, discussion, and prayer. For large worship events, such as Christmas, Easter Vigil, or the Day of the Dead, they rent empty warehouses, art studios, and rave music clubs. She and her young team of worship planners develop ritual that is respectful of the Christian tradition's ritual structure and liturgical actions. It is very ecumenical, combining and embracing worship traditions from "the great church"—what Pastor Ward calls the "great streams of Christianity," Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, and Pentecostal. They use liturgical art and practices from these traditions in ways appropriate and relevant to the culture of the young people whom they are trying to reach, many of whom know nothing about Christ or Christianity.

In developing liturgical art for their alternative-style worship, Church of the Apostles leaders invite the active participation of area artists—painters, sculptors, poets, installation artists, as well as computer,

media, and video artists. Although on occasion the church may use purchased video for backgrounds from one of the many media-for-worship vendors now selling their wares, this church always adapts media to their local needs. More typically, they call on the talents of their own members, their friends, and local artists.

Services during this past Lent and Easter Vigil incorporated a great variety of arts in the proclamation of the gospel. Their most recent Easter Vigil, held in an otherwise empty dance club, employed the talents of local video artists, called VJ's, who mixed video samples and live video footage of the participants and musicians and splashed their video art throughout the space. This video vibrates in an environment in which many young people feel at home. The results of the VJ's live video mixing were projected on many of the walls of the space and created a lively, joyful environment for their celebration of new life. For some of the VJ's, this was their first experience of a religious ritual event. This is down-in-the-streets evangelism we're talking about, seeking out the lost and forgotten of today's youth. Just as the Samaritan woman at the well in John's gospel story did, the Church of the Apostles calls out to others in their town to "Come and See!"

One of the members of the Church of the Apostles worship team is a young man currently engaged in biblical studies who is very interested in all the arts. His name is Ryan Marsh. For many of their services, Ryan creates images that are projected on walls, makeshift screens, and even onto a flowing waterfall. His images function in many ways. They visually announce the liturgical season. They provide the ritual responses for these young people, most of whom do not know the Lutheran or Episcopal prayers. They provide lyrics for singing. They indicate to those present what part of the service they are now entering, using terms appropriate to their young worshipers. The sermon, for example, may be called "Reverb." Other graphics may direct participation in various activities and ritual actions. These projected images are not only functional, but they are designed with an aesthetic skill and in a style that is likely to attract, invite, and engage the young people present to enter into the actions of worship. It is art with which they resonate. In multiple ways, Ryan's images help people to participate internally and externally in this church's alternative worship. I've edited some of his photo-montage images so you can see the creativity and sensitivity to the liturgical year that goes into their design.

VIDEO EXAMPLE: "Coda" by Ryan Marsh demonstrating a wide variety of aesthetic photo montage and design styles.

Pastoral Challenges

Having seen these examples, now let us consider the pastoral challenges. Here's the situation. Over the past eight years, I have communicated with Protestant and Catholic church leaders who have contributed to this liturgical trend. I have reports from churches not only in the United States and Canada, but also in Australia, England, Indonesia, Korea, New Zealand, Scotland, Singapore, and in other countries where worshipers live their daily lives in the matrix of today's media culture. This is an international phenomenon.

At a rate of more than two thousand churches a year, North American churches are bringing media into their worship. And the adoption rate is increasing as I speak. Just last week, I read of a new survey of more than six hundred U.S. Protestant senior pastors who were asked about their use of seventeen different worship practices. Among of the survey findings were two startling statistics: the use of PowerPoint or similar graphic presentations was up 620% over five years ago, and the use of video clips was up 625% over that same period.[4]

Much as I see potential for media in worship, I do see some problems associated with our use and understanding of this liturgical innovation. This new chapter in the ongoing dialogue of liturgy, art, and culture has not received sufficient theological, liturgical, or denominational attention. The research and critical evaluation of this phenomenon I have been observing, in conversation with people around the world, is really only just the beginning. There is much more scholarship and theological and pastoral reflection needed.

Denominational churches, particularly those with official liturgies like Lutherans, have not adequately reflected upon this phenomenon liturgically or theologically. Neither have their seminaries, so even young or new pastors can come into churches unprepared to deal with media in worship. Consequently, most local pastors have no guidance on how to deal with this matter other than to turn to conferences offered by megachurches or workshops offered by people who sell the media software and hardware. Pastors have been left to fend for themselves.

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[4]"Churches Continue Move toward Contemporary Worship Styles," *Facts & Trends*, March/April 2004, 6–7. For an on-line version, see http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/article_main_page/0%2C1703%2CA%253D159540%2526M%253D200349%2C00.html (accessed 22 August 2006).

Other than in some Lutheran and Catholic churches, local and denominational churches have not recognized the possibility for media to be a liturgical art. As a consequence of this lack of vision, we have not thought through the formation of pastors and church members who become engaged in this new liturgical ministry.

Regarding this liturgical innovation itself, our churches typically have operated from an instrumental view of media as a tool, not from a theological understanding of its creation and reception as a possible means of grace.

And, too often, we are letting non-liturgical factors drive the use of media. Given our lack of liturgical orientation and theological grounding to guide local implementation, it is inevitable that in some local churches the needs of media may end up driving the worship, instead of the needs of liturgy driving the use of media in it. It takes a certain discipline to be able to say with compassion and conviction, "Wait ... Let's talk about worship first, before we get into any conversation about media technology for it."

In the last decade in particular, media has increasingly entered average-sized and even smaller-sized Protestant and Catholic churches. The introduction of media into the liturgies of churches with officially prescribed orders of worship presents a real liturgical and pastoral challenge. Many pastors, such as Kent Wilson, have gone to media-in-worship conferences sponsored by megachurches. They have brought home enthusiasm and a vision for the necessity of their introducing media in their church. Unlike Pastor Wilson at Trinity Lutheran, though, some pastoral leaders fail to assess the compatibility of a church growth movement, megachurch model with their church's own liturgy or traditions. After all, most seeker-oriented megachurches are concentrating on attracting the unchurched. They use marketing models to guide their services. Many of them do not even claim to be doing worship, as we understand it. Given all of this, I am very concerned about uncritical acceptance of media in our liturgies.

I am concerned, too, about the pressure pastors face from their own congregants and from media industry hype. Enthusiastic, aggressive marketing surrounding the sale of audiovisual equipment and of worship media products and software can make some congregational leaders feel as though they must, as one pastor told me, "jump on the bandwagon" or else their church will be unable to attract new members. Consequently, media in worship has become a growing industry. It is considered the most significant market for installed A/V systems. One marketing research company is now offering a survey of information about the use of audiovisual equipment in the houses of worship market. They are charging

vendors $12,500 to receive the survey report! Those vendors are targeting you and your church.

Because of this full-court press in marketing, too often leaders of Protestant and Catholic churches have seen this worship innovation as simply being an issue of technology, a tool for evangelization and improved communication. As a matter of fact, I recently found on a media-for-worship vendor's website an article entitled "How to Use Multimedia in Your Church Worship Service." It begins: "It's not as hard are you might think! With a minimum investment, a strategy for implementation, and a willingness to get creative, you can be on your way to successfully using multimedia in no time.... The place to start with is the right equipment."

By now you must know that I believe this is the wrong place to start. *Liturgy* always is the starting point. And, since liturgy is the work of the people, *people* are always the starting point, not technology. The principal pastoral challenge facing us is one of *formation and discernment* so that the starting point is never technology, but is always the liturgy; that is, the work of the people.

My work, in addition to studying this worship phenomenon, has involved the development of evaluative frameworks that local leaders, lay and ordained, can use to help them keep their priorities straight and their assessment local. Obviously, though, I also see some very positive developments and tantalizing possibilities. Some pastors and church members are engaging media in creative and liturgically appropriate ways, as you have already seen and heard through my stories today. We need to learn from these pioneers. What excites me most about this new liturgical art form, though, is its implications for liturgical ministry and for the possibility for people to become more attuned to grace in their everyday lives, as well as in worship. In short, I'm excited because of the opportunities for a new liturgical ministry and a new way to help people connect their liturgy with the rest of their lives.

First, let me address ministry. In the emergence of this new art form I have witnessed the beginnings of a model for ministry that has the potential to be inclusive of the whole body of Christ. It involves a process that is local, inclusive, and communal. This kind of inclusivity is possible because everyone in our media culture has experienced watching and listening to popular media. More and more households have digital still and video cameras. People who are confined to their homes know more about broadcast radio and TV than I ever will. People who are immigrants, people who have lost their jobs, people who are isolated or marginalized in any way can contribute in various ways—large and small, long-term and on

occasion. They can offer suggestions at the very least. Remember that media ministry team at Trinity Lutheran? It actually includes a prisoner who makes suggestions by mail. Now that's an example we all need to take to heart!

I cannot express strongly enough a key feature of this new ministry. The ministry of liturgical media art involves a *process*, not a product or a program. It is liturgical ministry that acknowledges the varying gifts and talents of church members and that welcomes them to contribute their arts, their ideas, their imagination, and their time. You have already seen some of the first fruits of this new approach to liturgical ministry in the Lutheran stories and examples I have shared with you. I call this emerging model of ministry communal co-creation.

What would communal co-creation look like in a local church? The creation of liturgical media art would ideally begin with a core group of people who are highly interested in reflecting upon, creating, and recruiting other people to create media for worship. I envision, as actually *does* happen in many churches, that core group could be looking at their upcoming worship six weeks or more ahead. I have seen this approach work in several churches. The mission of the core group would include outreach, especially to those not usually invited into liturgical ministry. For example, this process can provide a wonderful reason and opportunity to welcome artists back into our churches, such as is now happening at the Church of the Apostles in Seattle.

For Lutheran, Episcopal, Roman Catholic and other churches whose weekly scripture is already set out in a lectionary, an invitation could go out in the Sunday bulletin or even in the local weekly newspaper. It might explain: "This Advent we will be reading these passages from Isaiah and Luke. We invite you to read them and come to an open discussion where we will reflect on movies, films, or music that you think speak to these passages or that suggest the very mood and meaning of Advent." And there is no reason why people who could not be physically present could not participate in such a group discussion by speaker phone. Or the core team might sponsor a retreat using media as the catalyst for spiritual reflection in preparation for upcoming liturgical seasons.

Film and TV buffs, music fans and musicians, amateur and professional photographers and other media folk, and imaginative people of all sorts could end up participating in some way in preparation for their worship. And whenever people are engaged in reflecting on scripture and worship and are invited to contribute, over and over again I find they are much more engaged in worship.

Pastor Wilson of Trinity Lutheran best sums up the benefit of local communal co-creation of liturgical media art. Last week in an e-mail he wrote this:

> For me the technology is interesting, but it is the transformation in people's lives that creates the true excitement. Technology sometimes fails, gets outdated, involves endless upgrades and the like. But when a person is touched by someone else's story, is humored into discovering an unexpected gospel insight, sees a connection between faith and everyday life, discovers a new application for their own God-given creativity, is healed in some way by the opportunity to share their story, or is in any other way positively affected by working with or observing this medium [in worship] … well, that's what makes it all worthwhile.

Theological Challenges

Let's turn from pastoral to theological challenges. What is the theological foundation for this new liturgical art and ministry?

As good Lutherans, in formulating your answer you most likely might began as I do, from a theology of grace. In my video interviews with Lutherans around the country I cannot tell you how often I did hear testimony to God's unfailing grace! In thinking about grace in this context, then, let me turn to your own Lutheran theologian Joseph Sittler, who provides much wisdom. In the introduction to a collection of Professor Sittler's writings, *Evocations of Grace*, Peter Bakken explains Sittler's vision of the whole creation as "the theater of God's grace."[5] It is a vision that allows no polarization between God-created nature and human-created culture, such as today's media technology and arts. Bakken continues: Sittler understood "nature" as encompassing

> not only the biological and physical world, but also the "artificial" world of art, architecture, technology, and social structures. Culture as well as "nature" is an integral part of creation, and therefore the products of human creativity are also capable of manifesting God's grace.[6]

In order to do any theologizing about media in worship or media in the world, we need to have this kind of all encompassing outlook, this foundational belief in God's unceasing gift of grace in our world. Sittler

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[5]Joseph Sittler, *Evocations of Grace: Writings on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics*, ed. Steven Bouma-Prediger and Peter Bakken (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 8.

[6]Ibid., 10.

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called us to think of grace "in fresh ways." Our "common life is the 'happening-place' of it," he explained. The professor reminded us that

> the reality of grace is the fundamental reality of God the Creator in his creation, God the Redeemer in his redemption, and God the Sanctifier and Illuminator in all occasions of the common life where sanctifying grace is beheld, bestowed, and lived by.[7]

"Occasions of grace" are what Professor Sittler describes as "bright and absolutely *particular*" moments that shock "the mind into astonished awareness, and to that startled thankfulness for things that are."[8] According to Sittler, they are moments that lead one to understand e.e. cummings' poem that begins:

> i thank You God most for this amazing
> day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
> and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
>
> which is natural which is infinite which is yes.[9]

And remember, for Sittler, the "natural" included both that created by God and that created by God-initiated human creativity, the events and products of human culture.

To illustrate the possibility for transformative, grace-filled moments related to media in worship, let me now share with you a music video created by a member of Union-Congregational UCC Church in the rural small town of Waupun, Wisconsin. Since the late 1990s, the pastor and members of this church have developed a Sunday worship service in which media—both popular media and media they create themselves—is integral and functions in many ways in their service. Often, members of the community volunteer or are recruited as freelance producers of homemade music videos. They use popular music of any genre, including rock, pop, blues, reggae, and Christian contemporary. One member created this music video to a Christian country-style song by Collin Raye, "What if Jesus Came Back Like That?"

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[7]Ibid., 156.

[8]Ibid., 158.

[9]Cited in Sittler, *Evocations of Grace*, 158; e.e. cummings, "i thank You God," in *Poems 1923–1954* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1954), 464.

Upon viewing this music video, a woman in her thirties sat stunned. When asked what had happened, she responded that she finally understood her mother. She explained why. For all the years of their growing up, she and her siblings had never understood their Methodist mother's constant volunteer work with people who were hungry or poor. The children actually ridiculed their mother for her works of charity. The encounter with this video, with its moving montage of song lyrics and photographs, opened a space in her daughter's heart that day. She explained: "I finally understand. My mother saw Jesus in them all."[10]

Of course, with media in worship as with anything in life, we can abuse this new gift, this potential for a new liturgical art and ministry. We can see media in worship as only a matter of technology; use media to dominate or to intimidate; create media without care for liturgy, ethics and justice; and be pressured into spending church funds to buy media equipment that is more than the church needs. We can make media an idol in our worship. As Professor Sittler has warned us, "What is not regarded as a grace will be disgraced into use without care.[11] Liturgical media art and media ministry must be seen as gifts whose use must be done with great care and much prayer. In my research, I have found that when media is used and integrated artfully and gracefully in the service of liturgy, worshipers testify to startling moments of grace when their very perception of their daily lives is transformed. They become attuned to grace ever present.

When talking with a liturgy colleague of mine from Jewish Theological Seminary, Professor Debra Reed Blank, she immediately associated that attunement with the Jewish concept of "normal mysticism" as described by Max Kadushin. He defines "normal mysticism" as enabling

> a person to make normal, commonplace, recurrent situations and events occasions for worship … These daily commonplace situations are not only interpreted in the act of worship as manifestations of God's love, but they arouse in the individual … a poignant sense of the nearness of God.[12]

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[10]Incident report in focus group facilitated by author, Union-Congregational UCC Church, Waupun, WI, 10 November 2001.

[11]Sittler, *Evocations of Grace*, 156, note 26.

[12]Max Kadushin, *Worship and Ethics* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 168.

Closing

The possibility is real for media in worship to become liturgical media art that, as Joseph Sittler would say, startles us with that sense of God's nearness. It is already happening in some of your churches. But we are at a very, very early stage in the development of this new liturgical art. I compare it to the introduction of three-chord folk songs into Catholic and Protestant worship in the late 1960s and 1970s. We used a vernacular music of our culture to encourage people to participate in worship. Of course, Lutherans always sang, so perhaps that's not the best analogy for you. But it is my way of suggesting that we do not really know what we are doing. We have hardly begun to appreciate media as an art form, never mind as a liturgical art form.

The model of ministry I have described, communal co-creation, is one that requires solid leadership and continuing formation of liturgical leaders and liturgical media ministers alike. All require biblical, liturgical, theological, ethical, and spiritual formation. They need to develop practices of discernment that are specific to this new liturgical media ministry. They need analytical tools for evaluating whether they are on the right track about using media at all. And, of course, let me state once more—no liturgy *requires* the use of today's media! It is just one option that can be chosen or not. That decision must be a local one.

I am trying to help local churches in this decision-making process. I have developed critical frameworks for local leaders and others in their church to use in their assessment of what they are already doing or of what they might do regarding media in their worship. These frameworks guide people through a process of reflection and analysis that includes four major areas of concern for a local church: 1) their overall worship context; 2) the functions media may play in their worship; 3) the evaluation of the media both from the standpoint of liturgical aesthetics and media aesthetics; and 4) the very important on-going task of attending to issues of ethics and justice throughout the entire process. For example, ethics and justice questions concern the responsible use of human and financial resources and the purchasing of needed licenses or permissions for copyrighted materials. They deal, too, with power issues related to the content of the media and to the process of appropriating or creating it. Whose images get shown? Whose media is preferred? Who gets to choose?

In short, both church leaders and media ministers need to develop liturgical knowledge and analytical skills, as well as training in aesthetics

and ethics. They need to start from the requirements of their particular form of worship and the needs of their particular community. In churches that function hierarchically, communal co-creation might present a challenge. Pastors and participants, though, would need to learn to respect everyone engaged in this collaborative process. They would need to appreciate and act as if liturgy really is the work of all the people, not just that of those on the pastoral staff.

But I would also suggest that all of *us* have a role to play in this liturgical innovation, whether or not we ever use media in our worship. We need to reflect theologically on this new thing that has appeared in our midst. How might our self-communicating God be communicating via today's media in worship and in media that saturates the rest of our lives? How might the Spirit be prompting our creation of this new liturgical art, to use the very media technologies and arts of our culture to give praise and glory to God? How might we understand the very nature of ministry as we reflect on the possibility for an inclusive, collaborative ministry related to this new art form, an approach that I am calling communal co-creation? How might we develop a theology of media that can begin to account for the spiritual experiences people are already having in the process of contributing to the creation of media for worship and in their encounters with that media in their liturgies? Our churches have not really even begun to deal theologically with media, because we have been so fixated on media being technology that we have ignored the grace being experienced by people working with media in our churches, people creating media for mass and small-group audiences, and just regular folks engaged in their own production of home media. We need a theology that can embrace the grandparent using a video camera, the TV producer creating a documentary, and the family watching their home movies, communicating by e-mail, and enjoying TV shows and feature films.

Carved here in the wall at Valparaiso University's Center for the Arts is an apt passage for our reflection on this new liturgical art and ministry. It's Isaiah 43:19, "Behold I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" We theologians have our work cut out for us!

To close, I will share with you the work of a professional media producer in Halifax, Nova Scotia. His name is Douglas Porter. He has produced a media meditation based on Meister Eckhart's writings entitled *Run into Peace*. We need people like Doug to teach us and inspire us as we live into the possibilities for this new liturgical art and ministry. I wish to close with this example, because it not only represents my wish for you, but it also suggests my hope for all of us: that we may welcome arts and artists

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of every kind into our worship; that we may nourish and support of all those local artists—amateur and professional alike; and that we may invite them to respond to the Spirit's call for them to be grace-filled ministers in Christ.

VIDEO EXAMPLE: Run into Peace.

May God's grace and peace be with you all now, during this conference, and every day of your lives. And may your art- and heart-filled worship be, as Bishop Rimbo suggested, "the celebration of life we hardly expect!"