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PERICHORETIC WORSHIP:
CULTIVATING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE TRIUNE GOD, WITH ONE
ANOTHER, AND WITH THE WORLD

by

GREG G. BUSBOOM

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

Perichoretic Worship: Cultivating Relationships with the Triune God, with One Another, and with the World

by

Greg G. Busboom

A Participatory Action Research (PAR) study focusing on perichoretic worship as a way of cultivating holy relationship with the Triune God, with others, and with the world. Theoretical lenses include ritual studies, Faith Development Theory, and personhood in social relationships. Theological lenses include perichoresis, Lutheran worship, and faith practices. Using both quantitative and qualitative research, the study explores the practice of Christian worship in a large Lutheran congregation and seeks to grow active participation in the missional work of the Triune God through worship grounded in Word and Sacrament. Presents the Triune God as the active subject of Christian worship.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine”
(Isaiah 43:1b).*

With gratitude to our Triune God who, through all the mountains and valleys of life, calls us, holds us, loves us, and gifts us with a relationship that transcends both life and death.

With gratitude to my family—my wife, Maressa, for sharing with me her unflinching patience and love; our daughter, Emma, for so strongly believing in me and encouraging me not to quit; our son, Luke, for inspiring me to work hard and to always give it my all; and, our son, Liam, for making me laugh and helping me realize that a game of Speed is always more important than working on my thesis.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
IRB	Institutional Review Board
PAR	Participatory Action Research
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THESIS

Introduction of Research Topic

Recently an active disciple in the congregation I serve shared with me that he often encourages his co-workers to “go to church.” For this particular disciple, “going to church” means primarily participating in weekly worship in the community of faith. He went on to share that the response he normally gets is a skeptical, “Why?” Though this particular disciple is a devoted and committed follower of Jesus who greatly values his involvement in the church, he struggled to offer an answer. He knows why it is important to him, but he struggled to articulate his answer in a meaningful way.

Christian worship in the community of faith is central both to God’s mission in the world and our lives as Jesus’ disciples in it, but why? Lutheran theology teaches that the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is the primary actor in worship, encountering us through the means of grace, namely, Word and Sacrament. The Triune God who encounters us through Word and Sacrament is inherently relational, drawing us ever deeper into relationship with God, with our sisters and brothers within the community of faith, and with the world beyond the walls of the faith community and our neighbors in it.

Relationships that are reflective of the Triune God are Spirit-led in that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to form and draw us into such relationships. Relationships that

are reflective of the Triune God are multi-dimensional in that they exist between us and God, between us and each other, and between us and the world. Relationships that are reflective of the Triune God are subject-to-subject in that they see and treat the other as a subject to be fully known and loved rather than as an object to be manipulated or controlled. Relationships that are reflective of the Triune God are perichoretic in that they are mutually interdependent one upon another, existing in a never-ending, always unfolding choreography of love, a love that both embraces us and transforms us through the cross.

Though God's missional activity in and through Word and Sacrament is certainly not dependent on our practice of Christian worship, but rather on the promise God gives in the Word by the Spirit, all too often the practice of Christian worship in our congregations is not reflective of the Triune God's perichoretic nature. All too often the practice of Christian worship assumes a subject-to-object relationship between God and God's people or, even worse, between the worship leaders and God's people, in which God's people are viewed and treated as passive and thereby untransformed recipients of what is being done for or to them. As a result of this frequent incongruity between what we believe about the God who actively encounters us in Christian worship and our actual practice of Christian worship within the community of faith, this thesis seeks to explore how congregations and, particularly worship leaders within congregations, can better plan and lead worship in such a way as to more effectively cultivate Spirit-led, subject-to-subject, multidimensional, perichoretic relationships that reflect the inherent missional identity of the Triune God. This exploration takes place through the specific research

question—How might Participatory Action Research interventions deepen the practice of worship in order to cultivate perichoretic relationships?

In the words of the hymn *God Is Here!*, lyricist Fred Pratt Green paints a beautiful picture of the transformative work of the Spirit through worship that is truly perichoretic.

God is here! As we your people meet to offer praise and prayer,
 may we find in fuller measure what it is in Christ we share.
 Here, as in the world around us, all our varied skills and arts
 Wait the coming of the Spirit into open minds and hearts.

Here are symbols to remind us of our life-long need of grace;
 Here are table, font, and pulpit; here the cross has central place.
 Here in honesty of preaching, here in silence, as in speech,
 Here, in newness and renewal, God the Spirit comes to each.

Here our children find a welcome in the Shepherd's flock and fold;
 here as bread and wine are taken, Christ sustains us as of old.
 Here the servants of the Servant seek in worship to explore
 What it means in daily living to believe and to adore.

Lord of all, of church and kingdom, in an age of change and doubt,
 Keep us faithful to the gospel; help us work your purpose out.
 Here, in this day's dedication, all we have to give, receive;
 We, who cannot live without you, we adore you! We believe!¹

It is the hope of this thesis that the practice of Christian worship in our congregations might continually be renewed in such a way that all those who gather might be encountered and transformed by the Triune God at work in and through Word and Sacrament, drawing us ever more deeply into relationship with God, with each other, and with the world.

¹ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada., *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Pew ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), #526.

Variables

Independent Variables

The independent variables embedded in this study include three specific Participatory Action Research interventions introduced into the worship life of the congregation over the course of a five-month period. The first intervention was designed to deepen worshippers' experience of their relationship with God. The second intervention was designed to deepen worshippers' experience of their relationship with one another. The third intervention was designed to deepen worshippers' experience of their relationship with the community and world. The goal of these interventions was to create worship practices in the life of the congregation that cultivate perichoretic relationships.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables embedded in this study include the effects that the Participatory Action Research interventions have on the growth in relationship that worship participants experience in their relationships with the Triune God, with one another, and with the world. In other words, do the Participatory Action Research interventions help or hinder growth in such relationships?

Intervening Variables

Intervening variables in this study include differences in responses between men and women, between different age groups, between those who have been long-time worshippers in the congregation and those who are relatively new, and between those who worship at different weekly worship services. Two additional important intervening variables in this study include several pastoral leadership transitions that took place

immediately prior to, during, and after the research and a major capital campaign that kicked off simultaneously with the implementation of the third intervention.

Importance of Research

This particular research question is important to me personally because of my deep love and passion for Christian worship and because of my strong conviction that it is through Christian worship, specifically through Word and Sacrament, that the Triune God encounters us, embracing us into God's own missional and perichoretic relationship. The Triune God is the primary agent and actor in Christian worship, gathering, teaching, claiming, feeding, forgiving, and sending us. Our primary role in worship is as recipient of all that the Triune God so graciously gives. However, we are not passive recipients in worship. We are active recipients, invited not into a subject-to-object relationship, but rather into subject-to-subject relationships with God, with one another, and with the world. I yearn for others to experience the same transformative embrace of our Triune God that I have experienced time and time again through the practice of Christian worship in the community of faith. I yearn for the church to find new ways to cultivate these transformational, perichoretic, subject-to-subject relationships through Christian worship.

In 2014, the congregation I serve participated in an in-depth process of visioning and discernment that led to the awareness that God was calling us to grow our intentionality in cultivating faith relationships. We adopted a new vision statement—"We are called to grow in meaningful relationships with Christ, with each other, and with our community as we are gathered for worship, equipped for discipleship, and sent to care." At the heart of this new vision is growing in multidimensional relationships. The

statement identifies worship as one of the three primary ways in which these multidimensional relationships will grow in the congregation. We chose verbs that indicate that this growth is not something that we do or achieve, but rather it is something that God does in us as God gathers us, as God equips us, and as God sends us. God is the primary agent, not us. This particular research question is important to the congregation I serve because it seeks to help us explore new ways and possibilities for God to grow us in relationship through Christian worship and, thus, to more fully live into God's vision for us.

Even though our Lutheran theology teaches that God is the primary agent and actor in Christian worship seeking to embrace and engage us in perichoretic, subject-to-subject relationships, our Lutheran practice of Christian worship does not always reflect our belief. Over the past years, I have shared in conversations with a number of young adults who have grown up in the Lutheran church, faithfully participating in weekly worship with their families, and who then go off to college and experience worship in other non-Lutheran Christian communities of faith. As I have listened to their stories and have tried to identify what they are experiencing in these non-Lutheran Christian communities of faith that they seemingly did not experience, or at least did not recognize as experiencing, in their weekly Lutheran worship experience, I have realized that it is growth in relationship with God, with others in the community of faith, and with the world around them. They share comments like, "For the first time in my life, I felt like my relationship with God grew through worship." "Worship leads to small group time in which we talk about Scripture and grow in our relationships with one another." "Worship challenges us to make our faith 'real,' leading us into the community around us to serve

those in need.” What always strikes me as I listen to their reflections is that nearly everything they say they experience through their participation in these non-Lutheran Christian communities are things that we Lutherans also say and believe are crucial to the Christian worship experience. However, there seems to be a significant disconnect, at least in the experience of these young adults, between what we say we believe and what they experience through our practice. Oftentimes, this disconnect leads to a journey away from the Lutheran church and into other non-Lutheran Christian communities. The particular research question of this study is important to the larger church because it seeks to realign our practice of Christian worship with our belief in our Triune God whose mission it is to embrace us into perichoretic, multidimensional, subject-to-subject relationships and who, we believe, does so, though not exclusively, through the Word and Sacrament that is shared through Christian worship.

Context of Research

The context of research for this study was a large congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) located in a medium-sized city in the Midwest. The congregation is comprised of over 2,100 members with an average weekly worship attendance of slightly more than 500. The congregation is comprised primarily of middle-class to upper-middle-class Caucasian professionals. However, there is noticeable diversity within the congregation with a growing number of African-American participants. The congregation has a rich 150-year history and values excellence in worship and music, outreach beyond the walls of the congregation into the community and around the world, growing in daily discipleship to Christ, and its ministries to young

children and their families. The congregation includes a vibrant Christian preschool that serves nearly 200 families in the community.

The congregation offers four weekly worship services. A 5:00 p.m. worship service on Saturday evening takes place in the sanctuary with an average weekly attendance of 90. It is a traditional liturgical service that has a casual feel. The primary musical leadership for this service is performed on piano. Two traditional liturgical services are offered on Sunday morning at both 8:00 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. in the sanctuary. The musical leadership of these two services includes the use of organ, choir, and various other instruments. The average worship attendance at these two services is 120 and 150, respectively. A contemporary worship service is offered at 10:30 a.m. on Sundays in the Parish Life Center. The musical leadership of this service includes a Praise Team that uses vocalists, guitars, electric bass, drums, and keyboard. The average weekly attendance at this service is 160. In addition, a bimonthly youth worship experience is offered on the 2nd and 4th Sunday evenings of each month for junior and senior high youth.

Theoretical Lenses

Three theoretical lenses inform the work of this study—Ritual Studies, Faith Development Theory, and Personhood and Social Relationships. Each of these three lenses brings to bear the field of social science on the interplay between the practice of Christian worship and the development of relationships.

Ritual Studies

The first theoretical lens of this study explores the conversation between the field of ritual studies and the practice of Christian worship. Ritual studies explore the power

and influence of human ritual upon individuals, communities, and society. The work of Catherine Bell in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*² and *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*³ is foundational to this exploration. Selections from *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship*⁴ by Paul Bradshaw, together with an assortment of other articles, were also informative in learning about the role ritual plays in Christian worship to develop perichoretic relationships between us and God, us and one another, and us and the world.

Faith Development Theory

The second theoretical lens of this study is the lens of faith development theory. An underlying assumption of the research is that the practice of Christian worship plays a key role in faith development. This lens looks toward how the practice of Christian worship might be strengthened to more effectively help in the Spirit-led process of developing faith. Primary sources for this lens include *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*⁵ and *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith*⁶ both by James Fowler, the developer

² Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

³ Catherine M. Bell and Reza Aslan, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford Univ Pr, 2009).

⁴ Paul Bradshaw, *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015).

⁵ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

⁶ James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith*, Rev. ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000).

of Faith Development Theory. In addition, *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development*⁷ edited by Jeff Astley and Leslie Francis, together with various other articles by assorted writers, offer additional perspectives and critiques helpful to this study.

Personhood in Social Relationships

The third theoretical lens of this study looks at what it means to be a person and how individual personhood is developed and shaped through the social relationships of which each person is a part. Central to this exploration of personhood in social relationship is Alistair McFadyen's book *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships*⁸ in which McFadyen develops a theoretical proposal for what it means to be a human person, but does so through the lens of Christian theology. There are deep connections between this particular lens and the theological lens of perichoresis. These connections are especially helpful in thinking about how the perichoretic God works to grow and develop perichoretic relationships through the practice of Christian worship. In addition, a brief look is given to Social Exchange Theory as developed by George Homans and how all relationships involve an exchange of gifts between two or more parties.⁹

⁷ Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis, *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development: A Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1992).

⁸ Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁹ George Homans, "Social Behavior as Exchange," *American Journal of Sociology* 63, no. 6 (May 1958): 597-606.

Biblical and Theological Lenses

Four biblical stories from the New Testament make up the biblical lenses of this study, each one using different images to communicate the mission of the Triune God to draw all creation into relationship with God, with each other, and with the world. Building on these four biblical stories, the study is further informed by the theological lenses of perichoresis, Lutheran worship, and faith practices. Together, these lenses creatively explore the relationship between the practice of Christian worship and God's perichoretic mission of drawing people into relationship.

John 15:1-17—Vine and Branches

In John 15:1-17, Jesus uses the images of the vine, the vine-grower, and the branches to describe the inherent relationality that exists both within God-self and between God-self and Christ's followers in the world. In this image, Jesus himself points to the perichoretic nature of God and how God's perichoretic nature calls and sends Jesus' disciples into mission in the world.

Luke 24:13-35—Walk to Emmaus

In Luke 24:13-35, two disciples experience a face-to-face encounter with the risen Christ. This stranger in their midst initiates a relationship with them and makes himself known to them through the opening up of Scripture with them and through the breaking of the bread. The story points to the Word and Sacrament, the two central elements of Christian worship, and invites readers to think about how God uses Christian worship to transform lives.

Acts 2:37-47—Community of Believers

In Acts 2:37-47, Luke richly describes the earliest Christian community, a community centered in the practices of worship. Luke's description hints at the four essential components of Christian worship—Gathering, Word, Meal, and Sending. This biblical lens explores how God works through the four parts of Christian worship to grow us in our relationships with God, with one another, and with the world. It also challenges worship leaders to think creatively about how to care for the four essential parts of worship in order to cultivate the growing of such relationships through this communal faith practice.

Acts 8:26-40—Ethiopian Eunuch

The fourth biblical lens explores the interaction between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40. The Spirit is clearly at work through this relationship and, through the relationship, brings the Ethiopian eunuch into relationship with Christ. The story invites worship leaders to consider how space might be integrated into the practice of Christian worship for God to work through the relationships we share with one another and, particularly, with the strangers in our midst.

Perichoresis

The perichoretic understanding of the Triune God focuses on the inherently relational nature of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The perichoretic relationships that are shared within the divine life of the Trinity are relationships that are interdependent, multi-directional, participatory, and subject-to-subject. This study looks specifically at the relationship between God's inherently perichoretic, relational nature and the practice of Christian worship. If the mission of the Triune God is to draw us and

all creation into interdependent, multi-directional, participatory, and subject-to-subject relationship with God's own self, then how can Christian worship be designed and led in such a way to grow interdependent, multi-directional, participatory, and subject-to-subject relationships between us and God, between us and one another, and between us and the world? In other words, how might our practice of Christian worship reflect the perichoretic nature of the Triune God in such a dynamic way that through Christian worship we are joined into the perichoretic dance of the Trinity? The work of theologians Jürgen Moltmann and Catherine LaCugna deeply inform this perichoretic understanding of the God's Triune nature and its connection with the Christian life.

Lutheran Worship

While this study seeks to explore the connection between the perichoretic understanding of the Triune God and our faith practice of Christian worship in general, it does so through the specific theological and liturgical lens of Lutheran worship. Of particular interest is what might be inherently perichoretic about the Lutheran understanding of Christian worship; for example, the Lutheran understanding that God is the active subject in Christian worship, and how such perichoretic practices might be strengthened for the sake of growing perichoretic relationships. In addition, through three Participatory Action Research (PAR) interventions into the worship life of one Lutheran congregation, the study seeks to creatively envision how new perichoretic practices might be introduced within the Lutheran practice of Christian worship in such a way as to help in growing perichoretic relationships between us and God, us and one another, and us and the world. This study draws heavily on the work of Gordon Lathrop, Timothy Wengert,

and Dirk Lange in understanding what is essentially Lutheran about the practice of Lutheran worship.

Faith Practices

As Christian worship is a primary faith practice, understanding both how faith practices are formed by our Christian beliefs and how faith practices are formational in our Christian belief serves as the third theological lens of this study. Of particular interest is the exploration of how faith practices work to grow perichoretic relationships both in the life of the individual Christian and in the life of the faith community. The writings of Christian Scharen, Miroslav Volf, and Dorothy Bass serve as primary sources for understanding the role of faith practices in Christian theology and life.

Research Methodology

The research methodology used in this study is Participatory Action Research (PAR) using a mixed-methods approach. As a mixed-methods approach, the study includes both qualitative and quantitative research.

Rationale for Research Methodology

As David Coughlan and Teresa Brannick explain in *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, Participatory Action Research focuses on research *in* action, rather than research *about* action.¹⁰ It is democratic, collaborative, and participatory. It is research that happens alongside of action. It is research that seeks to solve a problem or change something in an institution. In their words, “Action researchers work on the

¹⁰ David Coughlan and Teresa Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization* (Los Angeles i.e. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), 5.

epistemological assumption that the purpose of academic research and discourse is not just to describe, understand and explain the world but also to change it.”¹¹ Later, Coughlan and Brannick write, “Traditional research begins with what we know and seeks to find what we don’t know. What we don’t know that we don’t know is the particular fruit of action research.”¹²

The research question of this study focused on designing interventions in a congregation’s practice of Christian worship that seek to make worship more perichoretic, that is, more participatory in the action of forming and growing interdependent, subject-to-subject, and multidirectional relationships with the Triune God, with one another, and with the world. The research of this study hoped to discover where worship participants experience God’s activity in worship most fully and how to improve the design and leadership of Christian worship so as to encourage a deepening participation in God’s mission through this central faith practice. As such, Participatory Action Research was particularly suited to this question.

The study uses the mixed-methods research method, that is, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Baseline and end line surveys were used to measure the level of transformation in participants’ experience of God’s missional activity through the practice of Christian worship. Individual interviews at both the beginning and end of the research, together with interviews with a focus group following each of the three interventions into the practice of Christian worship in the congregation, were used to describe and give meaning to participants’ various experiences of God’s missional

¹¹ Ibid, 6.

¹² Ibid, 60.

activity in forming perichoretic relationships. The particular type of mixed-methods research that was used was transformative, as it sought to effect change within the system.

Biblical and Theological Framework

In Luke 10, Jesus intervenes in the lives of his disciples, sending them out into the world to enact the kingdom in both their words and their actions. “Go on your way,” commands Jesus. “See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves” (10:3).¹³ It is an experiment of sorts. The disciples meet with a variety of responses—some positive and some negative. Upon their return, the disciples reflect on their experience. “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” (10:17). The disciples are changed by their encounter in the world and Jesus rejoices in the Holy Spirit, giving thanks to the Father for the Father’s intervention in the world through Jesus’ disciples. The example of Jesus’ intervention in the world with his disciples is loosely reflective of Participatory Action Research. Jesus initiates an intervention with his disciples. The disciples carry out the experiment through their changed behavior. As a result, the disciples experience an adaptive change as they experience the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the world through them. The disciples do not act apart from the Holy Spirit, but they are full participants in what the Holy Spirit is doing in the world through them. Participatory Action Research seeks to effect adaptive change in a community through participatory experimental action.

¹³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)*.

Theologically, there are aspects of Participatory Action Research that are perichoretic in nature. First and foremost, like the perichoretic understanding of the Triune God in which each person of the Trinity is a full participant in this divine dance, Participatory Action Research is, as its name states, participatory in nature. It seeks to involve others in the action of research so as to effect change both within the larger system as well as in the participants themselves. Likewise, instead of seeing its research participants as objects merely to be observed or acted upon, Participatory Action Research views its participants as equal subjects in the research in which the participants themselves are actors within the research. This subject-to-subject approach to human relationship is also reflective of the perichoretic understanding of the Triune God in that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are mutual subjects one with another, each integrally involved in the Triune God's mission in the world. As this study explores the perichoretic nature and potential of Christian worship, it is particularly appropriate to use Participatory Action Research which, by its very nature, is a perichoretic exercise.

Overall Design of Research

The research for this study began with the administration of an online baseline survey to all adults in the congregation, eighteen years of age and older. The baseline survey was designed to measure people's experience of relationship formation through the practice of Christian worship. Using a Likert scale, respondents were asked to indicate how the current practice of Christian worship in the congregation helps to form and grow relationships between them and God, between them and others in the congregation, and between them and the world. In addition, individual interviews with nine members of a panel representing each of the congregation's four weekly worship

services were used to learn how they experience relationship formation through the practice of Christian worship.

Following the administration of the baseline survey and interviews, three interventions into the worship life of the congregation were introduced, each of which sought to increase the congregation's participation as subjects in God's missional activity of forming relationship between us and God, between us and one another, and between us the world. The first intervention took place during the season of Epiphany. Following the reading of the Scripture lesson each weekend, a period of silent reflection was given in which congregation members were invited to journal about what they heard God saying through God's Word to them personally, to the congregation, and to the world. The goal of this first intervention was to engage congregation members in actively responding to God's Word in their lives as full subject-to-subject participants in God's missional activity through the practice of Christian worship.

The second intervention took place during the season of Lent. During the Prayers of Intercession, congregation members were invited to form small groups of three or four persons. They were then invited to introduce themselves to one another and to share their prayer concerns with one another. Following the sharing of prayer concerns with each other, the presiding minister concluded the prayer time with a general intercession. The goal of this second intervention was to provide opportunity during the practice of Christian worship for worship participants to grow in their relationships with one another.

The third intervention took place during the season of Easter. Each weekend throughout the Easter season, a story of how the congregation was reaching out beyond the walls of the congregation into the community was shared immediately preceding the

Prayers of Intercession. A specific petition lifting up that particular community engagement was then shared during the Prayers. Representatives from each particular community outreach ministry were then invited to share a one-hour presentation during the Sunday School hour in which members of the congregation could interact with them personally. The goal of this third intervention was to engage congregation members in God's missional activity of forming relationships between us and the world. Following each of these three interventions, focus group interviews were conducted with the panel, inquiring with them how each intervention either helped or hindered them in their subject-to-subject participation in God's missional activity through the practice of Christian worship.

Following the completion of the three interventions, an online end line survey was conducted, inviting all adult members of the congregation to respond. In addition, individual end line interviews were conducted with each of the nine members of the panel. The goal of the end line survey and interviews was to measure if and how members experienced growth in their relationships with God, with one another, and with the world.

Population

The population of this study was all members, eighteen-years-old and older, of the participating congregation. Members of the panel were chosen to represent each of the four weekly worship services and to include a diversity of gender and age.

Instruments Used

As a Participatory Action Research study using concurrent mixed-methods, both quantitative and qualitative instruments were used. Quantitative instruments included

both a baseline and end line online survey using questionnaires. Qualitative instruments included both one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews using protocols.

Summary of Data and Analysis

A complete presentation of the data and their analysis is presented in chapters five and six of this thesis. Both the quantitative and qualitative data show that an increase in the level of active participation in the practice of Christian worship correlates with deepened growth in perichoretic relationships between the worshiper and God, between the worshipers and one another, and between the worshipers and the world. In addition, six particular worship practices are identified that are uniquely perichoretic in nature and that are helpful in cultivating perichoretic relationships. These include missional leadership that fully engages God's people in becoming participants in God's work, singing together in worship, creatively engaging God's people in God's Word in ways that make a difference in their daily lives, creating intentional space for meaningful, subject-to-subject interaction between worship participants, the celebration of Holy Communion, and drawing attention to the work of the Triune God within the practice of worship.

As described at length in chapter six, this study concludes that perichoretic worship is worship that actively engages the gathered assembly as full participants in the perichoretic work of the Triune God to grow holy relationships between God and God's people, between God's people and one another, and between God's people in the world. Perichoretic worship leaders are leaders who cultivate space with the practice of Christian worship for worshipers to participate fully in what it is that the Triune God is doing and, thereby, to be transformed by it.

Other Matters

Key Terms

Perichoretic

The adjective “perichoretic” stems from the word “perichoresis.” Perichoresis is a word used to describe the Eastern church’s understanding of the Trinity. While the Western church has traditionally focused on the sending nature of the Trinity, emphasizing the Trinity’s one-ness, the Eastern church has traditionally focused on the inherent relationality of the three distinct persons of the Trinity, emphasizing the social dimension of God. As Craig Van Gelder writes, “The social reality of the Godhead, in this approach, becomes the theological foundation for understanding the word of God in the world.”¹⁴ Because God is a perichoretic God, I use the word “perichoretic” to also describe God’s church as an expression of God’s inherent relationality in the world, as well as to describe a vision for Christian worship that is reflective of both God’s relational nature and God’s relational mission in the world.

Worship

The term “worship” is used throughout this study to refer to the corporate practice of Christian worship. More specifically, corporate Christian worship in this study refers to the gathered community of believers, centered around Word and Sacrament, and sent into the world to share in God’s mission. This view of Christian worship understands

¹⁴ Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 88.

God to be the primary active subject in worship. Worship participants respond in worship to the gifts God makes real in their lives through Word and Sacrament.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout this study, I worked hard to conform my research to IRB standards, including preserving the confidentiality of the research participants. I worked to fully disclose to the research participants how the gathered research data would be used and intend to make my results publicly accessible to them in multiple ways. I attained implied and informed consent forms from all those participating in my research. I have used pseudonyms for the congregation throughout my work and writing, seeking to preserve the confidentiality of both the congregation and its members. In addition, I recognize the dual role I hold as both researcher and pastor. I worked to clearly delineate these two roles with those involved in my research, articulating with them the boundaries of each role prior to my interviews with them. I have sought to be as unbiased as possible in recording, analyzing, and drawing conclusions from the data that have been gathered.

Overview of Thesis Chapters

Chapter One—Introduction to Thesis

Chapter One provides an introductory overview of this thesis. The specific research question is introduced—How might Participatory Action Research interventions deepen the practice of worship in order to cultivate perichoretic relationships? A description of the context of the research is provided. Each of the theoretical and biblical and theological lenses informing the research is introduced. An overview of the research

methodology undergirding this study is provided. Finally, the introduction concludes with a brief overview of each of thesis chapter.

Chapter Two—Theoretical Perspectives and Lenses

Chapter Two explores the three theoretical perspectives and lenses that inform this study. The field of Ritual Studies is introduced and applied specifically to the area of Christian worship. Faith Development Theory explores the process through which faith is developed in individuals. The lens of Personhood and Social Relationships provides a helpful way of thinking about the perichoretic relationships that exist within the Trinity, as well as how such perichoretic relationships might flow forth from the inherent relationality of the Trinity into the relationships we share with one another and with the world.

Chapter Three—Biblical and Theological Lenses

Chapter Three explores the biblical and theological lenses undergirding this study. Four New Testament passages—John 15:1-17, Luke 24:13-35, Acts 2:37-47, Acts 8:26-40—provide biblical images for the connection between Christian worship and the formation of perichoretic relationships. The theological lens of perichoresis unpacks the perichoretic understanding of the Trinity and explores how the perichoretic understanding of God informs and transforms the Christian life. The lens of Lutheran worship provides an overview of how Lutherans understand God to be the primary active agent in Christian worship and how this understanding impacts the design and leadership of worship in the community of faith. An exploration of faith practices as a theological lens looks at the relationship between practice and belief, paying particular attention to the ways in which

Christian belief informs Christian practice *and* how Christian practice informs Christian belief.

Chapter Four—Methodology

Chapter Four describes the research methodology used for this study. The chapter describes and explains Participatory Action Research (PAR) and how it was applied to explore the special research question of this study. A detailed description of the research design is also provided.

Chapter Five—Results of Study and Interpretation

Chapter Five reports the results of the research and provides an interpretation of these results. Statistical results and analyses of the baseline and end line surveys are provided. Detailed descriptions are given of the focus codes and axial codes that emerged from both the individual and panel interviews. From the axial codes, theoretical codes are developed to illustrate the relationship between each of the axial codes. Finally, the quantitative and qualitative data are triangulated with each other and conclusions for the study are drawn from the triangulation of the data.

Chapter Six—Conclusions with Theological and Theoretical Reflection

Chapter Six draws conclusions from the research, reflecting both theologically and theoretically on these conclusions. It describes at length how perichoretic worship is worship that fully engages God's people in active participation in the missional story and work of the Triune God. Through such active participation in the practice of Christian worship, the Triune God acts to draw people into deeper relationships with God's self, with one another, and with the world. The more actively engaged people are in the

practice of Christian worship, the more these holy relationships grow and develop. Chapter six ends by revisiting each of the theoretical, biblical, and theological lenses undergirding this study, reflecting on how the results of this study interface with each of these lenses.

Epilogue

The epilogue reflects on what I learned through this study. I reflect on how I have grown personally *and* perichoretically in my relationship with the Triune God, in my relationships with others, and in my relationship with the world. In closing, I give thanks to the Triune God for claiming me through the water and Word of Holy Baptism, sustaining and nourishing me through God's Word and Sacraments experienced through the practice of Christian worship, and sending me in ministry into the world to bear witness to God's mission.

Summary

Chapter one introduces the research topic of perichoretic worship and describes both the importance and the context of the research. It introduces each of the theoretical, biblical, and theological lenses that will be used to undergird the research. It provides an overview of the research methodology and the research design. It offers a brief overview of each of the coming chapters. Chapter two explores in-depth the three theoretical lenses of ritual studies, Faith Development Theory, and personhood and social relationships, lifting up the significance of each lens to the topic of perichoretic worship.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND LENSES

Introduction

Chapter one provides an introduction of this thesis in its entirety, including an overview of its theoretical, Biblical, and theological lenses. Chapter two explores in depth the three theoretical lenses of ritual studies, Faith Development Theory, and personhood and social relationships, looking at how each of these three theoretical lenses informs our understanding of perichoretic worship.

Ritual Studies

In her recent hymn *By Your Hand You Feed Your People* Susan Briehl beautifully writes, “Send us now with faith and courage to the hungry, lost, bereaved. In our living and our dying, we become what we receive: Christ’s own body, blessed and broken, cup o’erflowing, life outpoured, given as a living token of your world redeemed, restored.”¹ Reflecting on the liturgical ritual of Holy Communion, one of the central rituals of Christian worship, Briehl prays that somehow, through our participation in the ritual, “we become what we receive.” In so praying, Briehl reveals her underlying theological conviction that the ritual of Holy Communion is more than a simple rite of remembrance. Rather, there is something inherent in the ritual itself that creates a new

¹ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada., *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, #469.

reality in the lives of those who participate in it. There is something transformative in the performing of and in the participating in the ritual.

As Clifford Geertz writes, “In ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turns out to be the same world.”² According to Geertz, ritual brings together the present reality and the imagined or hoped-for future reality in such a way that the two become one and the same. Again, as reflected in Briehl’s hymn, ritual has the potential of changing the present into something new and something more than what it currently is. As this thesis explores how the practice of Christian worship functions to form perichoretic relationships between us and God, us and one another, and us and the world, ritual studies provides one important theoretical lens through which to view the transformative potential of Christian worship.

Ritual as a Way of Acting

In its most basic sense, ritual is simply a way of acting. In her foundational book *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* Catherine Bell defines ritual as a way of acting that differentiates itself from other ways of acting.

I will use the term ‘ritualization’ to draw attention to the way in which certain social actions strategically distinguish themselves in relation to other actions. In a very preliminary sense, ritualization is a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities. As such, ritualization is a matter of various culturally specific strategies for setting some activities off from others, for creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane,’ and for ascribing such distinctions to realities thought to transcend the powers of human actors.³

² Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 27.

³ *Ibid.*, 74.

Bell goes on to clarify how ritual acts differentiate themselves from otherwise mundane acts.

The significance of ritual behavior lies not in being an entirely separate way of acting, but in how such activities constitute themselves as different and in contrast to other activities . . . Acting ritually is first and foremost a matter of nuanced contrasts and the evocation of strategic, value-laden distinctions . . . Ritualization appreciates how sacred and profane activities are differentiated in the performing of them, and thus how ritualization gives rise to (or creates) the sacred as such by virtue of its sheer differentiation from the profane.⁴

An example Bell lifts up is that of Holy Communion in which the otherwise daily and ordinary activity of eating becomes a ritual act laden with meaning and both individual and communal significance.

While the field of ritual studies tends to steer away from being prescriptive in favor of being descriptive in its approach, Bell does lift up three features that she finds to be generally intrinsic to ritual acts.⁵ First, ritual acts have a *formality* about them that distinguishes them from seemingly similar acts that lack such formality. An example might be the difference between eating a piece of birthday cake that is surrounded by the gathering of friends and family, the lighting of candles, and the singing of “Happy Birthday,” in contrast to simply sneaking to the refrigerator in the middle of the night to enjoy a left-over piece of cake. The first possesses a *formality* that turns it into a ritual act. The latter does not.

Second, ritual acts possess *fixity*, that is, they are generally performed at prescribed times, in prescribed places, and as part of prescribed occasions. An example might be the difference between lighting the candles on the Advent wreath, lighting one

⁴ Ibid., 90.

⁵ Ibid., 92.

candle each week during the four weeks of Advent, in contrast to lighting candles around one's home before guests arrive in order to add ambience. The first action possesses *fixity*. The second does not.

Lastly, according to Bell, ritual acts are acts that bear *repetition*. Regularly marking oneself with the sign of the cross in remembrance of one's baptism is a repetitive act that bears significant meaning largely because of the repetitive nature of the act. Taking an ocean cruise might indeed remind one of the waters of baptism but it is not likely to become a repetitive act and, thereby, would not be considered a ritual.

Ritual as the Meeting Place of Thought and Action

In addition to being a way of acting that differentiates itself from other ways of acting, ritual tends to be the meeting place of thought and action. As Bell writes, “[Ritual is] the very mechanism or medium through which thought and action are integrated.”⁶ In ritual, what we think or believe about something is joined together with a special way of acting that communicates or represents what it is that we think or believe. What we think or believe informs how we act. Likewise, the action of the ritual plays a formative role in what we think or believe. Again, in the words of Bell,

Ritual is a type of critical juncture wherein some pair of opposing social or cultural forces come together. Examples include the ritual integration of belief and behavior, tradition and change, order and chaos, the individual and the group, subjectivity and objectivity, nature and culture, the real and the imaginative ideal.⁷

Ritual provides a means through which thought and action are integrated into a unity of form that yields meaning for those who participate in it. It is not difficult to see then why

⁶ Ibid., 23.

ritual is integral to Christian worship as it brings together belief and action in a way that gives meaning to their relationships with God, with one another, and with the world around us.

The Power of Ritual to Transform Reality

In “Generating Movement in the Social Sphere: Implications from Ritual Studies for the Relation of Theology and the Social Sciences” Derek Knoke suggests that “ritual is to the body what metaphor is to language. If so, ritual, like language makes things happen in the field through re-presentation.”⁸ In other words, as metaphor creates new meaning through the re-presentation of a common concept or idea, so also does ritual carry within it the potential to create a new reality by its re-presentation of an either real or imagined ideal. Throughout the article, Knoke ponders the creative potential of ritual.

If ritual is a bodily metaphor as I suggest, then it too is a function ‘of the *productive imagination*.’ As such, ritual seeks to create a world not by acting on it but by giving us a vision of what the world could look like. Seeing ritual as a metaphor and function of the productive imagination, would mean asking, what kind of world do our rituals make possible. And, how do we need to reframe our rituals so that they make possible the kind of world we believe God intends?⁹

Ritual, according to Knoke, not only acts to represent what is, but more importantly, what could be. This insight is particularly helpful as we think about the role of ritual in the context of Christian worship. How do the ritual acts of Christian worship bear witness to and, indeed, make real the promises of God’s coming kingdom in the here and now of our daily lives?

⁸ Derek Knoke, “Generating Movement in the Social Sphere: Implications from ritual studies of the relation of theology and the social sciences,” *Worship* 87 no 2 (March 2013): 105.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

Regarding the transformative potential of ritual, Paul Bradshaw lifts up a quote by Paul Valery, “The [imagined] idea introduces into what is, the leaven of what is not.”¹⁰ Like leaven, ritual holds the power to create something new in the individuals and communities that perform them. When we sing in the words of the offertory response, “Give us a foretaste of the feast to come,”¹¹ are we not praying for the imagined future of God’s promised kingdom to become a reality in our present? Again, the words of Susan Briehl’s hymn come to mind, “In our living and our dying, we become what we receive.”

The Relationship between Ritual and Liturgy

As integral as ritual is to Christian worship, the relationship between the two has not always been a beneficent one. Mark Searle gives a helpful overview of the historic development of the relationship between ritual and liturgy.

Among Roman Catholics, the Council of Trent confirmed a long-established dichotomy between the sacramental kernel of the rite, seen as an act of God, and the rest of the liturgy regarded as ‘mere ceremony’, useful for the edification of the faithful but generally relegated to the rubricists . . . In a sense, the whole Reformation was a protest against the way the word had been eclipsed by ritual in medieval Christianity, so that any concern with ritual was adjudged at best a distraction to religious seriousness, at worst a relapse into paganism.¹²

Certainly, ritual performed for the sake of ritual has the potential of becoming lifeless at best and idolatrous at worst. However, when ritual is employed as a means through which the gospel story is made real and accessible in the life of a worshiping community, then

¹⁰ Paul Bradshaw, *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 3.

¹¹ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada., *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, #181.

¹² Mark Searle, “Ritual,” in *Foundations in Ritual Studies*, ed. Paul Bradshaw and John Melloh (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 9.

surely such ritual can be both life-giving and God-pleasing. Since the 1960s, thanks in large part to the liturgical reforms initiated by Vatican II, there has been a renewed interest in ritual in the church, as well as among social scientists.¹³

Searle identifies three broad definitions of ritual that are particularly helpful in light of the ongoing dialogue between ritual and liturgy.

Formal definitions of ritual work seek to differentiate ritual activity from other forms of behavior in terms of its distinctive features, usually identified as repetitive, prescribed, rigid, stereotyped, and so on . . . *Functionalist* definitions approach ritual in terms of the purposes it serves in human life. Psychologists will focus on ritual behavior as it serves the needs (usually unconscious) of the individual . . . *Symbolic* approaches to the definition of ritual look at it in terms of communication: it is an activity that conveys meaning.¹⁴

Ronald Grimes also proposes a helpful framework for understanding ritual in terms of six unique modes of ritual activities. *Ritualization* refers to the rooting of symbolic acts in patterns of physical gesturing or posturing. *Decorum* refers to the stylized behavior and social etiquette that governs personal interactions. *Ceremony* includes those ritual acts that seek to display and respect positions of status and power. *Liturgy* describes any ritual action that bears an ultimate frame of reference, such as God. *Magic* refers to any ritual act that attempts to manipulate the transcendent. *Celebration* involves ritual activities in which participants focus more on the encounter with the transcendent than with any specific or desired outcome.¹⁵ Each of these six unique modes of ritual activities can be found in the practice of Christian worship to one degree or another. Key to the concerns of this thesis will be which modes of ritual activities are

¹³ Ibid., 10.

¹⁴ Ibid., 11-12.

¹⁵ Ibid., 12.

most helpful and effective in cultivating meaningful faith relationships. As Grimes argues, liturgy is, by necessity, a ritual act, thereby requiring us to think both critically and creatively about how ritual can best be used in service to God's mission.

What differentiates liturgy from other faith-expressions, such as preaching, poetry, iconography, and so on, is that it is essentially something that is what it is when it is *carried out* (Rappaport). It requires the physical presence of living bodies interacting in the same general space at the same time and passing through a series of prescribed motions. Liturgy is uniquely a matter of the body: both the individual body and the collective body. From the viewpoint of the individual, liturgy requires bodily presence and a bodily engagement that includes, but is by no means confined to, verbal utterances.¹⁶

The Relationship between Ritual and Belief

In addition to exploring the relationship between ritual and liturgy, it is also necessary to explore the relationship between ritual and belief. In many ways, the question of the relationship between ritual and belief is similar to the question, which came first, the chicken or the egg. Does ritual activity shape and form belief? Or, does belief shape and form ritual activity? The answer, of course, is, yes!

John Witvliet helpfully reflects on the inherent relationship between ritual and belief.

Particularly interesting for Christian liturgists and students of ritual is the relationship perceived between believing and ritualizing. Every invocation of the maxim *lex orandi, lex credenda* implies that human activity is always prior to human cognition or belief. Emile Durkheim, in his seminal work, *the Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, argued that ritual not only leads humans to intuit and comprehend ideas and affections, but also leads them to accept them as true and to live by them . . . Blaise Pascal firmly believed that habit was the surest way to beget faith: 'proofs only convince the mind; habit provides the strongest proofs and those that are most believed . . . Even John Calvin acknowledged that 'genuine piety begets genuine confession' . . . Luther also advised: 'Do not begin with innovations in rites . . . put first and foremost what is fundamental in our teaching . . . reform of impious rites will come of itself when what is fundamental

¹⁶ Ibid., 13.

in our teaching has been effectively presented, has taken root in our pious hearts'.¹⁷

The issue is not whether there is a connection between ritual and belief, but rather how and in which direction that connection is formed. Clearly, what we believe needs to inform how we act. However, how we act also informs what we believe. This formational function of ritual is especially important to consider in terms of how the practice of Christian worship forms faith relationships. As Witvliet concludes, "At best, ritual activity and rational theology must be viewed as partners in an ongoing dialogue."¹⁸

Margaret Mary Kelleher is most helpful here in articulating the missional significance of ritual activity in the life of a worshipping Christian assembly.

The church can be understood as a community which is continually in the process of being constituted by the gift of God's Spirit and the proclamation of Christ's message. This, of course, happens in diverse local communities where the handing on of the message from generation to generation is a form of 'praxis alive and active.' Theology is done when that praxis is questioned, scrutinized, made explicit and thematic. As the action of Christian assemblies, liturgy can be understood as a form of ecclesial ritual praxis in which the church is continually mediating itself within particular local contexts. In its liturgical ritual action an assembly performs its corporate meaning and contributes to the ongoing creation of itself as a collective subject, a community . . . An assembly engaged in the performance of liturgy acts as a collective subject and in its ritual praxis symbolically mediates a public horizon. One might refer to that public horizon as the limit of the assembly's imagination. It sets out a public spirituality, a vision of what it means to live as a member of the Christian community. It is a horizon handed on by others, one which offers challenges as well as sets limits for the assembly, and it is a horizon which may change as a result of decisions made within the collective subject.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid., 37-38.

¹⁸ Ibid., 38.

¹⁹ Ibid., 205-207.

In short, how might God be alive and at work through the ritual practice of the Christian assembly to form transformative relationships that make real in the here and now God's imagined and promised future?

Faith Development Theory

In 1981, James Fowler published his seminal work *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. Building on the work of theologians H. Richard Niebuhr and Paul Tillich and behavioral scientists Erik Erikson, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Jean Piaget, Fowler set out to redefine faith apart from any particular doctrinal or confessional belief and to identify universal stages of faith development across the broad diversity of human religious experience. Faith Development Theory, as developed by Fowler, proposes a sequential process of faith development through six distinct stages across a person's lifetime. Critics of Fowler's theory wrestle over whether his stages actually define and describe the process of faith development or something else altogether, such as the development of the self or the living out of one's baptismal identity. As this thesis explores how the practice of Christian worship forms faith relationships, it is important to acquaint ourselves with Fowler's theory and to consider how it might or might not be helpful in considering the role of Christian worship in faith formation.

Fowler's Definition of Faith

Instead of defining faith according to a set doctrine of belief or religious content, Fowler seeks to define faith as an individual's movement toward something greater than themselves, that which both Niebuhr and Tillich refer to as our "universal human

concern.”²⁰ “Faith,” writes Fowler, “is a person’s or group’s way of moving into the force field of life. It is our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives. Faith is a person’s way of seeing him- or herself in relation to others against a background of shared meaning and purpose.”²¹ Faith, according to Fowler, is not about the content of belief but rather about the ongoing development of and movement toward an openness to that which is transcendent in our lives, whatever we determine that transcendence to be. Thus, Fowler writes, “Faith is a *verb*; it is an active mode of being and committing, a way of moving into and giving shape to our experiences of life.”²²

In his redefinition of faith, Fowler builds on the work of the comparative religions scholar Wilfred Cantwell Smith, summarizing Smith’s work as follows.

Faith, rather than belief or religion, is the most fundamental category in the human quest for relation to transcendence . . . Each of the major religious traditions studied speaks about faith in ways that make the same phenomenon visible. In each and all, faith involves an alignment of the will, a resting of the heart, in accordance with a vision of transcendent value and power, one’s ultimate concern . . . Faith is an orientation of the total person, giving purpose and goal to one’s hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions . . . The unity and recognizability of faith, despite the myriad variants of religions and beliefs, support the struggle to maintain and develop a theory of religious relativity in which the religions – and the faith they evoke and shape – are seen as relative apprehensions of our relatedness to that which is universal.²³

Faith, according to Fowler, is not so much about *what* one believes, but *how* one believes.

²⁰ Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²² *Ibid.*, 16.

²³ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

Fowler's Stages of Faith

Fowler identifies six distinct stages of faith development, in addition to a pre-stage. He associates each stage with a unique age range and identifies both inherent strengths and dangers contained within each stage.

Fowler identifies the pre-stage as Undifferentiated Faith. This stage occurs during infancy and is the time in which “the seeds of trust, courage, hope, and love are fused in an undifferentiated way and contend with sensed threats of abandonment, inconsistencies and deprivations in an infant’s environment.”²⁴ The strength of this stage is the development of basic trust and the experience of mutuality shared with those responsible for the infant’s primary care. The danger is the failure of such a relationship of mutual trust to develop.

Stage One is the stage of Intuitive-Projective Faith and usually occurs between the ages of three and seven. Fowler describes this stage as “the fantasy-filled, imitative phase in which the child can be powerfully and permanently influenced by examples, moods, actions, and stories of the visible faith of primally related adults.”²⁵ It is during this stage when imagination becomes possible in children. The inherent danger during this stage is the possession of the child’s imagination by images of terror and destructiveness. Jeff Astley lifts up the importance of involving children in Christian liturgy during this stage. “The powerful symbols of Christian liturgy can contribute deep and lasting images in this stage of faith. Hence young children who are excluded from ritual and sacrament –

²⁴ Ibid., 121.

²⁵ Ibid., 133.

‘because they don’t yet understand’ – may be being cut off from a vital form of nourishment.”²⁶

Stage Two includes the development of Mythic-Literal Faith, “the stage in which the person begins to take on for him- or herself the stories, beliefs and observances that symbolize belonging to his or her community. Beliefs are appropriated with literal interpretations, as are moral rules and attitudes.”²⁷ This developmental stage usually occurs during the child’s middle to later elementary school years. As Astley writes, “Story-telling is important at this stage, including telling the story of the Christian community to which the child belongs, but meaning can easily be ‘trapped’ in the narrative.”²⁸

Synthetic-Conventional Faith develops during Stage Three of Fowler’s theory and generally occurs during adolescence. In this stage, “faith must provide a coherent orientation in the midst of that more complex and diverse range of involvements. Faith must synthesize values and information; it must provide a basis for identity and outlook.”²⁹ Astley explains that during this stage “what peers, parents, teachers (and sometimes church leaders) say is particularly important. Interpersonal relationships are

²⁶ Astley and Francis, *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development: A Reader*, xxi.

²⁷ Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, 149.

²⁸ Astley and Francis, *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development: A Reader*, xxi.

²⁹ Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, 172.

now very significant; it is a time of going with particular ‘faith-current’ or ‘faith-crowd’.”³⁰

Stage Four involves the development of Individuative-Reflective Faith. In Fowler’s words, “the self, previously sustained in its identity and faith compositions by an interpersonal circle of significant others, now claims an identity no longer defined by the composite of one’s roles or meanings to others.”³¹ Generally occurring during young adulthood, it is during this stage that individuals develop the capacity to reflect critically on both their self-identity and belief structures. In other words, it is during this stage when one’s faith becomes one’s own.

Fowler classifies Stage Five as Conjunctive Faith which, again in Fowler’s words, “involves the integration into self and outlook of much that was suppressed or unrecognized in the interest of Stage 4’s self-certainty and conscious cognitive and affective adaptation to reality.”³² Occurring in midlife, the development of conjunctive faith leads to the appreciation of symbols, myths, and rituals in communicating meaning. According to Astley, “one marked feature of [conjunctive faith] is a new openness to others and their worldviews, and a new ability to keep in tension the paradoxes and polarities of faith and life.”³³

The sixth and final stage of faith development is what Fowler calls Universalizing Faith. Very few individuals ever fully achieve stage six.

³⁰ Astley and Francis, *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development: A Reader*, xxi.

³¹ Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, 182.

³² *Ibid.*, 197.

³³ Astley and Francis, *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development: A Reader*, xxii.

These persons embody costly openness to the power of the future. They actualize its promise, creating zones of liberation and sending shock waves to rattle the cages that we allow to constrict human futurity. Their trust is in the power of that future and their trans-narcissistic love of human futurity for their readiness to spend and be spent in making the Kingdom actual.³⁴

Again in the words of Astley, “This way of being in faith is essentially a relinquishing and transcending of the self. Stage 6 people go out to transform the world, and often die in the attempt.”³⁵

While Fowler’s Stages of Faith Development have received significant criticism, primarily from theologians arguing for divine initiative in creating and sustaining faith, a criticism that I share and that I will explore in more length below, one of the more helpful conclusions Fowler makes is the need for faith communities to provide opportunities for ongoing faith development for adults. Faith, according to Fowler, is not static, but ever-changing, ever-growing, ever-developing. As Fowler suggests, it is necessary for the church today to give renewed attention to the nurturing and developing of faith among adults.

My vision for such a community as this begins with taking ongoing faith development in adulthood seriously. I believe that when a community expects and provides models for significant continuing faith development in adulthood its patterns of nurturing the faith of children and youth will change and become more open-ended. What might providing for ongoing adult development mean?³⁶

³⁴ Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, 211.

³⁵ Astley and Francis, *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development: A Reader*, xxii.

³⁶ Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, 295.

Faith as Primarily Relational

One of the most helpful pieces of Fowler's Faith Development Theory, particularly in light of the question of how the practice of Christian worship can more effectively cultivate faith relationships, is his definition of faith as being primarily relational.

Most often faith is understood as belief in certain centers in propositional, doctrinal formulations that in some essential and static way are supposed to 'contain' truth. But if faith is relational, a pledging of trust and fidelity to another, and a way of moving into the force field of life trusting in dynamic centers of value and power, then the 'truth' of faith takes on a different quality. Truth is *lived*; it is a pattern of *being* in relation to others and to God.³⁷

In a later work, Fowler makes a helpful and useful distinction between bi-polar faith, that is, faith as a relationship between us and the Transcendent, and tri-polar faith, that is, faith as a relationship between us, the Transcendent, and others. Fowler makes this important distinction as he discusses the work of those theologians upon whom his relational definition of faith is built.

First, in each theologian's position faith is understood as *relational*. It is the response to one's sense of relatedness to the ultimate conditions and depths of existence. It is always *bi-polar* in the sense that faith is the binding of the self and the Transcendent. It is the awareness, the intuition, the conviction of a relatedness to something or someone more than the mundane. But faith is relational for these theologians in another sense as well. For them, and for us, perhaps it is more accurate to say that faith is *tri-polar*. For it is a sense of relatedness to the ultimate conditions of existence which simultaneously informs and qualifies our relations and interactions with the mundane, the everyday, the world of other persons and things.³⁸

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Astley and Francis, *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development: A Reader*, 9.

Though Fowler himself does not make the connection, thinking of faith as tri-polar fits in well with the Trinitarian understanding of God who, in God's very nature, is tri-polar – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and who calls us to live in tri-polar relationships between God, one another, and the world in which we live. This thesis seeks to answer how Christian worship can most effectively cultivate such tri-polar faith relationships.

A Critique of Fowler and his Theory

While there is much that is helpful about Fowler's Faith Development Theory, theologians have been critical of Fowler's anthropocentric definition of faith that posits faith as primarily a human activity rather than an activity that is grounded in God's action and initiative toward us. In the words of Mary Ford-Grabowsky, "Fowler impoverishes the concept of faith by focusing on what he calls the 'human side' of faith without reference to the revealed 'divine side,' thus neglecting the transtemporal aspect of faith, the Christian Trinitarian confession, and the faith-destroying work of sin and evil."³⁹

Focusing on the human side of faith is particularly troubling to Lutheran theology in which faith is considered both the gift and the work of God in our lives through the power of the Holy Spirit. William Avery does a good job of articulating the Lutheran critique.

Because Fowler's concept makes faith a human act, it undercuts the radical primacy of the gospel. Therefore, a Lutheran definition of faith must differ from Fowler's concept and requires an alternative definition of faith. First, faith is a gift from God and not a human achievement . . . Faith is a gift from outside that tears apart all our attempts for self-achievement or self-fulfillment and lets us

³⁹ Ibid., 109.

acknowledge this gift that we cannot control. Second, faith cannot be separated from the object of faith. The object of one's faith determines what faith is.⁴⁰

Instead of judging Fowler's entire theory irrelevant, however, Avery suggests that the error in Fowler's theory is not the identification of various stages of development but rather in defining these stages in terms of faith. Avery's argument is that what is developed in each of Fowler's stages is not faith, which is always a gift given by God through baptism, but rather different ways of living into our baptism in daily life.

We can apply what is being measured by Fowler's seven aspects, not to faith development but to different ways of living in one's baptism. Living in one's baptism includes one's concept of selfhood but also encompasses one's entire life as a baptized child of God. I believe it is proper to see the stages Fowler delineates as growing out of baptism, because baptism is the cornerstone of a Christ's whole life.⁴¹

Faith is indeed the work of God and not the work of humans. Nor is faith a process of working upwards one stage at a time until one finally achieves a full relationship with God. Our relationship with God is a gift of grace, given to us fully and freely through baptism. Living, however, in an increasingly secular culture in which fewer and fewer people grow up in the church challenges us to seek new ways to cultivate the work of God in people's lives, including through the practice of Christian worship.

Personhood and Social Relationships

At the heart of my research question is the interplay between the practice of Christian worship and the development of perichoretic relationships between us and God,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 127.

⁴¹ Ibid., 128.

between us and one another, and between us and the world. As the Triune God is by God's very nature relational, that is, existing only in the mutually shared relationship between the three persons of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so too, this inherently relational Triune God calls us into a relationality that is essential to our personhood in relation to God, to others, and to the world. Thus, it is necessary to explore the nature of personhood and how our individual personhood is shaped by our social relationships.

Initially, I was intrigued by Social Exchange Theory as developed by George Homans and its argument that all human relationship involves a social exchange in which one person shares a gift or expression of communication with another that requires a response. As defined and developed in more depth below, only through this mutual exchange of gift and reciprocation can social relationships exist. In a very real sense, this exchange of gift and reciprocation is what happens, or is intended to happen, in Christian worship. God gives the gift of relationship and God hopes that we will reciprocate the giving of that gift by our faithful response, whether that response takes the form of worship, praise, service, discipleship, justice, or something other. In order for us to fully experience the relationship God freely gives we must somehow respond to the giving of the gift, thus becoming engaged subjects in our relationship with God rather than merely passive objects. However, as I explored Social Exchange Theory in light of my research question, I realized that Social Exchange Theory is but one component of a larger theoretical lens through which it is necessary to look, namely, the interplay between human personhood and social relationships. In order to explore how perichoretic relationships are formed through the practice of Christian worship, it is first necessary to

explore what it means to be a person and how our individual personhood is developed and shaped through the social relationships of which we are a part.

A Christian Theory of Personhood and Social Relationship

In 1990, Alistair McFadyen wrote and published a fascinating book titled *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships*.⁴² In it, McFadyen develops a theoretical proposal for what it means to be a human person, but does so through the lens of Christian theology. Not only does McFadyen propose that social science is integral to the task of theology, but also that theology is integral to the task of social science.

The theological task, in my understanding of it, has two poles: to understand and critically reflect upon Christian doctrine, tradition, and history on the one hand, and the social, cultural, and intellectual world in which we are living on the other. Christian reality is always bound up with its social world, and that is one very important reason why, even when the theological is attending to the understanding of faith through its past, theology should always involve critical reflection on the worlds of which the Church is and has been a part. These are not two tasks but dual elements of a single task. Critical engagement with the world as a whole is an essential element of the theological task of formulating an understanding of Christian tradition and of the contemporary situation which illuminates Christian faith together with the world and thereby clarifies what responsible existence in it might mean.⁴³

The central premise of McFadyen's theory is that the formation of our personhood as humans is dependent on the social relationships we share both with God and with others. "Persons," argues McFadyen, "cannot exist in a vacuum, but only within a structured social 'world'."⁴⁴ He identifies two extreme conceptualizations of human

⁴² McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships*.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

personhood, each of which is deficient in its understanding. The first extreme is individualism, the concept that one's personhood is entirely rooted and grounded in one's own personal identity or being. Such an understanding leads to an unhealthy and selfish ego-centrism, a symptom of today's overly individualistic world in which we live. Such an understanding of personhood leads to a life turned almost exclusively in upon oneself. The second extreme is collectivism, the understanding of one's personhood as being entirely rooted in and dependent upon their network of relationships with others. Such an understanding leads to the loss of self and an unhealthy lack of self-definition and self-differentiation. In contrast to these two extremes, McFadyen proposes a third option, a "midcourse between individualism and collectivism, which can do justice to personal autonomy whilst simultaneously acknowledging the role of social relation and institutions."⁴⁵

Drawing heavily on the language of I and Thou employed by Martin Buber and adopted by such twentieth-century theologians as Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, McFadyen proposes our human personhood can neither be defined nor developed apart from the social relationships we share with others.

The basis of a dialogical understanding of personhood is that we are what we are in ourselves only through relation to others. Persons are unique centers or subjects of communication, but they are so only through their intrinsic relation to other persons. So they are centered beings, but they become centered in a personal way only through relation with other personal centers, through commitment to others, and so on.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 9.

In other words, one can only be fully I as one is in relation to Thou. Simply put, relationships with others are essential to the development of human personhood. We cannot fully exist as individuals apart from the communities in which we exist. Social relationships are necessary for personhood.

Persons in Relationship to God

As a Christian theologian working to develop a theory of human personhood informed by Christian theology, McFadyen conceptualizes human existence in the image of the Triune God. Such an existence has both a vertical dimension, that is, the dimension of our personhood that exists in relationship to God, and a horizontal dimension, that is, the dimension of our personhood that exists in relationship to others and to the world.

McFadyen defines personal relationship as “an encounter between two or more partners who are different, who have some independence and autonomy in the relation and who may therefore engage with each other on the basis of freedom rather than coercion.”⁴⁷ Relationship happens when an I encounters a Thou. Thus, the vertical dimension of our human personhood is the encounter the Triune God has with us, an encounter that is initiated, formed, and sustained by God rather than by us, and yet, that also calls forth from us some sort of response. McFadyen describes this divine-human encounter in terms of a divine invitation into dialogue, an image that I find particularly helpful when thinking about what happens between God and us in Christian worship.

In the provision of space for free human response to the divine address, the divine-human relationship is structured from God’s side as a dialogue. For human being is intended in this communication to be God’s dialogue-partner. Human being is therefore to be described as a being-in-partnership with God, a being addressed as Thou by God’s I . . . Because God’s communication takes dialogical

⁴⁷ Ibid., 18.

form, it should be conceived of in terms of grace. Dialogue here means that, on God's side at least, there is respect for freedom and independence and an absence of overdetermination. In the mystery of God's grace human beings are addressed as God's dialogue-partners.⁴⁸

The Triune God invites us into a relationship of dialogue. God speaks to us, inviting us into relationship regardless of whether we speak back or engage in the dialogue.

However, we do not realize full human personhood until we engage the relationship, entering the dialogue through which we exist no longer as a Thou relating to the divine I, but rather as a Thou transformed into an I through the redeeming invitation of the Triune God. In other words, in McFadyen's view, we do not fully become who we are until we respond to the dialogue initiated with us by the Triune God.

We are addressed as the Thou corresponding to God's I. We are called thereby to become, in our turn, I's in response, to enter a personal relationship – a relationship in which our distinct identities are a requirement: a dialogue. It is through dialogue that we become true subjects and share a personal existence. A person is a subject of communication and as such makes responses which are more than mechanical responses to external stimuli, and which rest on the uniqueness of personal identity.⁴⁹

Persons in Relationship to Other Persons

Not only is human personhood defined vertically, that is, in relationship to God, but also horizontally, that is, in relationship to others. Like the vertical dimension of human personhood, McFadyen grounds the horizontal dimension in the Christian understanding of the Triune God, arguing that “a theory of human nature analogously informed by the nature of God as Trinity will lead to a specific understanding of individuality as a sedimentation of interpersonal relations which is intrinsically open to

⁴⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 23.

others as to God.”⁵⁰ As the persons of the Trinity, though each distinct in and of themselves, cannot exist separately apart from their relationality with one another, so too our personhood as humans, though fully distinct, cannot exist apart from our relationality with others.

I propose a model of the Trinity as a unique community of Persons in which Person and relation are interdependent moments in a process of mutuality. Each Person is a social unity with specific characteristics unique to Him or Her but whose uniqueness is not an asocial principal of being. The terms of personal identity within the Trinity identify not just unique individuals for the form of relation peculiar to them . . . The Father, Son, and Spirit are neither simply modes of relation nor absolutely discrete and independent individuals, but Persons in relation and Persons only through relation. Persons exist only as they exist for others, not merely as they exist in and for themselves . . . As the Persons are what they are only through their relations with the others, it must also be the case that their identities are formed through the others and the ways in which others relate to them.⁵¹

Just as human personhood is dependent on our relationship to God, so also is our human personhood dependent on our relationships with others. This dependence does not, however, mean that we have no unique identity apart from others, just as the persons of the Trinity do not lose their unique identity through their mutual dependence on the one another.

The analogy between God and human existence in the image is then properly not one of individual substance but of relation. Just as the Persons of the Trinity receive and maintain their identities through relation, and relations of a certain quality, then so would human persons only receive and maintain their identities through relation with others and would stand fully in God’s image whenever these identities and relations achieved a certain quality.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid., 24.

⁵¹ Ibid., 27.

⁵² Ibid., 31.

Only when we engage our personhood with the personhood of others, opening ourselves fully up to the other, all the while not giving up our unique self, do we become fully human. In so doing, we are free to become self-differentiated persons living fully in authentic, genuine, and healthy relationship with others.

Subject-to-Subject Relationships

The relationships that exist within the Triune God are subject-to-subject relationships in which each person relates to the other person as a unique I and not merely as a Thou to be manipulated or coerced. So it is that the Triune God also relates to us. Even though we are Thou's in relation to the divine I, the Triune God invites us into the dialogue as I's. The Triune God invites us to enter into the relationship as active and fully engaged subjects rather than as passive objects. This same Triune God invites us, in our relationships with others, to treat the others as subjects rather than as objects, meaning that our relationships with others exist not for the purpose of changing the others, but with the very real openness and possibility that we will be changed by them. Only in opening ourselves up in this way, risky though it may be at times, do we realize the unique human personhood for which the Triune God invites us.

One can come to oneself only through intersubjective processes of mutual recognition. The process through which one's own identity as a dialogical communicative subject is received is simultaneously one in which it is uniquely borne for others. For one's identity as an I is inextricably linked to the reality of the I of other people: an I only for an I!⁵³

⁵³ Ibid., 41.

As the Triune God frees us for a subject-to-subject relationship with God-self, so does the Triune God free us for subject-to-subject relationships with one another and with the world around us.

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory, as first developed by George Homans and subsequently developed by others, is one small part of the much larger conversation around social relationships.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, this particular theory has some interesting implications for our creative thinking about the formation of social relationships within the practice of Christian worship. In short, Social Exchange Theory proposes that every communication that happens within a relationship between two individuals involves both the giving of a gift and the expectation that a subsequent gift will be given in return. Peter Blau talks about this social exchange in terms of gratitude.

The concept of social exchange directs attention to the emergent properties in interpersonal relations and social interaction. A person for whom another has done a service is expected to express his gratitude and return a service when the occasion arises. Failure to express his appreciation and to reciprocate tends to stamp him as an ungrateful man who does not deserve to be helped. If he properly reciprocates, the social rewards the other receives serve as inducements to extend further assistance, and the resulting mutual exchange of services creates a social bond between the two.⁵⁵

When a gift is reciprocated with a gift of equal or similar value, then a balanced, subject-to-subject relationship becomes possible. However, when a gift is given and the receiver of the gift either fails to reciprocate the gift or is unable to reciprocate the gift in a

⁵⁴ George Homans, "Social Behavior as Exchange," *American Journal of Sociology* 63, no. 6 (May 1958): 597-606.

⁵⁵ Peter Michael Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life* (New Brunswick (U.S.A.): Transaction Books, 1986), 4.

meaningful way, then an imbalanced relationship will likely develop in which the giver of the gift plays the role of subject and the receiver of the unreciprocated gift plays the role of object. This imbalanced relationship can be created either intentionally or unintentionally, depending on the motivation of the giver.

Healthy relationships built on social exchange are relationships built on mutual trust between the two parties. As Blau writes, “The establishment of exchange relations involves making investments that constitute commitments to the other party. Since social exchange requires trusting others to reciprocate, the initial problem is to prove oneself trustworthy.”⁵⁶ Social relationships built on trust are marked by a mutual interdependence between the two individuals. Such relationships tend to be subject-to-subject. In contrast to relationships built on trust, relationships built on the power of one individual over or against another individual are typically unhealthy relationships characterized by one-sided dependence. Such relationships tend to be subject-to-object.

Power is conceptualized as inherently asymmetrical and as resting on the net ability of a person to withhold rewards from and apply punishments to others – the ability that remains after the restraints they can impose on him have been taken into account. Its source is one-sided dependence. Interdependence and mutual influence of equal strength indicate lack of power.⁵⁷

In Christian worship, the Triune God is always the initiator of the relationship, a relationship that begins with the giving of the gift of God-self to the other. Yet, the Triune God deeply yearns for the giving of the gift, that is, grace, to be reciprocated through trust in that gift, that is, faith. In this sense, the relationship between God and us is a relationship based on a social exchange between two parties. It is God’s desire that

⁵⁶ Ibid., 98.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 118.

this relationship become a relationship of mutual interdependence, that is, a subject-to-subject relationship rather than a relationship based only on one-sided dependence in which we remain mere objects in relationship to, but not with, a Divine Subject.

The Significance of Personhood and Social Relationships in Christian Worship

It is the primary argument of this study that the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is the primary actor in Christian worship, working to form perichoretic, subject-to-subject relationships between us and God, between us and one another, and between us and the world. These relationships that the Triune God seeks to form are relationships reflecting the nature of the relationships inherent within the Trinity itself. Such relationships are relationships in which persons can and do exist only in relationship to other persons, all the while remaining distinct persons not subsumed by the other. Such relationships are intended to be subject-to-subject relationships built on trust and mutual interdependence. Such relationships require an openness to the other and an openness to be transformed by the other. The question at hand remains how the practice of Christian worship can be designed and led in such a way to encourage space for the Triune God to make real the formation of such multi-directional, perichoretic relationships.

Summary

Chapter two provides an in-depth exploration of the three theoretical lenses of ritual studies, Faith Development Theory, and personhood and social relationships, looking at how each lens applies to an understanding of perichoretic worship. Chapter three explores the Biblical and theological lenses undergirding this study, providing a Biblical and theological foundation upon which an understanding of perichoretic worship may be built.

CHAPTER 3
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL LENSES

Introduction

Chapter two discussed the theoretical lenses of ritual studies, Faith Development Theory, and personhood and social relationships, exploring how each theoretical lens informs the study of perichoretic worship. Chapter three presents four Biblical lenses through which this study considers perichoretic worship. In addition, chapter three explores the three theological lenses of perichoresis, Lutheran worship, and faith practices, considering how each of them helps inform an understanding of the practice of Christian worship.

John 15:1-17 – Vine and Branches

Jesus' image of the vine in John 15 reveals the inherent relationality that exists within God's own self, between God's own self and Jesus' disciples, and between Jesus' disciples and the world. These mutually interdependent and interconnected relationships that Jesus herein describes reflect the perichoretic understanding of God's identity and being as Trinity.

First, Jesus defines himself in relationship to his Father. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower" (John 15:1). As a vine cannot exist apart from the one who plants, waters, cares for, and tends to the vine, so Jesus cannot exist apart from his Father.

The two are mutually interdependent. Jesus, the vine, is dependent on his Father, the vine-grower. Likewise, the Father, the vine-grower, loses his identity as the vine-grower apart from the vine, his Son. Vine-grower and vine, Father and Son, can only exist together.

Second, just as Jesus, the vine, is connected in relationship with his Father, the vine-grower, so too is Jesus, the vine, connected in relationship with Jesus' disciples, the branches. "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Not only do Jesus' disciples, the branches, exist in inherent relationship with Jesus, the vine, so also, through their inherent relationship with Jesus, the vine, they also exist in inherent relationship with Jesus' Father, the vine-grower. This inherent relationality exists not only between the vine and the branches, but also between the branches themselves. Through their connection with the vine, the branches are connected one with another. Because of their relationship with Jesus, the vine, Jesus' disciples also exist in relationship with one another, the branches. These relationships, one with another, are integral to what it means to be one of Jesus' disciples.

Third, in addition to their connection one with another, the branches of the vine also exist in relationship with the world. The very purpose of the branches, in the purview of the vine-grower, is to bear fruit in the world. Jesus says about his Father, the vine-grower, "He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit" (John 15:2). As Jesus later defines, the fruit that is desired by the vine-grower from the branches is the fruit of love—"I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another" (John 15:17). The branches of the vine

exist for the purpose of bearing the fruit of love in the world, something that is only possible as the branches exist in relationship to one another, in relationship to Jesus, the vine, and through the vine, with Jesus' Father, the vine-grower.

Also striking are the ways this passage offers up other images that are reflective of the perichoretic relationships that exist within the Triune God. Of particular note is the divine hospitality Jesus extends to his disciples, inviting them into divine relationship. "Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me" (John 15:4). Jesus' invitation is one of mutual interconnectedness as his disciples are invited to dwell in him even as he promises to dwell in them. As the disciples exist to dwell in the vine, so the vine exists to dwell in the branches. Jesus here reveals a glimpse of the missional identity of the Triune God who exists to draw us and all creation into relationship with the divine life.

Further reflective of the perichoretic nature of the divine relationships existing within the Triune God, Jesus redefines the relationship between him and his disciples as a subject-to-subject relationship rather than a subject-to-object relationship. "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father" (John 15:15). The relationship between master and servant presumes a subject-to-object relationship in which the master possesses a higher status in the relationship than the servant. The relationship, however, between friends presumes a subject-to-subject relationship in which each party shares an equal place within the relationship. The subject-to-subject relationship that Jesus here offers to the disciples does not mean that Jesus and his disciples are, by nature, equal in status. Clearly, they are

not. Rather, the subject-to-subject relationship that Jesus offers is a gift given to the disciples and made possible only through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Such subject-to-subject relationships are inherent to God's perichoretic nature, and thereby, should also be reflected in the cultivation of relationships that occurs within the practice of Christian worship.

Finally, throughout Jesus' discourse in John 15:1-17, we clearly see that God is the active subject at work in initiating, sustaining, and fulfilling all relationships. Nowhere is the agency of God stated more clearly than in Jesus' words, "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name" (John 15:16). The relationship into which we are invited by the Triune God is completely initiated, made possible, and sustained by the Triune God and not by us. Recognizing God as the active subject of our relationships with God, with one another, and with the world is critical to the perichoretic understanding of the Triune God, as well as to a perichoretic understanding of Christian worship in which God is understood as the active subject at work in the lives of God's people for the sake of the world.

Luke 24:13-35 – Walk to Emmaus

The story of the risen Christ encountering the two disciples walking along the road to Emmaus on Easter evening provides a helpful framework in which to think about the relationship between a perichoretic understanding of the Triune God and the practice of Christian worship. As these two disciples walk along the road, they are disheartened by the things that had taken place over the previous several days, most recently, the discovery of the empty tomb earlier that morning which they suppose means that

someone had stolen their master's body. As they walk, the risen Christ shows up in their midst, initiating a conversation with them, though, as Luke writes, "their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (Luke 24:16). Luke clearly portrays Jesus as the active agent in the story. It is Jesus who comes near and goes with them. It is Jesus who begins the conversation—"And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?'" (Luke 24:15). Jesus is the one who is at work in the lives of these two disciples as they walk along the road. In the risen Jesus, God is the active agent.

After these two disciples explain to the stranger in their midst why they are sad, Jesus begins sharing God's Word with them. "Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (Luke 24:25-27). Later in the story, after their eyes are opened and they recognize Jesus, these disciples said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32). God, the active agent, is at work in these disciples' lives through their hearing of God's Word being spoken and interpreted to them by Jesus.

In response to Jesus' interpreting Scripture for them, these two disciples extend to this stranger the gift of hospitality, inviting him into their home. "Stay with us," they offer, "because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over" (Luke 24:29). Jesus accepts their invitation and, using sacramental language, Luke describes, "When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them" (Luke 24:30). Through Jesus' sharing of this meal with them, "their eyes were opened, and they

recognized him” (Luke 24:31a). Again, God, through Jesus, is the active agent here, at work in the lives of these two disciples through the sharing of the meal. Through the extension of their gift of hospitality, these two disciples create a space in their homes and in their lives for God to act, seemingly through a stranger, though the stranger turns out to be the risen Christ.

Through the speaking and interpreting of God’s Word and through the breaking of the bread in the sharing of a meal, the two central elements of Christian worship, the risen Christ acts in the lives of these two disciples, transforming their grief and sadness into joy and proclamation. The story ends with Luke reporting, “Then they told what had happened on the road, how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread” (Luke 24:35). Even in Luke’s closing verse of the story, the action clearly belongs to the One who had made the risen Christ known to them through the breaking of the bread. As we weekly gather for the practice of Christian worship, the Triune God shows up in our lives through the speaking and interpreting of Scripture and in the breaking of the bread—Word and Sacrament—gathering us out of the sin and brokenness of our lives and sending us out into the world to proclaim the good news of Christ’s resurrection in both word and action. Like the two disciples on the road, perichoretic worship seeks to create spaces of hospitality within the practice of Christian worship for the Triune God to act, drawing us ever deeper into relationship with God, with one another, and with the world around us.

Acts 2:37-47 – Community of Believers

In Acts 2:37-47, the author Luke provides a vivid description of the earliest Christian community. Strikingly, Luke describes this earliest Christian community as a

community deeply grounded in the practices of Christian worship. Indeed, the worship practices in which this Christian community was engaged point to the four essential components of the ordo of Christian worship identified and studied by Gordon Lathrop—Gathering, Word, Meal, and Sending.¹

Having heard the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection as proclaimed to them by Peter, the community is gathered together through the act of baptism—"So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added" (Acts 2:41). Through the Word spoken to them by Peter, the Spirit works, creating in them a yearning for a deeper relationship with the God revealed in Jesus. Having entered into this deeper relationship through baptism, Luke writes that "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). Having been gathered into Christ's family through baptism, they center themselves around God's Word and God's Meal. Then, having been gathered in baptism and having centered themselves around God's Word and Meal, this early Christian community is sent to care for the community around them—"They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need" (2:45).

Through these central practices of Christian worship, the Triune God grows this earliest Christian community in their relationships with God's own self, in their relationships with one another, and in their relationships with the community and world around them. It is clear from Luke's description that God, and not the community itself, is the agent of this relational transformation. As Luke concludes, "And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47b). It is the Lord who

¹ Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

is responsible for the growth, both internally and externally, of the Christian community in Acts. Luke's rich description of the early Christian community invites us to consider how the Triune God works through the four central practices of Christian worship to draw us and our congregations into deeper relationships with God's self, with each other, and with the world.

Acts 8:26-40 – Ethiopian Eunuch

The formation of relationships through God's agency is central also to the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40. God drives the action throughout the narrative. It is one of God's messengers who commands Philip to travel on the road leading to Gaza—"Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza'" (Acts 8:26). It is God's Spirit who commands Philip to go to the eunuch's chariot and engage him in conversation—"Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over to this chariot and join it'" (Acts 8:29). It is God's Spirit who snatches Philip away from the eunuch and sends him elsewhere to continue spreading the good news about Jesus—"When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away" (Acts 8:39). God, not Philip or the Ethiopian eunuch, is the central actor in this story. It is God's agency, present in the work of the Spirit, that is acting in and through these two men, forming a relationship between Philip and the eunuch and, through Philip, forming a relationship between the eunuch and Christ.

The relationship that God forms between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch brings together an insider, that is, one who is already inside the community of faith, with an outsider, one who because of both his ethnicity and his physical condition is outside of

the community of faith. In initiating a conversation between these two men, Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, God creates a relationship of mutual hospitality in which Philip extends an invitation to the eunuch and, in return, the eunuch extends an invitation back to Philip. It is a subject-to-subject relationship in which Philip engages the eunuch with the question, “Do you understand what you are reading?” (Acts 8:30). In asking this question, Philip gives the eunuch the opportunity to offer something to the relationship. In return, the eunuch asks Philip the question, “How can I, unless someone guides me?,” thereby giving Philip permission to teach and to share. Through Philip, God invites the eunuch into a subject-to-subject relationship rather than merely as an object to be converted or won over to Christ, though a relationship with Christ is, indeed, the end result.

Interestingly, the relationship that God forms between the Ethiopian eunuch and Christ grows out of Word and Sacrament, the very centerpieces of Christian worship. God sends Philip to the eunuch while he is reading God’s Word from the Old Testament book of Isaiah (Acts 8:28). It is the eunuch’s engagement with the Word that leads him into a conversation with Philip and through which Philip is able to share with the eunuch the good news of Jesus. Through the Word, God works in the eunuch’s life to grow a relationship with Christ. Likewise, having heard the good news of Jesus, the eunuch seeks to be baptized—“Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36). Through baptism, the eunuch is brought into the community of faith and his relationship with Christ is sealed.

In Luke’s powerful telling of this story, God works through Philip and through Word and Sacrament to establish a relationship between the eunuch and Christ. The story

invites us to consider how God works through us and through the practice of Christian worship to bring people into subject-to-subject relationship with the Triune God, with one another, and with the world around us.

Perichoresis

While I was still in seminary, I heard a sermon preached on Trinity Sunday by a guest preacher who began his sermon saying, “There are only two things you need to know about the Trinity. First, it is a mystery. And, second, all things are possible for God.” Sadly, these cursory remarks were the preacher’s only reference to the Trinity in his entire sermon as he proceeded to talk about something completely unrelated to the liturgical and lectionary themes for the day.

Although the above example is a dramatic one, the central theological claim of the Trinity has all too often been glossed over or even, all but ignored in Western theology. In *The Crucified God*, Jürgen Moltmann writes, “In practice, the religious conceptions of many Christians prove to be no more than a weakly Christianized monotheism . . . From the time of Melancthon, and particularly since Schleiermacher and the moral theology of the nineteenth century, the doctrine of the Trinity seems to have been regarded in Protestantism as no more than a theological speculation with no relevance for life, a kind of higher theology mystery for initiates.”² Over recent years, the Eastern church’s emphasis on the immanent Trinity with its understanding of perichoretic relationship as being at the very heart of God’s identity has deeply enriched the Western church’s

² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 348-49.

theological understandings of the relevance and significance of God's triune nature, particularly as it relates to its understanding of the church in mission.

The Inherent Relationality of the Triune God

The Western church's traditional understanding of the Trinity has emphasized the outward work of each person of the Trinity. The Father works outwardly by sending the Son. Alongside the Father, the Son works outwardly by sending the Spirit. Alongside the Father and the Son, the Spirit works outwardly by sending the church. This economic understanding of the Trinity tends to ground God's unity in the oneness of God the Father from which the Son and the Spirit and, through the Son and the Spirit, the church flow. In contrast the Eastern church has grounded God's unity in the inherent relationality of the three distinct persons within the Trinity, an inherent relationality referred to as perichoresis. Dwight Zscheile offers a helpful definition of perichoresis.

In John 17:21, Jesus prays, 'As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.' The deeply relational identity of Jesus, the Father, and the Spirit in the Gospels came to be described in later centuries in terms of *perichoresis*, or the mutual indwelling of the three divine persons. *Perichoresis* literally means 'whirl,' 'rotation,' 'circulating or walking around.' With regard to the Trinity, it describes a relationship of dynamic mutuality, equality, openness, and shared participation among Father, Son, and Spirit.³

As Jürgen Moltmann argues in *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, so inherent are the relationships within the Trinity that the three persons of the Trinity cannot exist apart from their relationality one with another—"Persons exist in their particular, unique natures as Father, Son, and Spirit in their relationships to one another, and are determined

³ Dwight J. Zscheile, *Cultivating Sent Communities: Missional Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012), 14.

through these relationships. It is in these relationships that they are persons. Being a person in this respect means existing-in-relationship.”⁴ So dependent on one another are the three persons of the Trinity that their personhood and their mutual relationality cannot be separated.

The Three persons are independent in that they are divine, but as Persons they are deeply bound to one another and dependent on one another. But this relational understanding of the Persons has as its premise the ‘substantial’ interpretation of their individuality; the one does not replace the other . . . Person and relation therefore have to be understood in a reciprocal relationship. Here there are no persons without relations; but there are no relations without persons either . . . Only when we are capable of thinking of Persons, relations, and changes in the relations *together* does the idea of the Trinity lose its usual static, rigid quality. Then not only does the eternal life of the triune God become conceivable; its eternal vitality becomes conceivable too.⁵

It is in this inherent mutual relationality of the three persons that comprise the Trinity that the unity, or oneness, of God exists. Again, as Moltmann writes, “An eternal life process takes place in the triune God through the exchange of energies. The Father exists in the Son, the Son in the Father, and both of them in the Spirit, just as the Spirit exists in both the Father and the Son. By virtue of their eternal love they live in one another to such an extent, and dwell in one another to such an extent, that they are one.”⁶ According to a perichoretic understanding of the Trinity, God’s oneness emerges from God’s threeness rather than God’s threeness flowing forth out of God the Father’s oneness.

In her now classic work *God For Us*, Catholic theologian Catherine LaCugna also claims perichoresis as her dominant image for the Trinity, offering up a number of

⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 172.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 172, 74.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 174-75.

helpful and creative images to describe the significance of the Trinity's inherent relationality for the life of the church and our lives as disciples in it.

Effective as a defense both against tritheism and Arian subordinationism, *perichoresis* expressed the idea that the three divine persons mutually inhere in one another, draw life from one another, 'are' what they are by relation to one another. *Perichoresis* means being-in-one-another, permeation without confusion . . . to be a divine person is to be *by nature* in relation to other persons . . . Each person expresses both what he/she is (and, by implication, what the other two are), and at the same time expresses what God is: ecstatic, relational, dynamic, vital. *Perichoresis* provides a dynamic model of persons in communion based on mutuality and interdependence.⁷

Another common image used to describe the mutual interrelatedness of the Trinity is the image of the divine dance. Again, LaCugna writes,

Choreography suggests the partnership of movement, symmetrical but not redundant, as each dancer expresses and at the same time fulfills him/herself towards the other. In interaction and inter-course, the dancers (and the observers) experience one fluid motion of encircling, encompassing, permeating, enveloping, outstretching. There are neither leaders nor followers in the divine dance, only an eternal movement of reciprocal giving and receiving, giving again and receiving again.⁸

According to this perichoretic understanding of God's Triune nature, God is, at God's core, the God of relationship.

Subject-to-Subject Relationships

A significant characteristic of the perichoretic relationships that exist within the divine life of the Trinity is their nature as subject-to-subject relationships and not subject-to-object relationships. Subject-to-subject relationships are relationships in which all persons within the relationship have the inherent power to act equally upon one another,

⁷ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 270-71.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 272.

thus mutually influencing one another. Subject-to-object relationships are relationships in which there is an unequal balance of power in which one person in the relationship has more power to act upon or influence another person in the relationship who has less power. As Jürgen Moltmann writes,

If the divine life is understood perichoretically, then it cannot be consummated by merely one subject at all. It is bound to consist of the living fellowship of the three Persons who are related to one another and exist in one another. Their unity does not lie in the one lordship of God; it is to be found in the unity of their trinity . . . Through the concept of perichoresis, all subordinationism in the doctrine of the Trinity is avoided . . . Here the three Persons are equal; they live and are manifested in one another and through one another.⁹

In these subject-to-subject relationships, distinct personhood is not in any way diminished through the relationships that are shared one with another, but rather is enriched in ways that make each person richer together than apart. Unique personhood is not consumed by the relationship but enriched through it. In the words of Miroslav Volf,

Perichoresis refers to the reciprocal *interiority* of the Trinitarian persons. In every divine person as a subject, the other persons also indwell; all mutually permeate one another, though in so doing they do not cease to be distinct persons . . . Perichoresis is ‘co-inherence in one another without any coalescence or commixture’ . . . The one divine person is not only itself, but rather carries within itself also the other divine persons, and only in this indwelling of the other persons within it is it the person it really is.¹⁰

Thinking about the inherently subject-to-subject relationships that exist within the divine life of the Trinity informs our thinking about the relationships into which we are called to dwell as God’s people, relationships in which each person is equally honored and respected and not manipulated or diminished.

⁹ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, 175-76.

¹⁰ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Sacra Doctrina (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 209.

The Cross and Perichoresis

If each person of the Trinity is equal one to another and mutually dependent upon one another and if the mission of the Trinity, as will be discussed later, is to draw all creation into a subject-to-subject relationship within the divine self, then what is the unique role of Jesus as the subject of the world's salvation? Then what is the role of the cross?

Moltmann works hard to argue for the centrality of the cross even within a perichoretic understanding of the Trinity—"It is only in fellowship with the first-born of creation that the world will be drawn into the Trinitarian life of God."¹¹ Indeed, the central claim Moltmann makes about the Trinity is the inherent centrality of the cross to the Trinitarian understanding of God—"The theology of the cross must be the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the Trinity must be the theology of the cross."¹²

For Moltmann, the only way to understand the event of the cross is through a Trinitarian understanding of God. Apart from such a Trinitarian understanding, God the Father is a merciless judge who condemns his own Son to a cruel and bitter death. However, as part of such a Trinitarian understanding, the event of the cross reveals itself as involving all three persons of the Trinity in the ultimate act of suffering love on behalf of a broken and hurting world, the act through which all creation is justified, that is, restored to right relationship with God's own self.

To understand what happened between Jesus and his God and Father on the cross, it is necessary to talk in Trinitarian terms. The Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son. The grief of the Father here is just as important as the

¹¹ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, 166.

¹² *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, 356.

death of the Son. The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father, and if God has constituted himself as the Father of Jesus Christ, then he also suffers the death of the Son.¹³

In the cross, Father and Son are now most deeply separated in forsakenness and at the same time are most inwardly one in their surrender. What proceeds from this event between Father and Son is the Spirit which justifies the godless, fills the forsaken with love and even brings the dead alive, since even the fact that they are dead cannot exclude them from this event of the cross; the death in God also includes them.¹⁴

For Moltmann, it is inconceivable to think about the Trinity apart from the cross and, likewise, the cross apart from the Trinity. Only in the event of the cross does the identity and mission of the Trinity become known. Only within the life of the Trinity does the event of the cross become the act of self-suffering love offered and effected on behalf of the entire world. Again, in the words of Moltmann, “The content of the doctrine of the Trinity is the real cross of Christ himself. The form of the crucified Christ is the Trinity.”¹⁵ Only from a Trinitarian understanding of the event of the cross does a theology of hope emerge, a theology in which the Triune God is fully present with us in the midst of our suffering *and* in which all of our human suffering is fully present within the Triune life of God.

The Mission of the Perichoretic God

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved

¹³ Ibid., 359.

¹⁴ Ibid., 361.

¹⁵ Ibid., 363.

through him” (John 3:16-17). Just as the Triune God is defined by the perichoretic relationships that exist within God’s self, so also is God’s mission perichoretic in nature. Indeed, the very mission of the perichoretic God is to draw all creation into relationship with the divine relationships that exist within God’s own self. Nowhere is this perichoretic mission better expressed than in the 15th-century icon of the Trinity by Andrei Rublev (see Figure 6.1, p. 193). Here Rublev depicts three persons seated around a table, each equal in stature and glory. Yet, one side of the table remains empty, the side facing those who are viewing the icon. It is as if the icon is inviting us, “Come, sit at the table with us. Come, be in relationship with us. Come, find refreshment and joy and peace and life here with us.” As Moltmann writes, “To throw open the circulatory movement of the divine light and the divine relationships, and to take men and women, with the whole of creation, into the life-stream of the triune God: that is the meaning of creation, reconciliation and glorification.”¹⁶

The mission of the Trinity is nothing less than to welcome, invite, and engage us, together with all of creation, into the divine life that exists between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This relationship between the Trinity and us is made possible only through the event of Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection from the grave on Easter morning. Through the self-giving of the Father, Son, and Spirit through the cross, the Triune God empties God’s self of all divine prerogative to remain separate from us, God’s creation, broken by sin, and instead opens wide the door, inviting us to life within the divine relationship, a relationship defined by love. In this radical giving of God’s own self for

¹⁶ *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, 178.

us, the power of sin, death, and devil is destroyed once and for all and there is no longer anything that can separate us from God's love. Again, as Moltmann writes,

If one conceives of the Trinity as an event of love in the suffering and the death of Jesus—that is something which faith must do—then the Trinity is no self-contained group in heaven, but an eschatological process open for men on earth, which stems from the cross of Christ. By the secular cross on Golgotha, understood as open vulnerability and as the love of God for loveless and unloved, dehumanized men, God's being and God's life is open to true man. There is no 'outside the gate' with God (W. Borchert), if God himself is the one who died outside the gate on Golgotha for those who are outside.¹⁷

Catherine LaCugna also describes God's mission in the world in terms of this sharing of the Trinitarian life with us and all creation.

The life of God is not something that belongs to God alone. *Trinitarian life is also our life*. As soon as we free ourselves from thinking that there are two levels to the Trinity, one *ad intra*, the other *ad extra*, then we see that there is one life of the triune God, a life in which we graciously have been included as partners. Followers of Christ are made sharers in the very life of God, partakers of divinity as they are transformed and perfected by the Spirit of God. The 'motive' of God's self-communication is union with the creature through *theosis*.¹⁸

This Trinitarian life invites us not only into a shared relationship with God, but also into ever deeper relationships with one another.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not ultimately a teaching about 'God' but a teaching about God's life with us and our life with each other. It is the life of communion and indwelling. God in us, we in God, all of us in each other. This is the 'perichoresis', the mutual interdependence that Jesus speaks of in the Gospel of John: "I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:20-21).¹⁹

¹⁷ *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, 368.

¹⁸ LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 228.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

The perichoretic understanding of the Triune God finds God's oneness in God's threeness, that is, in the perichoretic relationships that are mutually shared between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Not only do these perichoretic relationships define God's inner self, but also God's missional posture toward the world. The Triune God is the God of relationship whose mission it is to draw us and all creation into relationship with God's self, with one another, and with the world for which God gave God's very self on the cross. This perichoretic mission inherent to the life of the Triune God deeply shapes and informs the mission of God's church in the world.

Perichoretic Worship

As the purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between the perichoretic nature and mission of God and the practice of Christian worship, it is necessary to think about how the practice of Christian worship might more fully embody God's perichoretic nature and mission. LaCugna is helpful here.

Perichoresis . . . upholds three central values: inclusiveness, community, and freedom. Since these ways of relating are the hallmarks of divine life, they should characterize the patterns of human persons in communion with one another. Inclusiveness entails accepting a person in light of our own common humanity. Community points to interrelatedness at every level of reality, and contradicts those forces destructive to genuine community, especially sexism and racism. Freedom and its corollary, responsibility, belong to the exercise of personhood under the conditions of genuine community. *Perichoresis*, embodied in inclusiveness, community and freedom, is thus the 'form of life' for God and the ideal of human beings whose communion with each other reflects the life of the Trinity.²⁰

Worship that is perichoretic is worship that is inclusive, that is, worship that welcomes and invites all those who are present into the gracious action of God, ever

²⁰ Ibid., 273.

present in Word and in Sacrament. Such inclusive worship also always seeks to invite and welcome those who are not present into what God is doing in and through Christian worship. Perichoretic worship is marked by radical hospitality in which all God's people are invited into relationship with God, with each other, and with the world.

Worship that is perichoretic is worship that forms and values community. As LaCugna writes, "*Perichoresis* is thus the intradivine model for persons in the human community. *Perichoresis* takes place within God, and the human community is supposed to mirror or imitate this *perichoresis* in its own configuration."²¹ Jesus is fully divine *and* fully human in that he exists fully in community with God, fully in community with others, and fully in community with the world, especially those considered to be on the margins. True Christian worship is worship that seeks to cultivate community between the worshipers and God, between the worshipers and one another, and between the worshipers and the world. Only when all three forms of community formation in worship are present can Christian worship truly be considered perichoretic. Craig Van Gelder also makes this connection between the divine community within the Triune God and the community into which the church is called by the Spirit for the sake of God's mission in the world.

The social reality of the Godhead, in [a perichoretic understanding of the Trinity], becomes the theological foundation for understanding the work of God in the world. Created humanity reflects this social reality of God through the *imago Dei* – humans being created in the image of God. When this understanding is brought into conversation with the Western view of the Trinity, we begin to understand the church, through the redemptive work of Christ, as being created by the Spirit

²¹ Ibid., 276.

as a social community that is missionary by nature in being called and sent to participate in God's mission in the world.²²

Finally, worship that is perichoretic is worship that encourages freedom, that is, the freedom to fully engage as a human subject in Christian worship, fully expressing one's own self in relationship to God, in relationship to others, and in relationship to the larger world. As LaCugna rightly notes, such freedom also entails responsibility, namely, the responsibility that comes from being a full human being participating in relationship with God, with others, and with the world. Such freedom occurs in relationships that are subject-to-subject relationships in which each person in the relationship is free to act fully as an active subject with the other, as opposed to subject-to-object relationships in which one person exercises power over or against another. In Christian worship, God is the primary active subject, calling, gathering, enlightening, and making holy God's people. However, because God is a God of love, having created us in God's own image, God desires us to be subjects in our relationship with God and with others, rather than objects. In Christian worship, our acting as subjects involves taking ownership for our full participation and engagement in our relationship with God, with others, and with the world into which the Spirit sends us to participate in God's mission. Worship that is perichoretic encourages participants to fully engage in every aspect of the God-initiated action that takes place within it. In this way, worship becomes liturgy, the work of the people in response to and in partnership with the work of the Triune God for the sake of the world.

²² Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, 88.

Lutheran Worship

Word and Sacrament as the Center

Recently, a most faithful member of the congregation I serve came to me visibly distraught over an experience she had in worship. This particular member regularly worships at one of our traditional worship services and has a high regard for Lutheran worship. In addition, she highly values reverence as an essential component of true Christian worship. She had the occasion to worship at our contemporary worship service one weekend and was, quite frankly, appalled at the experience. “That was not worship,” she shared. She was not angry. Instead, she had been left spiritually broken by her experience and was grieving the fact that, in her judgment, she had not experienced worship that weekend.

In processing her experience with her, I finally asked her two questions. First, was God’s Word read and proclaimed during the worship service? Her answer was a resounding yes as she then went on to share how God spoke to her through the sermon. Second, were the sacraments shared in a way that conveyed God’s gift of grace? Again, her answer was a resounding yes as she went on to recount the joy of the baptism that happened during the service and of sharing Holy Communion within her family of faith.

At this point in the conversation, I reached for my bookshelf from which I took down *The Book of Concord* and shared with her the words of Article VII from the Augsburg Confession.

It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true

unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places. It is as Paul says in Eph. 4:4, 5, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”²³

Here is defined the very center of Lutheran worship. Lutheran worship revolves around these two things—God’s holy Word and God’s holy sacraments—in and through which God in Christ encounters us with forgiveness, grace, and life, drawing us into relationship with God, with each other, and with the world around us.

In *Central Things*, Gordon Lathrop eloquently describes this Lutheran center to Christian worship—“The Lutheran tradition of liturgy, at its best, is the tradition of this confession. A Lutheran approach to the Christian assembly for worship should always ask whether word and sacrament are strongly at the center of the meeting, graciously unobscured, speaking and doing the gospel of Jesus in clarity.”²⁴ Word and sacrament are what Lathrop refers to as the essentials of Christian worship.

These essentials are, quite simply, a community gathered around word and sacrament. Worship that carries this Christian center, holds these things as central, is “worship in word and sacrament.” Or, to say the matter more fully, the essentials for Christian worship are *an open and participating community gathered on the Lord’s Day in song and prayer around the scriptures read and preached, around the baptismal washing, enacted or remembered, around the holy supper, and around the sending to a needy world.*²⁵

Through such worship with word and sacrament at its center, God in Christ encounters us, drawing us into life-changing relationship. “Christian worship is the communal encounter with the grace of God incarnate in Jesus Christ, and it involves the encounter

²³ Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord; the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia,: Mühlenberg Press, 1959), 32.

²⁴ Gordon Lathrop, *Central Things Worship in Word and Sacrament*, Worship Matters (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 20.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

with those concrete, flesh-and-blood things that connect us to the flesh of Jesus and so engage us in that grace.”²⁶ As Lathrop notes, this life-transforming encounter with the crucified and risen Christ through Christian worship with word and sacrament at its center is urgently needed in our world today.

In 1959, in an important little book entitled *Worship in Word and Sacrament* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), Lutheran theologian Ernest B. Koenker, wrote, “Together, worship, Word, and Sacrament embody the living Christ, whom we encounter in the service; when and where this occurs, tired, harassed people experience the joy, the renewal, the edification, that comes only from the life of God” (pp. 7-8). Half a century later, this assertion is still true, and if anything, even more urgent.²⁷

Once I reminded my distraught member of the center of Christian worship, that is, Word and Sacrament, grounded in the Lutheran Confessions, a visible sense of relief and peace swept over her. Though she may not have appreciated the style of music or the informality of dress or the video screens, she could now affirm that, indeed, this was Lutheran worship. Sometime later, this same member returned to my office to thank me for reminding her about what is most important in worship and to express her disappointment in herself for not being more open to what God was doing through that worship experience. Thankfully, Lutheran worship, centered in Word and Sacrament, does not depend on our receptivity to what it is that God is doing through it. Whether she liked it or not, this member had been encountered by Christ through Word and Sacrament through that contemporary worship experience and, in time, her life had been transformed by it.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

God as the Active Agent

Lutheran worship claims God as the active agent encountering us with the crucified and risen Christ through Word and Sacrament. Lutheran worship, therefore, is not so much an act that we do or perform for God, but rather an act that God performs for us. Lutheran worship views God as the giver of the gifts and us as the recipients of those gifts. In the words of Gordon Lathrop,

The central things of Christian worship are not so much things that we do as events where God has promised to act. There is no “temple” in the city. God and the Lamb take its place. That is, our praise, our worship, our action, our sacrifice, even our seeking, are not the heart of Christian worship. God’s presence, God’s gift, the very fruit of the tree of life, is. Bath, table, prayer, and word are important to “every seeking soul” because God is there, wiping away tears, giving life.

The word *worship* can thus mislead us. The word can sound as if the praise we give to God is the heart of the matter, as if we call this event a *service* because we are giving service to God. The service, rather, is first of all a service God renders to any and all who come. Everything is turned on its head. It is not just “worship.” It is “worship in word and sacrament,” worship with the giving away of the leaves and the fruit of the tree of life at its center. In astonishing mercy, God uses our assembly, our words, our actions with water, bread and wine, our place and our time, as the means of the presence of these leaves and this fruit.²⁸

In short, Lutheran worship understands God as the active agent, or subject, of what happens in worship. In worship, God gives, encountering us with the gift of God’s grace in Jesus. In worship, we receive through faith what God gives with glad and thankful hearts.

In his article “What Is Essential in Lutheran Worship?,” Stephen Paulson passionately argues for this downward direction of Christian worship from God to us rather than an upward direction of Christian worship from us to God.

Worship of the preached God means that time, space, and direction operate in a brand-new way on account of Christ, who, after all, did not wait for further

²⁸ Ibid., 21.

sacrifices or keep himself in heaven above, but came down into our sinful world's time and place to make something new and end all sacrifice. Worship can only be worthwhile when it follows the path of the incarnation all the way to the cross. This presents us with a basic distinction that should guide all worship planning or liturgies: It is not our sacrifice that matters, but Christ's benefits—*beneficium*, not *sacrificium*. It is not what we give but what Christ gives that matters. This is such a sea change that we can hardly even call what happens on Sunday “worship,” since worship concerns giving God what is due the divinity. Instead, what happens in worship is whatever God gives to us while we are yet ungodly. The word of God is the whole thing and the only reason for worship.²⁹

Such an understanding of Christian worship as being from God to us rather than from us back to God radically turns our basic conceptions of Christian worship upside-down and changes the expectations we bring to our experience of it.

From this radically inverted understanding of Christian worship, Paulson develops five essential principles that are particularly revealing of our Lutheran theology of worship.

It is not what you are giving to God, even by way of thanks, but what God is giving to you that matters. So, we are to avoid all temptations to confuse these. It must be God who acts for you through his holy word. From this we have a simple definition of true, Christian worship, that “nothing else may ever happen in [this new house] except that our dear Lord himself may speak to us through his holy Word and we respond to him through prayer and praise.” Thus we have our principles for evangelical worship:

- First, the **direction** will be clear: from God to us—first and finally.
- Second, the **means** God uses to get to us will be clear: his Word, who is Jesus Christ crucified.
- Third, something will **happen**. Better yet, nothing will happen except that “our dear Lord himself speaks to us,” permanently interrupting our lives and cultures of death by bringing new life—not metaphorically, but really.
- Fourth, this limits **human tradition** as the starting point and “meaning” or purpose for worship (like the “papists’ churches with their bishops’ chrism and censuring”).

²⁹ Stephen Paulson. “What Is Essential in Lutheran Worship?” *Word & World* Volume 26, Number 2 (2006): 157.

- Fifth, this means that the “**human role**” in worship is first to **hear** the preaching of Scripture, then in response to “call on him together,” that is to **pray together**.³⁰

As Helmar Junghans summarizes,

The decisive reality of worship is God’s action. God acts without human beings entreating him. God instigates matters and bestows a promise through his Word. Human beings are the recipients, who accept this Word with thanksgiving and trust him, that is, believe him. They are incapable of climbing up into heaven and moving God to be gracious. Instead, God must make the first move, that is, through his word make a particular promise that human beings grasp with firm faith.³¹

Lutheran worship understands God to be the active agent, acting upon the gathered assembly through God’s holy Word and holy Sacraments. Worship is primarily what God does to us and not what we do to God. Through Word and Sacrament, God gives the gift of grace and we receive that gift through faith.

Called to Participate in God’s Action

Though Lutheran worship clearly holds that God is the acting agent, solely initiating the encounter that occurs through Word and Sacrament between the gathered assembly and the crucified and risen Christ, it also holds that the gathered assembly is called by the Holy Spirit to be active participants in the action as it occurs. The gathered assembly is called not to be a passive object acted upon by a passionless God, but rather fully involved as an active subject in receiving the gifts that God gives and in responding to those gifts with lives of praise and thanksgiving, lived out in love of God and love of neighbor.

³⁰ Ibid, 160.

³¹ Helmar Junghans, “Luther on the Reform of Worship,” *Lutheran Quarterly* XIII (1999): 320.

Timothy Wengert lifts up this call of the assembly to be active participants in what God is up to in his book *Centripetal Worship*.

To participate is, in the deepest sense, not so much about giving as it is receiving. It isn't so much about singing a solo as it is to hear others' voices; not so much getting everybody's attention as receiving your share with all the others. But in fact, it is both to give and to receive for it is to take a part (in all the ambiguity of that phrase).

Participation means operating as subjects, not objects. When we realize what the worship will entail, we come ready to absorb what lies inside and is revealed through its pattern and content (its form and substance, in other terms).³²

Lutheran worship is participatory in that through it, God calls us into active relationship with God, with each other, and with the world, inviting us to share our God-given gifts both in the assembly itself as well as with the world beyond the walls of the assembly. In worship, God, the active subject, calls us through Word and Sacrament, to live out our freed and forgiven identity as subjects with God in living out God's mission of reconciliation in the world. Again, in the words of Wengert,

Worship is not a perfunctory obligation that must simply be endured by an audience observing from a distance. Rather, worship is a corporate action; the congregation, led by the pastor and worship leaders (most of whom are lay members of the congregation), together listen to and feed on the promises of God, give thanks, and articulate the needs of the world, begging for wisdom and healing. By sounds and physical movement the assembly "assembles" the event. There are no bystanders. The assembly gathers, engages with the word of God as it is made audible and visible in and to themselves—the body of Christ—and in language, images, water, and food, and then the assembly is sent out.³³

Such participation is more than merely doing one's part to make sure the worship happens, but rather participation in the very life and mission of the Triune God.

Whether the issue is real or imagined, being able to participate fully in worship is not a "fix" for a problem. Participatory worship is much more than an answer to a

³² Timothy J. Wengert and Dirk G. Lange, *Centripetal Worship: The Evangelical Heart of Lutheran Worship*, Worship Matters; Worship Matters. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 2007), 52.

³³ *Ibid.*, 56.

problem. Problems are dilemmas for which a solution can be found. Problems have answers. The question for which worship is an appropriate response is much deeper than a problem. That question is the crisis of being human. Problems, in other words, have solutions; crises require presence. Worship is the presence of the triune God for a people formed by gathering around the media that make God's word visible and audible. Worship is the means by which we are formed to live by faith in the crisis that is life; for worship is made up of the gifts that do save us, gifts given by God: word, water, bread, and wine.³⁴

Lutheran worship is, first and foremost, the action of the Triune God, but because that action is *for us*, it calls us into full participation as subjects within God's mission in the world.

Called into the Mission of the Triune God

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”³⁵ With these words, the presiding minister greets the gathered assembly, extending an invitation into the very life and mission of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is the Triune God who gathers the assembly together. It is the Triune God who speaks to the assembly through the reading and proclamation of God's Word. It is the Triune God who welcomes the assembly at the table, feeding the assembly with the gifts of forgiveness and life. It is the Triune God who sends the assembly out into the world to share in God's mission. Gordon Lathrop in his classic text *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* puts it this way—

The primary experienced theology of the assembly is trinitarian. To begin is to be in the Trinity. To read scripture and preach—to read the word of God, enlivened by the Spirit, to speak of Christ—is to be in the Trinity. To wash, to enact the event that the Synoptic Gospels show as an image of the triune God—Jesus standing with the people being washed, the Spirit descending, the voice

³⁴ Ibid., 54.

³⁵ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada., *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

speaking—is to be in the Trinity. To give thanks at table—to eat and drink the signs of Christ, enlivened by the Spirit, in thanksgiving to God—is to be in the Trinity. To find all these things accessible to outsiders and the ungodly is to behold the stunning surprise of the holiness of the Trinity. One could even say that “Trinity” is what Christians who have experienced meeting in the risen Christ have found they must say about God; it is the dogma that is the “soul” of the liturgy.³⁶

To engage in Christian worship is to engage in nothing less than the life of the Trinity whose mission it is to give one’s one life to us and to all creation. Lutheran worship, therefore, is worship that exists within the very life and mission of the Triune God, inviting and drawing the gathered assembly into God’s own self.

Called to Love and Serve the Neighbor

Even as Lutheran worship begins with the presiding minister inviting the gathered assembly into the life of the Triune God, so Lutheran worship ends with the gathered assembly being sent out into the world with these or similar words—“Go in peace. Serve the Lord.”³⁷ In worship, the Triune God gathers us around Word and Sacrament so that we can be sent into the world to share God’s gifts with others. In his article “Disrupting Worship,” Dirk Lange eloquently articulates the inherent relationship between Christian worship and Christian ethics.

What happens in the New Testament, however, is a redefinition of the metaphor of gift. Something has been given—the gift of Jesus Christ himself—but the people can give nothing in return. The only possible response is ministry, service, *leitourgia* to the neighbor, continual openness toward those not included, the outsider, the outcast, the refugee, the other in all his or her suffering and need. The only liturgical response—if we can even call it a “response”—is an ethical response or . . . perhaps not a response but liturgy, which is ethics itself . . . Liturgy as ethics is continually attentive to the voice of the neighbor calling,

³⁶ Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*, 138.

³⁷ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada., *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

calling the participant out; it is the suffering and need of the other pleading. Liturgy is constantly being disrupted by that voice and thus continually points beyond itself.³⁸

True Christian worship calls us beyond ourselves toward our neighbors in need, nourishing and strengthening us with the gifts of God so that we might share those gifts with others. As Timothy Wengert rightly notes, “‘Bringing people to Jesus Christ’ means being brought to Christ ourselves and taking our selves—our lives, our comforts, our dreams—to the edges where our suffering neighbor is calling out for help.”³⁹

As the action of the Triune God through Word and Sacrament, Lutheran worship draws us into the very life and mission of the Triune God, calling us into relationship with God, with each other, and with the world. While the Triune God always remains the active subject initiating the relationship, this same Triune God calls us to be active participants in God’s action, actively receiving God’s gifts, actively letting ourselves be transformed by those gifts, and actively using the gifts we have been given for the world. In short, we are gathered so that we can be sent.

Bath, table, prayer, word, and an assembly of seeking souls—there is our simple list. Or, put in action, we gather through the water; we hear the scriptures read and preached and we pray; we set a table, give thanks, eat and drink, and send to the poor. We do the whole thing musically. We work to keep the door open, for going out as well as for coming in. And, most deeply, we realize that God has been the actor here, and then we are sent ourselves. These things are the central things, the marks of worship in word and sacrament. But, once again, why? Because they are the gift of God for the life of the world, and because by them God continually brings us again, together, into faith and so into hope and love.⁴⁰

³⁸ Dirk Lange, “Disrupting Worship,” *Word & World* 26, no. 2 (2006): 134.

³⁹ Wengert and Lange, *Centripetal Worship: The Evangelical Heart of Lutheran Worship*, 76.

⁴⁰ Lathrop, *Central Things Worship in Word and Sacrament*, 76-77.

Faith Practices

The Integration of Belief and Action

As Christians, what we believe matters. As Christians, what we do matters. Faith practices integrate what the Christian community believes with what the Christian community does in a way that both responds to the grace of God active and present in Jesus *and* that benefits individual Christians, the Christian community as a whole and, ultimately, the world.

In her introduction to *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* Dorothy Bass defines faith practices as “patterns of cooperative human activity in and through which life together takes shape over time in response to and in the light of God as known in Jesus Christ.”⁴¹ Later, she and Craig Dykstra articulate, “By ‘Christian practices’ we mean *things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world.*”⁴² In other words, faith practices are what Christians do both in response to what God in Christ Jesus has first done for us and as a living witness to God’s continuing activity in our lives and in our world through the power of the Spirit.

As such, faith practices form a bridge in the Christian community between what the community believes and how the community lives. As Bass describes,

First, as meaningful clusters of human activity (including the activity of thinking) that require and engender knowledge on the part of practitioners, *practices resist the separation of thinking from acting*, and thus of Christian doctrine from Christian life. Second, *practices are social, belonging to groups of people across*

⁴¹ Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 3.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 18.

generations—a feature that undergirds the communal quality of the Christian life. Third, *practices are rooted in the past but are also constantly adapting to changing circumstances*, including new cultural settings. Fourth, *practices articulate wisdom that is in the keeping of practitioners who do not think of themselves as theologians.*⁴³

Miroslav Volf takes the relationship between theology and practice one step further to argue that the very purpose of theology is to lead to right, or good, practice. In other words, Christian theology should directly impact how Christians, both individually and corporately, live their lives.

Theology is an (academic) enterprise whose object of study is God and God's relation to the world and whose purpose is not simply to deliver "knowledge," but to serve a way of life. Put slightly differently, my contention is that *at the heart of every good theology lies not simply a plausible intellectual vision but more importantly a compelling account of a way of life, and that theology is therefore best done from within the pursuit of this way of life.*⁴⁴

In short, faith practices are the living out in daily life of Christian belief. A goal of the Christian faith, then, is for individuals and communities to display a visible congruence between what they believe and what they do, between what they think and how they act, between what they confess and who they are. Faith practices both bear witness to this desired congruence and help to form it.

The Interdependence of Belief and Practice

So, does Christian belief shape Christian practice or do Christian practices shape and form Christian belief? The answer, of course, is "Yes!" As Amy Plantinga Pauw

⁴³ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 247.

succinctly states, “Practices shape religious belief, but religious beliefs also shape practices.”⁴⁵

First and foremost, Christian belief shapes Christian practice. In other words, what we believe about God directly informs, or at least *should* inform, how we live in relationship with and in response to God. As Miroslav Volf argues,

Christian beliefs shape Christian practices . . . Christian practices have what we may call an “as-so” structure (or correspondence structure): *as* God has received us in Christ, *so* we too are to receive our fellow human beings . . . in an appropriately qualified way, in relation to the practice of hospitality as well as in relation to all other practices, we must say: “As Christ, so we.”⁴⁶

Later, he writes,

Practices are essentially belief-shaped, and beliefs are essentially practice-shaping . . . more than just normatively guiding practices, Christian beliefs narrate the divine action by which human beings are constituted as agents of practices, by which they are placed into a determinate normative space, and by which they are inspired and charged to imitate God.⁴⁷

What we believe God has first done for us determines what we do in response to God and in relationship with God, with one another, and with the world. Christian belief shapes Christian practices.

Yet, at the same time, Christian practices also shape and form Christian belief.

Again, in the words of Volf,

People come to believe either because they find themselves already engaged in Christian practices (say, by being raised in a Christian home) or because they are attracted to them. In most cases, Christian practices come first and Christian beliefs follow—or rather, beliefs are already entailed in practices, so that their explicit espousing becomes a matter of bringing to consciousness what is implicit in the engagement in practices themselves . . . Put differently, by being attracted

⁴⁵ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 250.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 254.

to and habituated in a set of practices, they have embraced the set of beliefs that sustain these practices and that are inscribed in them.⁴⁸

Because what we do together as Christians in our practices shapes and informs, rightly or wrongly, what it is that we believe, we must be careful that what we do leads to right belief. Simply put, wrong-doing leads to wrong-understanding while right-doing leads to right understanding. Thus, Volf writes, “‘Right (communal) doing’ seems in some sense a precondition for right understanding. The obverse is also true: ‘wrong doing’—especially if deeply patterned and long lived—leads to twisted understanding.”⁴⁹ Because of the central role of Christian worship in the life of the Christian community, special attention needs to be paid to making sure that how we worship God together faithfully reflects what we believe about God so that as individuals engage in the practice of Christian worship right-belief is formed.

Christian Worship as the Embodiment of Faith Practices

In many ways, the practice of Christian worship embodies all that has been said about faith practices up to this point. In the practice of Christian worship, we enact as the Christian community on a regular basis what it is that we believe about God. In the practice of Christian worship, belief and action come together. What we believe about God certainly informs and shapes what it is that we do in Christian worship. However, the reverse is true as well. What we do in Christian worship also shapes and informs what it is that we believe about God.

In public worship, the Christian community takes all these gestures and does them on a grand scale. We use the familiar elements of everyday life—food,

⁴⁸ Ibid., 256.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 257.

water, oil, embrace, word—to proclaim and celebrate what God is doing in the world and in our lives. Worship distills the Christian meaning of the practices and holds them up for the whole community to see. We confess our failure to do them well, receive assurance of God’s grace, hear stories and speak words that relate our practices to God’s own creative and redemptive work, and go out strengthened to live more faithfully.

Worship is to daily life, a wise pastor said, as *consommé* is to broth. In liturgy at its best—in the common work of the people assembled to hear the Word of God and celebrate the sacraments—the meaning of all the practices appears in a form that is thick and tasty, darker and richer than what we get in most everyday situations. In Holy Communion (or, as it is also called, the Lord’s Supper or the Eucharist), every one of the Christian practices finds guidance. The worshipers experience the extravagant hospitality of God at the table and commit themselves to extend God’s welcome to others; they collectively say no to what is harmful and yes to what is good; they keep the Sabbath holy in a joyful celebration of Christ’s resurrection.

A Christian community at worship is a community gathered for rehearsal. It is “practicing” the practices in the same way a child practices catching a ball or playing scales.⁵⁰

In a very real sense, the practice of Christian worship is the ritual embodiment or enactment of what it is that the community believes about God on a weekly basis.

As faith practices are, by definition, the integration of belief and action, so too is the practice of Christian worship the dual act of both celebrating who God is and living out who God calls us to be. In a compelling article, Miroslav Volf lifts up the practice of Christian worship as the dual, or bilateral, act of adoration and action.

Christian worship consists both in obedient service to God and in the joyful praise of God. Both of these elements are brought together in Hebrews 13:15-16, a passage that comes close to giving a definition of Christian worship: “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” The sacrifice of praise and the sacrifice of good works are two fundamental aspects of the Christian way of being-in-the-world. They are at the same time the two constituent elements of Christian

⁵⁰Dorothy C. Bass, *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 9.

worship: *authentic Christian worship takes place in a rhythm of adoration and action.*⁵¹

Volf goes on to articulate how the act of praising God leads us into the world to enact God's love for the world.

When we adore God, we worship God by enjoying God's presence and by celebrating God's mighty deeds of liberation. When we are involved in the world, we worship God by announcing God's liberation, and we cooperate with God by the power of the Spirit through loving action. Christian worship is bivalent . . . Authentic Christian adoration cannot take place in isolation from the world. Because the God Christians adore is engaged in the world, adoration of God leads to action in the world and action in the world leads to adoration of God. Adoration and action are distinct, but nevertheless *interdependent* activities . . . In thanking, blessing or praising God, a person expresses his or her own relation toward the God he or she is adoring: joyous *gratitude* for what God has done and reverent *alignment* with God's character from which God's actions spring forth.⁵²

The practice of Christian worship is, indeed, adoration, but such adoration of God must lead us to put our belief and faith in action in the world lest it become false adoration, that is, adoration of something less than or other than the Triune God. Again, in the powerful and eloquent words of Volf,

Only those who help the Jews may sing the Gregorian chant, Dietrich Bonhoeffer rightly said, in the context of Nazi Germany. Only those who are actively concerned with the victims of economic, political, racial or sexual oppression—who are doing “the significant something”—can genuinely worship God. Without action in the world, the adoration of God is empty and hypocritical, and degenerates into irresponsible and godless quietism.⁵³

As our Christian belief shapes and forms our Christian practices and as such practices also shape and form our Christian belief, so too, in Christian worship, adoration of God leads to our joining with God's action in the world and our joining with God's action in

⁵¹ Miroslav Volf, “Worship as Adoration and Action: Reflections on a Christian Way of Being-in-the-World,” *Worship: Adoration and Action* (2002): 207.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 208-211.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 211.

the world leads us ever deeper into adoration. Anything less simply is not Christian worship.

Summary

Chapter three discusses in-depth the Biblical and theological lenses undergirding this study of perichoretic worship. Chapter four will describe the methodology used to carry out this study in the context of a particular worshipping community.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is the social science methodology I chose to answer my research question: How might Participatory Action Research interventions deepen the practice of worship in order to cultivate perichoretic relationships? I used a mixed-methods research approach using both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Rationale

As David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick explain in *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, Participatory Action Research focuses on research *in* action, rather than research *about* action. It is democratic, collaborative, and participatory. It is research that happens alongside of action. It is research that seeks to solve a problem or change something in an institution.¹ In their words, “Action researchers work on the epistemological assumption that the purpose of academic research and discourse is not

¹ David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), 5.

just to describe, understand and explain the world but also to change it.”² Later, Coghlan and Brannick write, “Traditional research begins with what we know and seeks to find what we don’t know. Action research begins with what we don’t know and seeks to find what we don’t know. What we don’t know that we don’t know is the particular fruit of action research.”³ My particular research question focused on designing interventions in a congregation’s practice of Christian worship that sought to make worship more perichoretic, that is, more participatory in the action of forming and growing interdependent, subject-to-subject, and multidirectional relationships with the Triune God, with one another, and with the world. Through my research, I hoped to discover where worship participants experience God’s activity in worship most fully and how to improve the design and leadership of Christian worship so as to encourage a deepening participation in God’s mission through this central faith practice. As such, Participatory Action Research is particularly suited to my research question.

I used the mixed-method research method, that is, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods as part of my Participatory Action Research. Through the use of baseline and end line surveys, I sought to measure the level of transformation in participants’ experience of God’s missional activity through the practice of Christian worship. Through the use of interviews at both the beginning and end of my research and through the use of focus groups following each particular intervention into the practice of Christian worship in the congregation, I sought to describe and give meaning to the participants’ various experiences of God’s missional

² Ibid., 6.

³ Ibid., 60.

activity in forming perichoretic relationships. The particular type of mixed methods research used was transformative, as it sought to effect change within the system.

Biblical and Theological Framework

In Luke 10, Jesus intervenes in the lives of his disciples, sending them out into the world to enact the kingdom in both their words and their actions. “Go on your way,” commands Jesus. “See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves” (10:3). It is an experiment of sorts. The disciples meet with a variety of responses—some positive and some negative. Upon their return, the disciples reflect on their experience. “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” (10:17). The disciples are changed by their encounter in the world and Jesus rejoices in the Holy Spirit, giving thanks to the Father for the Father’s intervention in the world through Jesus’ disciples. The example of Jesus’ intervention in the world with his disciples is loosely reflective of Participatory Action Research. Jesus initiates an intervention with his disciples. The disciples carry out the experiment through their changed behavior. As a result, the disciples experience an adaptive change as they experience the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the world through them. The disciples do not act apart from the Holy Spirit, but they are full participants in what the Holy Spirit is doing in the world through them. Participatory Action Research seeks to effect adaptive change in a community through participatory experimental action.

Theologically, there are aspects of Participatory Action Research that are perichoretic in nature. First and foremost, like the perichoretic understanding of the Triune God in which each person of the Trinity is a full participant in the divine dance, Participatory Action Research is, as its name states, participatory in nature. It seeks to

involve others in the action of research so as to effect change both within the larger system as well as in the participants themselves. Likewise, instead of seeing its research participants as objects merely to be observed or acted upon, Participatory Action Research views its participants as equal subjects in the research in which the participants themselves are actors within the research. This subject-to-subject approach to human relationship is also reflective of the perichoretic understanding of the Triune God in that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are mutual subjects one with another, each integrally involved in the Triune God's mission in the world. As I sought to learn about perichoretic worship, it was intriguing to consider how my research was not only about the perichoretic nature and potential of Christian worship, but that the research methodology I used to study perichoretic worship was also, by its very nature, a perichoretic exercise.

Research Design

Context

The context of my Participatory Action Research was the congregation in which I serve as Lead Pastor. It is a large-sized congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) with a membership of 2,127 and an average weekly worship attendance of 504. It is located in a mid-sized capital city in the Midwest and is comprised primarily of middle-to-upper-middle-class Caucasians, though the congregation has recently experienced an increased presence of minority participants both from the immediate neighborhood as well as from the surrounding community.

Worship is central to the congregation's life, identity, and mission. Everything else that the congregation does—community outreach, global mission, Christian education, small groups, discipleship, etc.—flows out of its worship life. The worship life

is lived out through four weekly worship services—a casual traditional service on Saturdays at 5:00 p.m. in the sanctuary, two formal traditional services on Sundays at 8:00 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. in the sanctuary, and a contemporary service on Sundays at 10:30 a.m. in the congregation’s Parish Life Center—a multi-purpose space designed for worship, fellowship events, and community use. Because my PAR was tied directly to the worship life of the congregation, it was in these four primary worship experiences of the congregation that my PAR interventions took place.

Interventions

The research began by administering a baseline survey of the congregation (see Appendix C). The baseline questionnaire was field tested by the church staff. The questionnaire was made available both online and in print copies to all members of the congregation eighteen years old and older. Invitations to participate in the survey were shared verbally during the announcements at each worship service, in the printed announcements included in the weekly bulletin, and through an e-mail invitation to everyone in the congregation for whom an e-mail address was available. The congregation was given approximately four weeks during the month of December to complete the questionnaire. The baseline questionnaire was designed to measure members’ experience of relationship formation through the practice of Christian worship. Using a Likert scale, respondents were asked to indicate how the current practice of Christian worship in the congregation helps to form and grow relationships between them and God, between them and others in the congregation, and between them and the world.

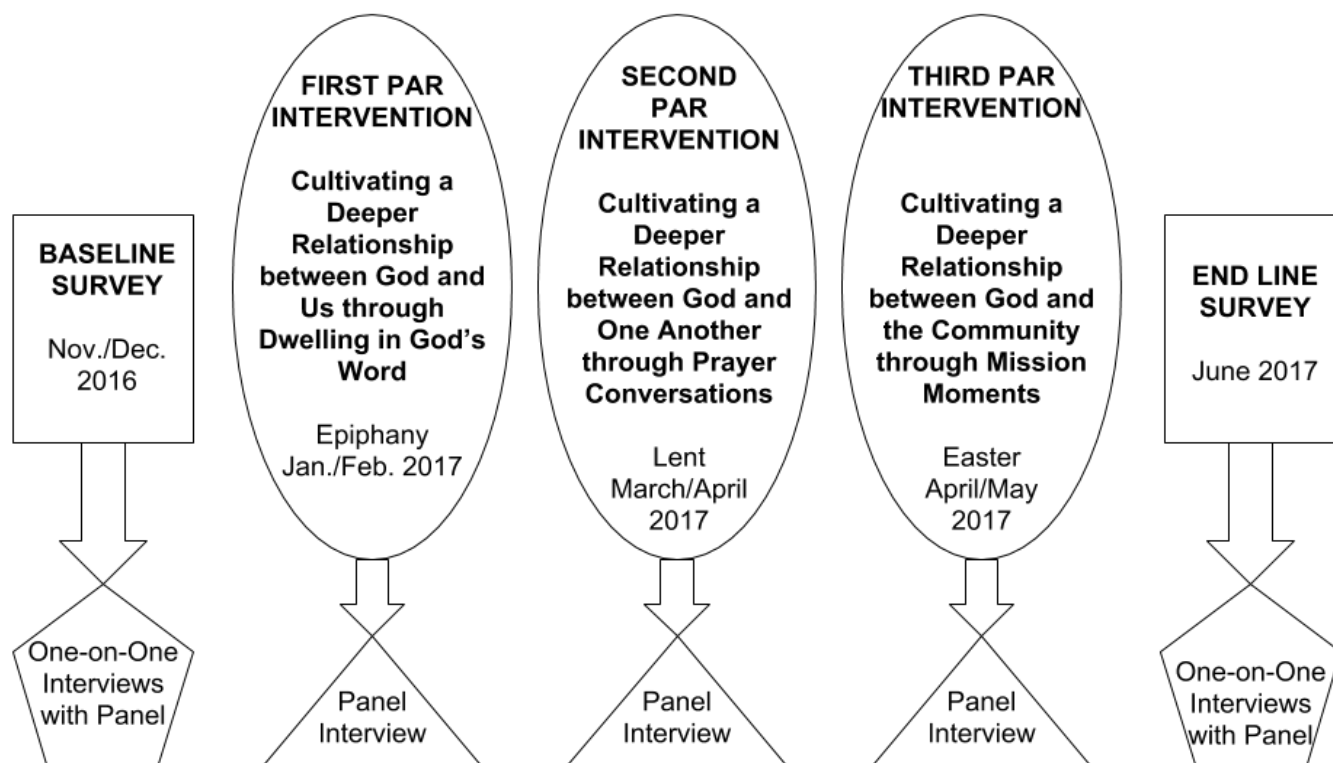
In addition to the baseline survey, individual baseline interviews were conducted with nine members of the congregation, representing each of the congregation’s four

primary weekly worship services. These nine members were chosen as a purposive sample of the congregation and served as the research panel throughout the duration of the PAR. Two members were selected from each of the four worship services, one male and one female, one younger adult and one older adult. In addition, once the eight initial panel members were selected, a ninth member was added to serve on the panel due to this particular member's unique ability to reflect meaningfully and articulately on the presence and activity of God in Christian worship (see Table 5.2, p. 111).

During these baseline interviews, questions similar to those on the baseline questionnaire were asked, inviting members to reflect more deeply on their experience of relationship formation with God, with each other, and with the community through the practice of Christian worship. Interviews took place over the course of the first two weeks in January and lasted between thirty and sixty minutes in length. These interviews were video recorded for the sake of accurate transcription.

Following the baseline survey and interviews, three PAR interventions were initiated sequentially into the worship life of the congregation, one during the season of Epiphany (January-February), one during the season of Lent (March-mid April), and one during the season of Easter (mid April-early June). These PAR interventions were designed to increase the congregation's participation as subjects in God's missional activity of forming relationship between us and God, between us and one another, and between us and the world. Each of these three PAR interventions were followed by a focus group with the panel described above in which panel members were asked to reflect upon how the intervention either helped or hindered them in their subject-to-

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subject participation in God's missional activity through the practice of Christian worship. Each

Figure 4.1 Research Design

of these panel interviews lasted approximately one hour and were video recorded for the sake of accurate transcription.

The first intervention took place during the season of Epiphany (January-February) and focused on increasing the congregation's participation as subjects in God's missional activity of forming relationship between us and God. Each weekend during

each of the four weekly worship services, only the assigned gospel lesson from the Revised Common Lectionary was read; however, this gospel lesson was read three times during each service. Following each reading of the lesson, a period of approximately two minutes of quiet reflection was observed during which congregation members were asked to reflect on a specific question. Following the first reading, members were asked to reflect on the question, What do you hear God saying to you through God's Word? Following the second reading, members were asked to reflect on the question, What do you hear God saying to our congregation through God's Word? Following the third reading, members were asked to reflect on the question, What do you hear God saying to the world through God's Word? Worksheets and writing utensils were provided each week for the congregation members with which they were invited to journal their responses to the three questions (See Appendix E). Worksheets were then collected at the end of each worship service.

The second intervention took place during the season of Lent (February through mid-March) and focused on engaging congregation members in actively sharing in the worship practice of corporate prayer as full subject-to-subject participants with one another. In place of the regular Prayers of Intercessions, during this time congregation members were invited to gather in small groups of three to four persons and to spend time sharing with one another their unique prayers concerns for themselves, for the congregation, and for the world. The idea behind this new practice was that simply through the sharing of prayer concerns with one another, those prayer concerns were also being lifted up to God. Congregation members were then invited and encouraged to include these shared prayer concerns in their daily prayers throughout the coming week.

Following this period of sharing, the presiding minister would close the prayer time with a brief spoken prayer asking God to hear and receive each of the prayer concerns that were shared.

The third intervention took place during the season of Easter (mid-April through early June) and focused on engaging congregation members in God's missional activity of forming relationships between us and the world. During each of the seven weekends following Easter, immediately prior to the Prayers of Intercession, a brief story was shared during worship about a local community agency or ministry with which the congregation partners. Congregation members were then invited to share in conversation with a representative of that particular community agency or ministry during the Adult Forum time between Sunday morning services from 9:15-10:15. Community agencies and ministries that were represented included a local food pantry, a local elementary school, a group home for the blind, a women's shelter, a daily feeding ministry, and a prison ministry.

Following the completion of the three interventions, an end line survey was conducted of the congregation designed to measure how members' experience of God's missional activity in forming relationship through the practice of Christian worship may have been influenced or affected by the PAR interventions (see Appendix D). The end line survey was administered in the same way as the baseline survey at the beginning of the study. The questionnaire was made available both online and in print copies. Congregation members were invited to participate through verbal announcements during worship services, print announcements in the weekly bulletin, and through an e-mail sent to all for whom e-mail addresses were available. In addition, end line interviews were

conducted individually with each member of the panel, asking each of them to reflect on how their experience of God's missional activity in forming relationship through Christian worship may have been influenced or affected by the PAR interventions. The goal of both the end line survey and interviews was to determine if and how congregation members experienced growth in their relationships with God, with one another, and with the community, through the practice of Christian worship.

Circumstantial Events

Two circumstantial events that affected this study included a pastoral transition in the life of the congregation and a significant capital campaign that happened in the middle of the third intervention. These events impacted the interventions in various ways.

A new full-time Pastor of Community Care began serving the congregation in November, one month prior to the implementation of the baseline survey. The full-time Pastor of Community Care was intended to be the third full-time pastor serving the congregation alongside the full-time Lead Pastor and the full-time Pastor of Outreach and Discipleship. However, in late September, just two months prior to the implementation of the baseline survey, the full-time Pastor of Outreach and Discipleship unexpectedly resigned. This unexpected resignation significantly increased the demands on the Lead Pastor and became an intervening variable in the research. In addition to losing the full-time Pastor of Outreach and Discipleship and gaining the full-time Pastor of Community Care, the congregation began the call process for a new full-time Pastor of Outreach and Discipleship. Combined with the added workload for the Lead Pastor, these transitions introduced a significant level of anxiety into the congregational system.

Another significant circumstantial event was the launch of a major capital campaign in the middle of the third PAR intervention, beginning in late April and ending in late May. The threefold purpose of the campaign was to pay down an existing mortgage on a significant 2004 building addition and renovation, raise principal for a potential new building addition and renovation, and continue to grow the congregation's staffing to meet the demands of its growing mission and ministry. The purpose of the proposed new building addition and renovation was to increase and improve hospitality space and add much needed office space. The theme of the campaign was lifted up in multiple ways throughout the life of the congregation, including its worship life. Sermon themes, hymns, and liturgies were designed to lift up the theme of the campaign and the need for continued financial support for the congregation's growing ministries, including its growing outreach to the community.

Processing and Analysis of Data

As a Participatory Action Research study using concurrent mixed-methods, the research included both quantitative and qualitative instruments. Quantitative instruments included both a baseline and end line questionnaire. Qualitative instruments included both individual interview and panel interview protocols.

The quantitative data from the surveys were first entered into Survey Monkey⁴ and then transferred into IBM SPSS Statistics 24⁵. Using SPSS, the data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics, including t-tests to compare and contrast

⁴ *Survey Monkey*. <https://www.surveymonkey.com>.

⁵ *IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows* (version 24.0). Armonk, NY: IBM Corp, 2016.

the data from the baseline and end line surveys and Chi-square tests to compare and contrast data across different demographic categories.

The qualitative data from the individual interviews and panel interviews were first video recorded for the sake of accurate transcription. A professional transcriptionist was used to transcribe the interviews. The transcriptions were then analyzed using the four step method of coding and analysis described by Kathy Charmaz in *Constructing Grounded Theory*.⁶ Initial coding involved word-by-word and line-by-line coding as *in vivo* codes were identified in order to inform the development of significant concepts and themes. Next, these *in vivo* codes were clustered into related concepts and ideas as multiple focused codes emerged. Axial coding then identified the emerging relationships between the focused codes and categories. Finally, theoretical coding was employed to explain the inter-related patterns between the axial codes that emerged and to describe what was learned through the PAR interventions.

Summary

Through the social science research methodology of Participatory Action Research (PAR), this study sought to answer the question, How might PAR interventions deepen the practice of worship in order to cultivate perichoretic relationships? Using mixed-methods research, including both quantitative and qualitative instruments, the study explores how one congregation experienced change in their relationship with God, with one another, and with the community through three specific PAR interventions. Analysis of the quantitative research included statistical analysis including independent t-

⁶ Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 2nd edition ed., Introducing Qualitative Methods (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014).

tests and ANOVA's. Analysis of the qualitative research included a four-step coding process including initial coding, focused coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding. Chapter Five describes and interprets the results of this research.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS OF STUDY AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

Chapter four describes in detail the methodology used in this study. Using the social science methodology of Participatory Action Research (PAR), the study employs a mixed-method approach using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Through three distinct PAR interventions, the study was designed to determine how the practice of worship in a congregation might more deeply cultivate perichoretic relationships with God, with one another, and with the world.

The study began with a baseline survey of the congregation through a questionnaire that was made available both on-line and in print. The baseline survey was designed to measure how the congregation was or was not experiencing growth in relationship through their participation in worship. At the same time, a panel of nine members of the congregation was assembled. A one-on-one baseline interview was conducted with each member of the panel asking them to describe if and how they experienced growth in their relationship with God, with other members of the congregation, and with the world through the practice of worship.

The first worship intervention took place during the season of Epiphany and was designed to more deeply engage worship participants in their relationship with God. Each weekend for eight consecutive weekends, instead of using all four of the assigned

readings from the Revised Common Lectionary, just the assigned gospel reading was read. However, this one reading was read three different times. After each reading, a period of quiet reflection followed during which worship participants were asked to write their responses to three different questions: What do you hear God saying to you through God's Word? What do you hear God saying to our congregation through God's Word? What do you hear God saying to the world through God's Word? Following the completion of the first intervention, a focus group interview of the panel took place, asking them to describe if and how they experienced growth in relationship with God, with one another, and with the world through their participation in the intervention.

The second PAR intervention took place during the five weekends of Lent. This intervention was designed to more deeply engage worship participants in relationship with one another. In place of the Prayers of Intercession, worship participants were instructed to form small groups of three or four persons. Once in their small groups, worshipers were asked to share their prayer concerns aloud with one another. Groups were asked to commit to praying for one another during the coming week and, if time allowed, to consider praying for one another aloud during their small group time provided during worship. The presiding minister would then conclude the small group time with a short, spoken prayer asking God to hear and receive all of the prayers that had been offered. Following the completion of the second intervention, a second focus group interview of the panel took place, asking them to describe if and how the second intervention had changed their experience of relationship with God, with one another, and with the world.

The third and final PAR intervention took place during the season of Easter and was designed to more deeply engage worship participants in relationship with the world. Each weekend, a brief story was shared in worship about how the congregation was partnering with a local community agency or ministry. During the adult educational forum on Sunday morning, a representative from each week's featured community agency or ministry was invited to share in conversation with the congregation about their work. Again, following the completion of this third intervention, a third focus group interview of the panel took place, inviting them to reflect on if and how they grew in relationship with God, with each other, and with the world through the third intervention.

At the completion of the three interventions, the entire congregation was invited to participate in an end line survey which asked the exact same questions as were asked in the baseline survey. The goal of the end line survey was to measure whether there had been any significant change in the level of growth in relationship through the three interventions. Concurrent with the administration of the end line survey, one-on-one end line interviews were completed with each member of the panel, inviting them to answer the same questions as were asked during the baseline interview, again seeking to measure what change, if any, occurred through their participation in the interventions.

Statistical analyses of the survey data were then performed to determine the level of change that may have occurred throughout the study. Each of the interviews was coded. Focused codes and axial codes were developed and theoretical codes emerged to describe the relationship between each of the axial codes. The reporting of these quantitative and qualitative data results follows.

Participants

For both the baseline and end line surveys, the entire congregation was invited to participate. Questionnaires could be completed either online or on the print copies that were provided. Eighty-nine participants responded to the baseline survey. One hundred forty-one participants responded to the end line survey.

Table 5.1 Baseline and End Line Survey Participant Profiles

	Baseline N=89		End Line N=141	
	<i>Number (n)</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>	<i>Number (n)</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
Gender				
Male	41	46.1	44	31.2
Female	47	52.8	95	67.4
Missing	1	1.1	2	1.4
Age				
18-29	3	3.4	5	3.5
30-39	7	7.9	20	14.2
40-49	10	11.2	19	13.5
50-59	13	14.6	23	16.3
60-69	27	30.3	33	23.4
70-79	18	20.2	25	17.7
80-89	10	11.2	12	8.5
90-99	0	0.0	1	0.7

Table 5.1 (continued) Baseline and End Line Survey Participant Profiles

	Baseline N=89		End Line N=141	
<i>Years of Membership</i>	<i>Number (n)</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>	<i>Number (n)</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
0-9	37	41.6	56	39.7
10-19	14	15.7	33	23.4
20-29	16	18.0	28	19.9
30-39	4	4.5	7	5.0
40-49	2	2.2	3	2.1
50-59	4	4.5	4	2.8
60-69	7	7.9	3	2.1
70-79	2	2.2	3	2.1
80-89	1	1.1	2	1.4
Missing	2	2.2	2	1.4
<i>Worship Service Attended</i>				
Sat., 5:00 p.m.	18	20.2	24	17.3
Sun., 8:00 a.m.	21	23.6	32	22.7
Sun., 10:30 a.m. (Traditional)	29	32.6	40	28.4
Sun. 10:30 a.m. (Contemporary)	20	22.5	43	30.5
Missing	1	1.1	2	1.4

Table 5.1 (continued) Baseline and End Line Survey Participant Profiles

	Baseline N=89		End Line N=141	
	<i>Number (n)</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>	<i>Number (n)</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
<i>Life-long Lutheran</i>				
Yes	40	44.9	83	58.9
No	47	52.8	55	39.0
Missing	2	2.2	3	2.1
<i>Level of Education</i>				
12 th grade	14	15.7	31	22.0
Associates or Bachelors Degree	27	30.3	41	29.1
Graduate or Post-Grad Degree	47	52.8	66	46.8
Missing	1	1.1	3	2.1

As Table 5.1 shows, respondents demonstrated a fair level of diversity across the demographic categories included on the questionnaires. In both the baseline and end line surveys, more females responded than males. In the baseline survey, 61.7% of respondents were 60 years of age or older. In the end line survey, only 49.6% of respondents were 60 years of age or older, showing that a slightly younger population of the congregation participated in the end line survey than in the baseline survey. In both the baseline and end line surveys, more than 75% of the respondents had been members of the congregation for 29 years or less and approximately 40% of participants in each survey had been members of the congregation for 9 years or less. In both surveys, respondents represented the four different worship services fairly evenly. In the baseline

survey, more respondents identified as not being life-long Lutherans. However, in the end line survey, there were more life-long Lutherans than not. Overall, respondents had a high level of education with 83.1% of participants in the base line survey having a college degree and 52.8% of baseline participants having a graduate degree or higher. Among the end line survey participants, 75.9% had a college degree and 46.8% had a graduate degree or higher.

In contrast to the baseline and end line surveys in which all members of the congregation were invited to participate, those members who participated on the panel were hand-selected in order to represent different demographic groups within the congregation. Two members were selected from each of the four different worship services, one being male and the other being female. A ninth member was added because of the rich perspective it was believed he would offer. In addition, a wide range of ages were included.

Table 5.2 Panel Participant Profiles

Name	Worship Time	Gender	Age	Denominational History
Roger (PM1)	5:00 p.m. Saturday	Male	79	Lutheran
Laurie (PM2)	5:00 p.m. Saturday	Female	27	Lutheran
Rhoda (PM3)	8:00 a.m. Sunday	Female	57	Roman Catholic, Lutheran
Ryan (PM4)	8:00 a.m. Sunday	Male	37	Lutheran

Table 5.2 (continued) Panel Participant Profiles

Name	Worship Time	Gender	Age	Denominational History
Melanie (PM5)	10:30 a.m. Sunday Traditional	Female	42	Lutheran
Shane (PM6)	10:30 a.m. Sunday Traditional	Male	25	Lutheran
Callie (PM7)	10:30 a.m. Sunday Contemporary	Female	68	Disciples of Christ, Episcopalian, Lutheran
Darin (PM8)	10:30 a.m. Sunday Contemporary	Male	43	Lutheran
Mark (PM9)	10:30 a.m. Sunday Contemporary	Male	39	Lutheran

Quantitative Results

Frequencies

On both the baseline and end line questionnaires, survey participants were asked to answer twelve questions using a Likert scale with six options ranging from strongly agree (6) to strongly disagree (1). Questions were designed to measure the sense of worshipers' participation in the action of worship and the level of growth worshipers

experienced through worship in their relationship with God, with one another, and with the world.

Table 5.3 Baseline Survey Frequencies and Means

Through worship . . .	Mean /(N)	Strongly Disagree %/(n)	Disagree %/(n)	Slightly Disagree %/(n)	Slightly Agree %/(n)	Agree %/(n)	Strongly Agree %/(n)
I experience God's presence.	5.38 (89)	0.0 (0)	3.4 (3)	0.0 (0)	5.6 (5)	37.1 (33)	53.9 (48)
God is active.	5.51 (89)	0.0 (0)	2.2 (2)	1.1 (1)	4.5 (4)	28.1 (25)	64.0 (57)
I experience growth in my relationship with God.	5.31 (88)	0.0 (0)	1.1 (1)	0.0 (0)	12.5 (11)	39.8 (35)	46.6 (41)
I experience growth in my relationship with others.	5.03 (88)	1.1 (1)	1.1 (1)	0.0 (0)	22.7 (20)	40.9 (36)	34.1 (30)
I experience growth in my relationship with the world.	4.71 (89)	0.0 (0)	4.5 (4)	5.6 (5)	25.8 (23)	42.7 (38)	21.3 (19)
God is the primary actor.	5.08 (88)	0.0 (0)	2.3 (2)	9.1 (8)	9.1 (8)	37.5 (33)	42.0 (37)
The pastor is the primary actor.	4.16 (89)	3.4 (3)	15.7 (14)	6.7 (6)	27.0 (24)	30.3 (27)	16.9 (15)
I am engaged as an active participant.	5.06 (89)	0.0 (0)	2.2 (2)	4.5 (4)	13.5 (12)	44.9 (40)	34.8 (31)
I am discouraged from being an active participant.	1.64 (89)	52.8 (47)	36.0 (32)	6.7 (6)	3.4 (3)	1.1 (1)	0.0 (0)
I am one of the primary actors.	3.80 (89)	4.5 (4)	13.5 (12)	15.7 (14)	33.7 (30)	29.2 (26)	3.4 (3)
I experience the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit.	5.04 (89)	0.0 (0)	2.2 (2)	2.2 (2)	16.9 (15)	46.1 (41)	32.6 (29)
Growing in our relationships with God, with one another, and with the world is central.	5.35 (88)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	10.2 (9)	44.3 (39)	45.5 (40)

Overall, respondents to the baseline survey indicated a high level of experiencing God's presence and activity in worship. Respondents experience growing in relationships with God, with one another, and with the world central to the worship experience, with 89.8% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing. Through their experience of worship, respondents identify the most growth in their relationship with God and the least growth in their relationship with the world. Respondents agree that God is the primary actor in worship, with a mean of 5.08. At the same time, the respondents also view the pastor as having a relatively primary role in the action of worship, with a mean of 4.16. A much lower percentage of respondents view themselves as being one of the primary actors in worship, with a mean of only 3.80.

Table 5.4 End Line Survey Frequencies and Means

Through worship . . .	Mean/ (N)	Strongly Disagree %/(n)	Disagree %/(n)	Slightly Disagree %/(n)	Slightly Agree %/(n)	Agree %/(n)	Strongly Agree %/(n)
I experience God's presence.	5.49 (138)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	2.9 (4)	44.9 (62)	52.2 (72)
God is active.	5.62 (138)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	38.4 (53)	61.6 (85)
I experience growth in my relationship with God.	5.40 (139)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	7.2 (10)	45.3 (63)	47.5 (66)
I experience growth in my relationship with others.	5.01 (137)	0.7 (1)	0.0 (0)	2.2 (3)	27.0 (37)	34.3 (47)	35.8 (49)
I experience growth in my relationship with the world.	4.74 (138)	0.7 (1)	2.9 (4)	4.3 (6)	28.3 (39)	41.3 (57)	22.5 (31)

Table 5.4 (continued) End Line Survey Frequencies and Means

Through worship . . .	Mean/ (N)	Strongly Disagree %/(n)	Disagree %/(n)	Slightly Disagree %/(n)	Slightly Agree %/(n)	Agree %/(n)	Strongly Agree %/(n)
God is the primary actor.	5.36 (135)	0.0 (0)	0.7 (1)	1.5 (2)	11.9 (16)	33.3 (45)	52.6 (71)
The pastor is the primary actor.	4.13 (137)	4.4 (6)	10.9 (15)	16.1 (22)	23.4 (32)	26.3 (36)	19.0 (26)
I am engaged as an active participant.	5.25 (138)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.7 (1)	9.4 (13)	53.6 (74)	36.2 (50)
I am discouraged from being an active participant.	1.61 (138)	50.7 (70)	43.5 (60)	3.6 (5)	0.0 (0)	0.7 (1)	1.4 (2)
I am one of the primary actors.	3.96 (137)	2.9 (4)	14.6 (20)	10.2 (14)	32.1 (44)	36.5 (50)	3.6 (5)
I experience the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit.	5.25 (139)	0.0 (0)	0.7 (1)	0.0 (0)	10.8 (15)	50.4 (70)	38.1 (53)
Growing in our relationships with God, with one another, and with the world is central.	5.42 (139)	0.0 (0)	0.7 (1)	0.0 (0)	5.8 (8)	43.2 (60)	50.4 (70)

In general, the responses on the end line survey are consistent with those on the baseline survey, showing a high level of experiencing God's presence and activity in worship and a high level of growth in relationships. The number of responses showed a dramatic increase over those received on the baseline survey. In addition, every mean on the end line survey, with the exception of the mean for experiencing growth in

relationships with others, moved slightly in a direction suggesting that the interventions may have had some level of influence in growing worshipers' experience of God as the active subject in worship, as themselves as active participants in the action of worship, and in growth of relationship with God and with the world.

Independent t-Test Results between Baseline and End Line Surveys

The purpose of Participatory Action Research is to create change or transformation within a system. To identify whether the three interventions into the worship life of the congregation influenced change, independent t-tests were run comparing the means of the baseline survey with the means of the end line survey.

Table 5.5 Independent t-Test Results Comparing Baseline and End Line Means

Through worship ...	x_b (N_b)	x_e (N_e)	df	t-value	p
I experience God's presence.	5.38 (89)	5.49 (138)	134	-1.065	.289
God is active.	5.51 (89)	5.62 (138)	128	-1.137	.258
I experience growth in my relationship with God.	5.31 (88)	5.40 (139)	225	-1.027	.306
I experience growth in my relationships with others.	5.03 (88)	5.01 (137)	223	.155	.877
I experience growth in my relationship with the world	4.71 (89)	4.74 (138)	225	-.229	.819
God is the primary actor.	5.08 (88)	5.36 (135)	221	-2.224	.027

Table 5.5 (continued)**Independent t-Test Results Comparing Baseline and End Line Means**

Through worship ...	x_b (N_b)	x_e (N_e)	df	t-value	p
The pastor is the primary actor.	4.16 (89)	4.13 (137)	224	.135	.893
I am engaged as an active participant.	5.06 (89)	5.25 (138)	225	-1.876	.062
I am discouraged from being an active participant.	1.64 (89)	1.61 (138)	225	.279	.780
I am one of the primary actors.	3.80 (89)	3.96 (137)	224	-.956	.340
I experience the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit.	5.04 (89)	5.25 (139)	226	-1.950	.052
Growing in our relationships with God, with one another, and with the world is central.	5.35 (88)	5.42 (139)	225	-.795	.428

In nearly every variable, with the exception of one, the means between the baseline results and the end line results moved in the direction of a deeper experience of God's presence and activity, an increased experience of oneself as an active participant in worship, and growth in relationship. The only variable whose mean between the baseline results and the end line results moved in the opposite direction of the desired growth in relationship was the variable of experiencing growth in relationship with others. The mean for the baseline results was 5.03 while the mean for the end line results was 5.01, showing a very slight reduction in the perception of the growth in relationships with others through the experience of worship.

Only one variable showed statistical significance. The baseline mean for identifying God as the primary actor in worship was 5.08 while the end line mean for this same variable was 5.36. This difference was statistically significant, $t_{(221)} = -2.224$, $p = .027$. Such statistical significance suggests that the three interventions influenced worshipers' experience in such a way that they more readily identified God's activity through the practice of Christian worship.

Comparison of Means between Worship Service Groups

One of the interests of this study was to determine if there was a significant difference in worship experience between those who worship at each of the congregation's four distinct worship services. An ANOVA was conducted comparing the means for each of the four worship services and, as all of the p values were greater than .05, no statistical significance was found.

Qualitative Results

Baseline Interviews

Baseline interviews were conducted individually with each of the nine members of the panel. Questions were designed to explore how and where worshipers experience God's presence and activity in worship, the level of participation worshipers experience during the act of worship, and how and where in worship participants experience growth in their relationships with God, with one another, and with the world. From the transcription of these interviews, *in vivo* codes were gathered and focused codes were developed. Focused codes were then grouped into seven axial codes.

Baseline Axial Codes

Table 5.6 Baseline Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes**AB1 Worship leadership that encourages active participation in the work of worship grows relationship.**

- (FB5) Holy Communion engages us as active participants in what God is doing in worship.
- (FB6) Serving as a communion assistant in worship enhances sense of active participation in what God is doing in worship.
- (FB9) Holy Communion includes physical participation in the action of worship.
- (FB12) Accessible (easy to sing) hymns and songs in worship facilitate more active participation.
- (FB13) Inaccessible (difficult to sing) hymns and songs in worship hinder more active participation.
- (FB20) Sharing music together in worship facilitates active participation.
- (FB21) The structure and tradition of liturgy can facilitate participation in worship.
- (FB22) The structure and tradition of liturgy helps to experience God's presence in worship.
- (FB23) Liturgy that does not engage worshipers as active participants hinders experience of God's presence in worship.
- (FB43) Sharing of peace increases active participation in worship.
- (FB58) Being acknowledged as a real person in worship increases sense of participation.
- (FB74) Permission from pastors to actively engage in worship is key to relationship growth.
- (FB79) Active participation in worship grows relationship.
- (FB91) Making room in worship for people to respond to Holy Spirit is central to growing relationships.

AB2 The experience of shared music in worship grows relationship.

- (FB10) The Triune God acts in our lives through music in worship.
- (FB11) Sharing music together in worship makes God's presence known and experienced.
- (FB14) Singing hymns in worship makes God's presence known and experienced.
- (FB15) Sharing music together in worship opens us up to the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit.
- (FB16) Sharing music together in worship grows relationships with one another.
- (FB17) Singing together a common song has the potential to grow relationships with the community and world.
- (FB18) Sharing music together in worship grows our relationship with God.

Table 5.6 (continued) Baseline Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

AB2 (continued) The experience of shared music in worship grows relationship.

- (FB19) Sharing music together in worship creates community.
- (FB54) Joyful worship grows relationship.

AB3 Worship practices that encourage intentional engagement with others grow relationship.

- (FB24) Interacting with others in worship enhances experience of God's presence.
- (FB39) Sharing of peace grows relationships with others.
- (FB40) Compassionate, physical touch in worship grows relationships with others.
- (FB41) Sharing of peace provides opportunity to interact with others.
- (FB42) Sharing of peace acknowledges the personhood of others.
- (FB44) Sharing of peace extends welcome and hospitality to others.
- (FB45) Being open to engagement with others in worship grows relationship.
- (FB46) Lutherans are not naturally open to engagement with others in worship.
- (FB47) Praying with others grows caring relationships with them.
- (FB48) Praying with others in worship enhances experience of God's presence.
- (FB49) Praying aloud with others in worship creates shared intimacy and vulnerability in worship.
- (FB50) Prayers of intercession grow our relationship with the community and world.
- (FB52) Hospitality grows relationships with one another and with the community.
- (FB59) Being acknowledged as a real person in worship increases sense of community.
- (FB73) Being vulnerable with one another grows relationships with one another.
- (FB86) Physical space of Parish Life Center is more conducive to growing relationships with one another than sanctuary.
- (FB87) Contemporary worship service provides multiple entry points for diverse people to connect with the Triune God.
- (FB88) Contemporary worship service is more conducive to growing relationships with others.
- (FB89) Traditional worship service is not conducive to growing relationships with others.
- (FB93) Hesitation to share faith verbally hinders growth in relationships.
- (FB97) Fellowship time before and after worship grows relationships with others.

AB4 The Triune God acts through Word and Sacrament in worship to engage us in relationship.

- (FB1) The Triune God acts in and upon us through Holy Communion.
- (FB2) The Triune God encounters us through Holy Communion.
- (FB3) Holy Communion grows our relationships with God.
- (FB4) Holy Communion grows our relationships with one another.

Table 5.6 (continued) Baseline Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

AB4 (continued) The Triune God acts through Word and Sacrament in worship to engage us in relationship.

- (FB7) Holy Communion is one of the central acts of Lutheran worship.
- (FB8) Holy Communion makes real an intimate connection between the worshiper and God.
- (FB37) The Triune God speaks through the sermon and helps make connections between God's Word and daily life.
- (FB55) Holy Spirit is visibly present and active in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.
- (FB56) The Triune God speaks to us through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.
- (FB57) Holy Spirit is visibly present and active in all of worship.
- (FB64) The Triune God acts through worship to care for us.
- (FB65) The Triune God acts through worship to engage with us.
- (FB66) The Triune God acts through worship to transform us.
- (FB81) The Triune God works through God's Word to reach us.
- (FB82) The Triune God works through God's Word to transform us.

AB5 The practice of gathering together in Christian community grows relationship.

- (FB60) Traditional worship services and contemporary worship service joining together creates powerful sense of community.
- (FB61) Need to grow interconnectedness between traditional worship services and contemporary worship service.
- (FB62) Multiple worship services, styles, and locations hinders growth in relationships with one another.
- (FB63) The act of gathering together for worship creates experience of God's presence.
- (FB67) The act of regularly gathering together for worship grows relationships with God, with one another, and with the community/world.
- (FB68) The act of gathering together for worship invites us into the praise of God.
- (FB69) Small group participation grows relationships with others.
- (FB70) Small group participation grows relationship with God.
- (FB71) Increased connection between worship and small group participation enhances growth in relationship with God and with one another.
- (FB72) Growth in relationships with one another deepens sense of community.

AB6 Worship that moves us to action in the world grows relationship.

- (FB51) The offering grows our relationship with the community and world.
- (FB53) Worship needs to move us from passivity to action.

Table 5.6 (continued) Baseline Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

AB6 (continued) Worship that moves us to action in the world grows relationship.

- (FB75) Participation in service projects outside of worship engages worshipers as participants in God's mission.
- (FB76) Participation in service projects outside of worship grows relationships with others.
- (FB77) Participation in service projects outside of worship deepen sense of community.
- (FB78) Announcements in worship help interpret worshipping community's participation in God's mission.
- (FB80) Annual stewardship campaign grows participation in God's mission.
- (FB92) Participation in service projects outside of worship grow relationship with community/world.
- (FB95) Vocation in daily life grows participation in God's mission in the world.
- (FB96) Participation in ministries beyond walls of congregation grows participation in God's activity in the world.

AB7 Worship that actively engages us in hearing and responding to God's Word grows relationship.

- (FB25) Times of silence and quiet reflection in worship enhance experience of God's presence.
- (FB26) Children's message engages all generations in God's Word.
- (FB27) Children's message grows multi-generational relationships with God and with one another.
- (FB28) Active participation of children in worship enhances experience of God's presence.
- (FB29) Multi-generational engagement in worship enhances experiences of God's presence.
- (FB30) Personal distractions in worship detract from experience of God's presence.
- (FB31) Active engagement in worship requires personal responsibility on the part of the worshiper.
- (FB32) Sermons are central to growing relationship with God.
- (FB33) Sermons that make connections to daily life increase growth in relationship with God.
- (FB34) Sermons that make connections to current events increase growth in relationship with God.
- (FB35) Sermons have potential to move worshipers from passivity to action through God's Word.
- (FB36) Sermons that make connection to current events increase growth in relationship with world.

Table 5.6 (continued) Baseline Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

AB7 (continued) Worship that actively engages us in hearing and responding to God's Word grows relationship.

- (FB38) Engaging congregation in active listening to sermon enhances growth in relationships.
 - (FB83) Active listening to God's Word grows relationship with God.
 - (FB84) Active listening to God's Word grows participation in God's mission.
 - (FB85) Openness to God's Word grows relationship with God.
 - (FB90) Visual engagement with readings increases active participation in God's Word.
-

Explanation of Baseline Axial Codes

AB1 Worship leadership that encourages active participation in the work of worship grows relationship.

Panel members shared that the more actively engaged in the work of worship that they are, the more they experience growth in their relationships with God, with one another, and with the world. Multiple panel members talked in-depth about Holy Communion as the central participatory act of worship. Whether serving as a communion assistant or coming forward to the altar rail to receive communion, panel members talked about Holy Communion as a participatory act including both physical and spiritual participation in the action of worship. One panel member responded, "Communion is the time of the service when you actually get up and become part of the show" (PM9).

Music also was described as a means through which worshipers are invited into the action of worship as full participants. Familiar, singable music in worship facilitates active participation while unfamiliar, difficult-to-sing music hinders active participation. Likewise, panel members described the structure of the liturgy as a helpful tool in

facilitating active participation in worship. However, when the liturgy is merely performed in front of the congregation rather than led as a full participatory act of the entire congregation then the liturgy can actually become a hindrance to participation in worship rather than a help.

Lastly, panel members talked about the worship leaders as being key in encouraging active participation in worship. Worship leaders who acknowledge the worshipers as active subjects in the work of worship encourage worshiper participation. Receiving permission from the primary worship leader to engage in full worship participation seemed to be a key to whether or not worshipers experienced growth in their relationships through the act of worship.

AB2 The experience of shared music in worship grows relationship.

Multiple panel members talked about music in worship as being central both to their experience of God in worship and to their growth in relationship with others. Panel members described experiencing God's presence and activity through their participation in music. In particular, corporately shared music, or singing together in worship, was described as creating community and having the power to grow relationships both with God and with others. One panel member talked, too, about the potential of music to create community beyond the walls of the congregation.

AB3 Worship practices that encourage intentional engagement with others grow relationship.

Worship practices that create opportunities to intentionally engage with others were described as being central to growing relationships with others. Panel members identified the sharing of the peace during worship as one of the only opportunities they are regularly provided in worship for interaction with others. For panel members, the

sharing of the peace is a meaningful time of relational interaction with others that includes physical touch, acknowledging the personhood of those around them, and extending a gesture of hospitality. One panel member acknowledged, however, that the brevity of the sharing of the peace in worship makes it difficult to engage in genuine relationship with others.

Prayer was also lifted up as a means in worship to grow relationship with others. While the Prayers of Intercession were identified as growing relationship with our community and world through the lifting up of local and global concerns, the occasional practice of inviting worshipers in the contemporary service to share intercessions aloud during worship was identified as more deeply growing relationships with others.

Opportunities for hospitality and fellowship before, during, and after worship were also identified as being important for relationship growth with others, as was the arrangement of physical space. The more open space of the Parish Life Center in which the contemporary worship service is held was identified as creating a more conducive environment for relationship building with others than the more traditional space of the sanctuary in which the traditional worship services are held. The more open physical space, together with the more relaxed feel of the contemporary worship service, were identified as making the contemporary worship service more conducive to growing relationships with others than the traditional worship services.

AB4 The Triune God acts through Word and Sacrament in worship to engage us in relationship.

Panel members described powerfully experiencing the presence and activity of the Triune God through the practice of Christian worship. Multiple panel members talked about how God seeks to reach us, engage with us, and transform us through the practice

of Christian worship. These experiences of God’s presence and activity were most focused in the traditionally Lutheran means of grace—God’s Word and God’s Sacraments. Members described how God speaks to them through the sermons, particularly as God makes connections in them between God’s Word and their daily lives.

Similarly, the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion were described as moments in worship when God’s presence and activity become most visible. In particular, panel members described observing or participating in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism as making visible for them the power and activity of the Holy Spirit. Sharing in Holy Communion was consistently lifted up as the means through which they most powerfully experience the activity of God in worship, describing Holy Communion as an intimate encounter between the worshiper and the Triune God. In the words of one member, “In communion, God says, ‘I forgive you. I want you here. I love you’” (PM1).

AB5 The practice of gathering together in Christian community grows relationship.

Panel members spoke powerfully about the basic act of gathering together for worship as creating an experience of God’s presence through which God grows relationships between us and God, between us and each other, and between us and the world. Most simply put, being together in Christian community grows relationship. Using his own words, one panel member recalled Jesus’ words in Matthew 18, “Wherever two or more are gathered in my name—there I am also” (PM1). Panel members identified the division between the traditional end of the building and the contemporary end of the building, together with the division of worshiping communities that exist therein, as a significant hindrance to the growth of Christian community, and thereby meaningful relationships, in the life of the congregation. In addition, panel members lifted up small

group participation as a significant means of relationship growth and identified the need to strengthen the connection between small group ministries and the practice of worship.

AB6 Worship that moves us to action in the world grows relationship.

Panel members spoke significantly about how their relationships with God, with each other, and, particularly, with the world, are not only grown through their participation in Christian worship, but also through their participation in God's mission and ministry that takes place outside the walls of the congregation. They talked about how true worship needs to move the participant from passivity in the pews to action in the world and in their daily lives. They identified as being helpful those opportunities that are provided in worship to interpret what God is doing in the world as well as that provide ways for worshipers to get involved in hands-on ministries either in the congregation or the community.

AB7 Worship that actively engages us in hearing and responding to God's Word grows relationship.

Panel members described growing in their relationships with God, with each other, and with the world when they are actively engaged in both the hearing of and the responding to God's Word. Sermons that deeply engage the listener were lifted up as being central to this relationship growth. One panel member recalled a sermon about God choosing David to be king, despite his physical weakness. The panel member stated, "As I listened to the sermon, it was like God was choosing me just like he chose David" (PM6). Particularly helpful in growing relationship through active engagement are sermons that creatively connect God's Word to daily life, that connect God's Word with current political and world events, and that move listeners from passive discipleship to active discipleship.

Panel members also identified the children's messages as actively engaging all the generations in God's Word. Multigenerational engagement in worship was lifted up numerous times as helpful in growing relationships. Any practices that encourage and strengthen active listening and engagement with God's Word, particularly with the sermons, were considered essential to growing relationship through the practice of worship.

Theoretical Coding of Baseline Interviews

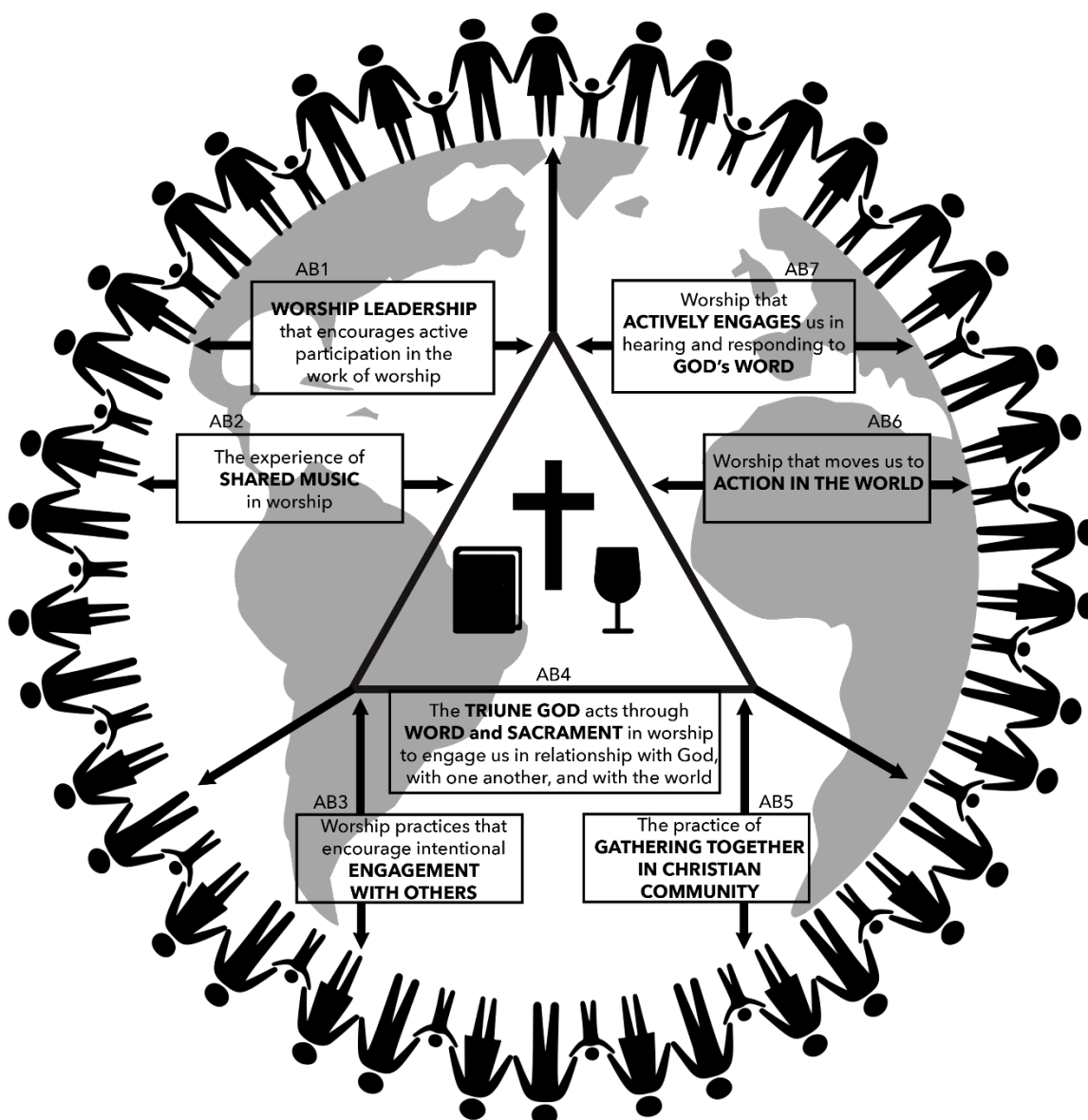


Figure 5.1 Theoretical Coding of Baseline Interviews

Through the baseline interviews with the panel members, it was clear that participants experience the Triune God's presence and activity in worship most clearly through Word and Sacrament. The Triune God present and active in the world through Word and Sacrament stands as central to the congregation's understanding of Christian worship. The mission of the Triune God in worship is understood to be reaching out

through Word and Sacrament to engage worshipers in relationship with God, with one another, and with the world. Six worship practices were then identified that help to cultivate the missional activity of the Triune God in growing these multi-dimensional relationships. The Triune God works through these six worship practices to strengthen worshipers' relationship with God, with each other, and with the world.

Panel Interview following 1st PAR Intervention

Following the first PAR Intervention which included hearing the gospel reading read aloud three times, each time followed by time for personal reflection and journaling on three focus questions, an interview was conducted of the panel as a whole. During the interview panelists were invited to reflect together on their experience and how it either helped or hindered them to grow in their relationship with God, with each other, and with the world.

PAR Intervention #1 Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

Table 5.7 PAR Intervention #1 Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

A1.1 Increased active engagement in the hearing and interpreting of God's Word.

- (F1.1) Increased active thinking about God's Word.
- (F1.2) Increased active analysis of God's Word.
- (F1.3) Moved worshipers from passivity to action.
- (F1.4) Increased level of engagement with God's Word.
- (F1.18) Hearing readings three times was overly repetitive.
- (F1.19) Seeing the written Word while hearing it read was helpful.
- (F1.22) Encouraged increased engagement.
- (F1.23) Encouraged active listening
- (F1.25) Forced us to make our own conclusions
- (F1.28) Increased focus
- (F1.29) Music enhanced the worship experience
- (F1.41) Improved memory of the texts
- (F1.42) Increased internal impact of God's Word

Table 5.7 (continued) PAR Intervention #1 Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

- (F1.43) Dramatically increased attention to God's Word in worship
- (F1.48) Increased active participation in worship
- (F1.49) Required active listening
- (F1.51) The act of writing reinforced the hearing of God's Word
- (F1.52) The act of writing increased memory of text
- (F1.54) Increased active learning

A1.2 Deepened lives of faith and discipleship in response to God's Word.

- (F1.5) Created opportunity to hear God speaking personally.
- (F1.6) Increased relatability of God's Word to daily life.
- (F1.21) Increased application of God's Word to daily life.
- (F1.27) Helped discern God's will for our lives
- (F1.30) A personal experience
- (F1.32) Recent witnessing of more reaching out within congregation
- (F1.45) God spoke personally through God's Word
- (F1.40) Witnessed God's activity in children's engagement with the intervention
- (F1.44) Powerful experience of God's presence in the intervention
- (F1.35) Deepened discipleship
- (F1.36) Deepened ability to witness in the world
- (F1.50) Deepened level of commitment
- (F1.53) Created connection between God's Word and daily life
- (F1.57) God wants to draw us into relationship
- (F1.60) Through this exercise, God strengthened faith and discipleship

A1.3 Revealed value of community discernment in interpreting God's Word.

- (F1.7) Challenge to hear distinction between what God was saying to individuals, to community, and to world.
- (F1.8) Easiest to discern what God was saying to individual life of faith.
- (F1.9) Most difficult to discern what God was saying to world.
- (F1.10) Moderately difficult to discern what God was saying to congregation.
- (F1.11) Noticed disparity between individual interpretation and pastor's interpretation.
- (F1.12) Variety of interpretation added value to hearing of God's Word.
- (F1.13) Added weight to pastor's interpretation over individual interpretation.
- (F1.14) Most difficult to discern what God was saying to congregation.
- (F1.17) Deeper opportunity for dialogue with pastors and others about text would have been helpful.
- (F1.31) Planted the seed of possible connections with others

Table 5.7 (continued) PAR Intervention #1 Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

- (F1.33) Created a new reason to talk with one another
- (F1.34) Promoted conversation about the texts
- (F1.38) Not helpful in connecting with the world
- (F1.39) Challenging to broaden the experience of going deep

A1.4 Challenged disciples to align hearts with God’s Word.

- (F1.15) God revealed a weakness in spiritual health.
 - (F1.16) Did not quite fit in the worship service.
 - (F1.20) Revealed lack of knowledge about God.
 - (F1.24) Moved us outside of our comfort zone
 - (F1.26) Revealed the truth of my heart
 - (F1.37) Amplified contrast between worldview of the Bible and worldview of society
 - (F1.46) Experienced God’s Word changing my heart
 - (F1.47) Through God’s change of my heart, God transformed the world
 - (F1.55) Forced the question, “What is God up to in the world?”
 - (F1.56) God wants to make us uncomfortable
 - (F1.58) God wants to mold and shape us
 - (F1.59) God wants to challenge us to align ourselves with God’s will
 - (F1.61) Through God’s Word, God comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.
-

Explanation of 1st PAR Intervention Axial Codes

A1.1 Increased active engagement in the hearing and interpreting of God’s Word.

In response to the first intervention, panel members talked at length about the experience moving them from a passive hearing of God’s Word to active listening and active engagement with God’s Word. Worship participants were forced by the exercise to make their own conclusions about what God was saying through the text. The physical and mental act of writing down their responses reinforced what they were both hearing

and thinking. Panelists responded that the intervention increased the impact of God's Word in their lives. One panelist shared the power of seeing his six-year old daughter engaging in God's Word through the intervention. "I looked down on the first Sunday and my six-year-old daughter had written on her response sheet, 'God loves me. God loves you. God loves the world.' She wrote those same answers every week. God's Word, I guess, is that simple" (PM9).

A1.2 Deepened lives of faith and discipleship in response to God's Word.

Panelists described the first intervention as deepening the connections between the hearing of God's Word in worship and the living out of their faith in daily life. Respondents experienced deepened discipleship, a deepened level of commitment, a deepened ability to witness in the world, and deepened faith. As panelists grew in their connection to God's Word, they also grew in their ability to live out God's Word in their daily lives.

A1.3 Revealed value of community discernment in interpreting God's Word.

While respondents felt like their individual faith and discipleship was strengthened through the intervention, they also deeply yearned for an opportunity in the intervention to engage in conversation and discernment with one another about the text. Panelists indicated that it was easiest to discern what God was saying to them individually, but much more difficult to discern what God was saying to the congregation and the world. Several indicated that time for conversation with others about the text could have helped with such discernment. Others struggled with the perceived difference between their own personal interpretation of the text and the pastor's interpretation of the text during the sermon. An opportunity to engage in mutual conversation during worship

about the meaning and interpretation of the text could have been a helpful addition to this intervention.

A1.4 Challenged disciples to align hearts with God's Word.

Panelists talked about how the intervention revealed a disparity between God's will as revealed in God's Word and their own hearts. Several talked about feeling convicted by God's Word and moved to repentance. Participants consistently talked about God working through the Word to transform their hearts, seeking to more closely align their hearts with God's will.

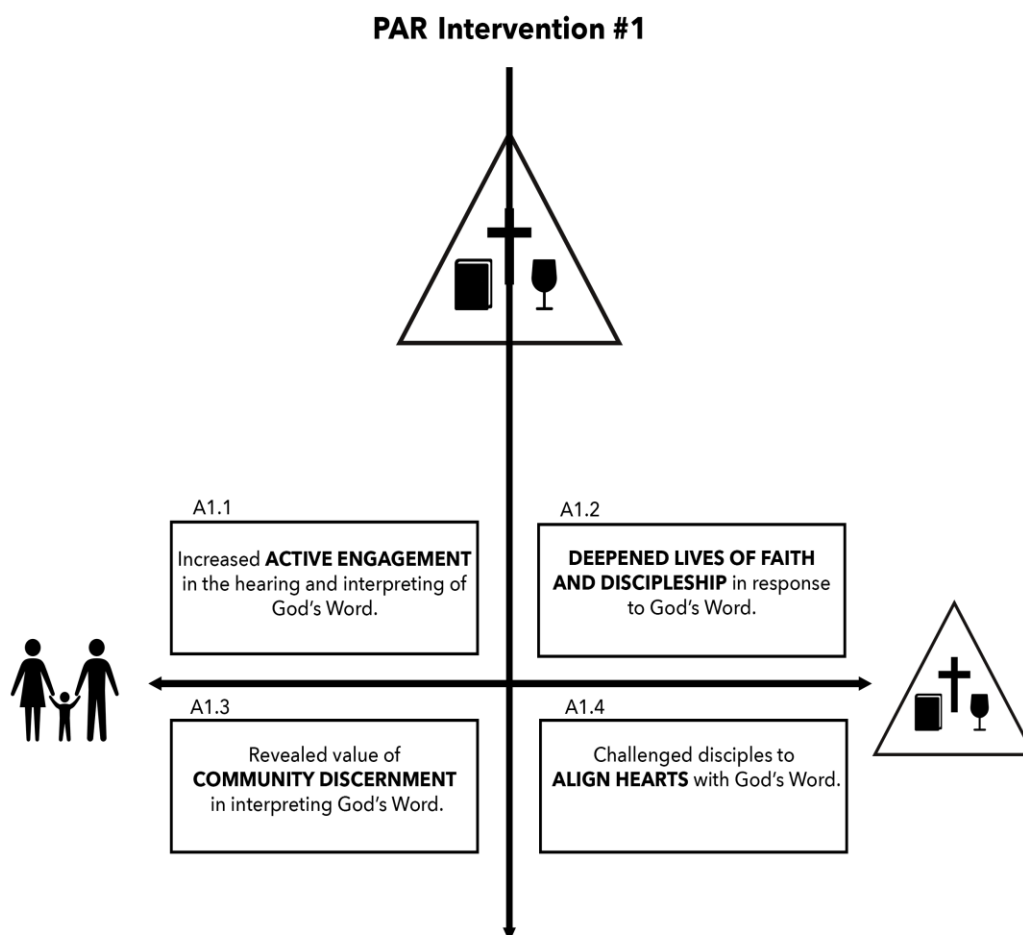
Theoretical Coding of 1st PAR Intervention

Figure 5.2 Theoretical Coding of PAR Intervention #1

The Triune God worked through the 1st PAR Intervention to grow relationships between God's people and God's own self. The intervention strengthened this growth in relationship through the four axial codes shown in Figure 5.2. Each of these four axial codes both resulted from the intervention and significantly impacted the level of relationship growth worshipers experienced between themselves and the Triune God.

Panel Interview following 2nd PAR Intervention

Following the 2nd PAR Intervention in which worshippers, in place of the Prayers of Intercessions, were asked to form small groups of 3-4 individuals and to share their prayer concerns with one another, a group interview of the panel was held. Like following the 1st PAR Intervention, panelists were asked to reflect on their experience of the intervention and to share how the intervention either helped or hindered their growth in relationship with God, with one another, and with the world.

2nd PAR Intervention Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

Table 5.8 2nd PAR Intervention Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

A2.1 Increased engagement through active participation in the practice of corporate prayer.

- (F2.2) Written prayers in bulletin may not speak directly to people.
- (F2.3) Written prayers in bulletin are not personal.
- (F2.4) Praying together makes the prayers personal.
- (F2.10) Praying together made the prayers more meaningful.
- (F2.63) Increased role as participants in the worship service.
- (F2.64) Increased engagement in action of worship.
- (F2.65) Moved congregation from passivity to active engagement.
- (F2.69) Praying together enhances worship experience.
- (F2.70) Praying together intensified the prayer experience.
- (F2.71) Increased focus on one's own prayer needs.
- (F2.72) Increased focus on content of prayers.

A2.2 Required expression of shared vulnerability within worship.

- (F2.1) Easy to do.
- (F2.7) Initially difficult to pray together.
- (F2.11) Discomfort in sharing personally with strangers.
- (F2.14) Uncomfortable for some.
- (F2.15) Comfortable for some.
- (F2.17) Surprised by willingness to participate.
- (F2.18) Challenging to do.

Table 5. 8 (continued) 2nd PAR Intervention Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

A2.2 (continued) Required expression of shared vulnerability within worship.

- (F2.19) Required a high level of personal vulnerability.
- (F2.20) Surprised by depth of sharing.
- (F2.22) Challenging to be vulnerable.
- (F2.24) Surprised by the level of vulnerability.
- (F2.27) Challenged me to articulate what was bothering me.
- (F2.43) Becoming vulnerable with others requires a leap of faith.
- (F2.44) Being in relationship with others requires a leap of faith.
- (F2.46) Prayer is the ultimate plea for God's healing.
- (F2.67) Delicate balance between welcoming and overwhelming.
- (F2.68) Delicate balance between creating authentic engagement and creating discomfort
- (F2.79) Praying together exposes one's vulnerability.
- (F2.80) Praying together externalizes one's weaknesses.
- (F2.83) Sharing concerns with others reveals shared brokenness and sin
- (F2.87) Becoming vulnerable with others humbles the self.
- (F2.95) Praying together creates shared vulnerability.

A2.3 Shared expression of vulnerability opened up growth in relationships with others.

- (F2.5) Good to pray with people you know.
- (F2.6) Good opportunity for pray for others and lift up their needs.
- (F2.8) Prayers were for others, not themselves.
- (F2.9) Praying together was a form of reaching out to others.
- (F2.12) Opened up communication within own family.
- (F2.13) Uncovered things about one another.
- (F2.16) Strangers opened up with other another.
- (F2.21) Becoming vulnerable with others leads to enriched relationships.
- (F2.23) Willingness to be vulnerable opens one up to the gift of others.
- (F2.25) Continued to pray for others throughout the week.
- (F2.26) Created opportunities for personal connections with others.
- (F2.28) Praying with others creates a lasting connection.
- (F2.29) Becoming vulnerable with one another creates an immediate connection.
- (F2.30) Becoming vulnerable with one another brings a responsibility to the other.

Table 5.8 (continued) 2nd PAR Intervention Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

A2.3 (continued) Shared expression of vulnerability opened up growth in relationships with others.

- (F2.32) Created enhanced interaction with others.
- (F2.34) Praying together deepens existing relationships.
- (F2.41) Opened up a desire to pray with others outside of worship in the community.
- (F2.42) Made praying with others more natural.
- (F2.47) Praying together opens us up to others and their needs.
- (F2.55) Praying together lifted up global concerns.
- (F2.57) Praying for others creates a responsibility to them.
- (F2.73) Discomfort in praying with others was a positive.
- (F2.74) God challenged our selfishness.
- (F2.75) God opened us up to needs of others.
- (F2.85) Sharing problems with others brings strength.
- (F2.88) Becoming vulnerable with others sharpens our experience.
- (F2.89) Becoming vulnerable with others forces us to listen and understand differently than normal.

A2.4 The presence of the Triune God deepened the experience of praying with one another.

- (F2.35) God was very much present in the midst of praying for one another.
- (F2.36) God provided comfort in the midst of becoming vulnerable with others.
- (F2.37) Prayer is a relationship with our Father.
- (F2.40) Praying with one another makes God extra-present.
- (F2.45) Prayer invites God into the moment.
- (F2.50) God's presence adds to community.
- (F2.51) There is great comfort in knowing we are children of God.
- (F2.53) Deepened sense of God's presence in the community through this intervention.
- (F2.58) Holy Spirit opened people up to one another.
- (F2.59) Holy Spirit opened people up to share with one another.
- (F2.60) Holy Spirit opened people up to take a leap of faith.
- (F2.61) Holy Spirit opened people up to be vulnerable.
- (F2.62) Holy Spirit opened people up to step outside their comfort zones.

Table 5.8 (continued) 2nd PAR Intervention Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

A2.5 Shared expression of vulnerability in worship leads to experience of authentic Christian community.

- (F2.31) Small groups build friendships with others.
 - (F2.33) Small prayer groups build community.
 - (F2.38) Praying together enhances the idea of family.
 - (F2.39) Praying together creates a unique community.
 - (F2.48) Knowing others is essential for Christian community.
 - (F2.49) Time spent in relationship deepens relationship.
 - (F2.52) Being family gives a deeper purpose to Christian community.
 - (F2.54) Christian community is unique from secular community.
 - (F2.56) God calls us to the challenging move from prayer to action.
 - (F2.66) Broke down social barriers between congregation members.
 - (F2.76) Sharing in each other's struggles builds community
 - (F2.77) Encouraging one another through struggles builds community.
 - (F2.78) Sharing in one another's suffering deepens community.
 - (F2.81) Externalizing one's weaknesses equalizes the community.
 - (F2.82) Externalizing one's weaknesses reveals equality as God's children.
 - (F2.84) Sharing concerns with others reveals unity as children of God
 - (F2.86) Purpose of prayer is to be present with one another in the midst of suffering and brokenness.
 - (F2.90) Value in confessing our brokenness together in worship.
 - (F2.91) Becoming vulnerable like Christ is the most authentic witness.
 - (F2.92) Worship demands congruity between Sunday morning and the rest of the week.
 - (F2.93) Goal of Christian worship is radical transformation.
 - (F2.94) Goal of Christian worship is becoming vulnerable, loving, compassionate people.
 - (F2.96) Shared vulnerability creates true community.
 - (F2.97) Shared vulnerability opens up authentic worship.
 - (F2.98) Shared vulnerability leads to integrity of identity.
-

Explanation of 2nd PAR Intervention Axial Codes

A2.1 Increased engagement through active participation in the practice of corporate prayer.

Panelists consistently shared that by actively participating in the prayers through this intervention they experienced increased personal engagement in the act of prayer in worship. The prayers became personal and increased in meaning. Worshipers expressed a move from passively listening to the prayers to an active engagement in the practice of corporate prayer.

A2.2 Required expression of shared vulnerability within worship.

One of the more interesting reflections by the group about the 2nd intervention was their description of the shared vulnerability that participating in the intervention required. In sharing their prayer concerns with one another, especially those with whom they were less familiar, participants were externalizing their own inner weaknesses. Participants talked about this shared vulnerability as being difficult and uncomfortable. Yet, at the same time, participants acknowledged that it was this shared vulnerability in worship that led to the deepest relationship growth. The more vulnerable we are with one another and the more vulnerable we are with God, acknowledging our human sin and brokenness, the more open we become to real transformation.

A2.3 Shared expressions of vulnerability opened up growth in relationships with others.

Though initially difficult and uncomfortable for some, panelists agreed that the vulnerability that praying together required opened participants up to relationships with others. Participants reported that becoming vulnerable with one another through the

sharing of prayer concerns deepened existing relationships and grew richer relationships with those they had not previously known. They talked about how becoming vulnerable with one another brings a shared responsibility to the other. They also talked about how becoming vulnerable with one another in worship forces us to see one another as fully human and to listen to and understand one another differently.

A2.4 The presence of the Triune God deepened the experience of praying with one another.

Participants expressed a deep experience of God's presence within the 2nd intervention and described feeling God's presence within the sharing that took place between one another. In particular, panelists talked about the agency of the Holy Spirit in opening people up to step outside their comfort zones, to share with one another, and to become vulnerable with one another.

A2.5 Shared expression of vulnerability in worship leads to experience of authentic Christian community.

Panelists talked powerfully about how the experience of shared vulnerability in worship led to an experience of authentic Christian community. In the act of sharing one another's burdens and encouraging one another in their struggles, participants experienced a deep sense of Christian community. Panelists talked about how becoming vulnerable with one another and externalizing one's weaknesses with one another broke down barriers between members and served as an equalizing force, revealing a unity of shared brokenness and shared identity as forgiven children of God. In addition, panelists talked about how becoming vulnerable with one another in worship reflected Christ's own becoming vulnerable for us on the cross. One panelist in particular reflected deeply on how our shared vulnerability with Christ in worship is the only form of authentic

worship and leads to the possibility of radical transformation. In the powerful words of one of the panelists, “We all have problems and when you can share with others, knowing that you’re going to get some strength from it, because that’s the whole purpose of prayer, talking with your Father, like Christ said, ‘If you can take the cup away from me, I would really like that, but really just be with me. If this is your will, then just be with me’” (PM1). Another panelist shared, “When you have prayer and you’re bringing either the people you know or the people you don’t know into the circle and you’re being vulnerable together, I think that’s what we really are as a community—opening us up authentically and going to the point of being who we are and at all times” (PM7).

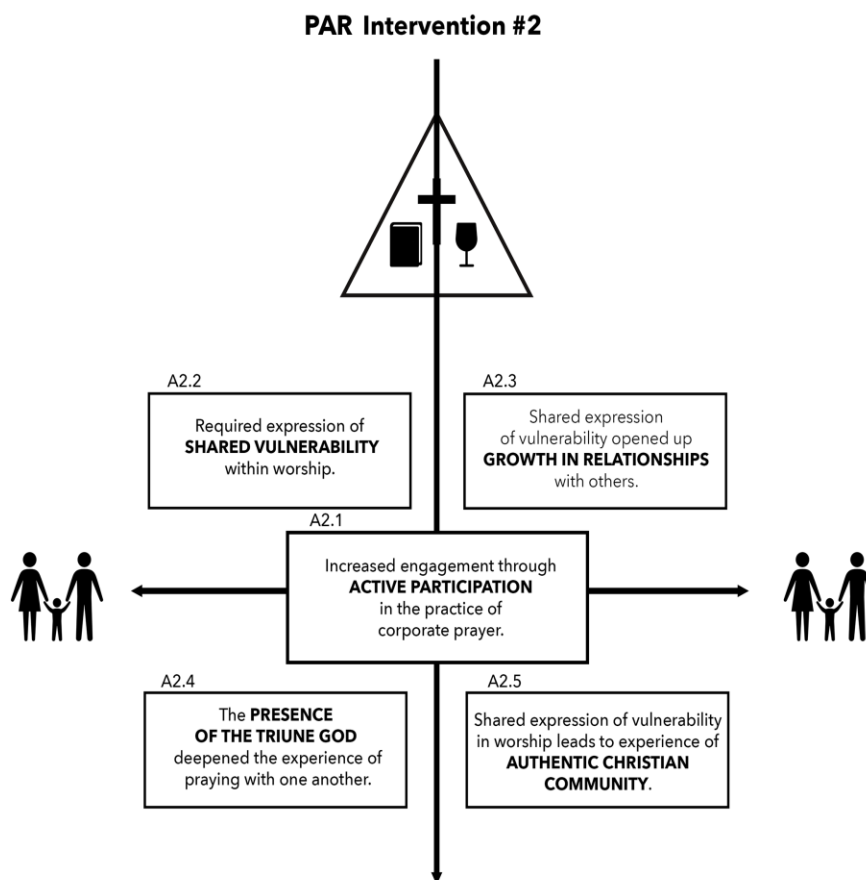
Theoretical Coding of 2nd PAR Intervention

Figure 5.3 Theoretical Coding of 2nd PAR Intervention

The Triune God worked through the 2nd PAR Intervention to deepen relationship growth between members of the worshipping community. As shown in Figure 5.3, five axial codes emerged through the intervention. These five axial codes both resulted from

the intervention and significantly impacted the level of relationship growth experienced between members of the congregation.

Panel Interview following 3rd PAR Intervention

The 3rd and final PAR Intervention included sharing stories in worship during the seven Sundays of Easter of how the congregation is connecting in ministry with local agencies and ministries in the community. In addition, each week a representative from the featured community agency or ministry was invited to share in conversation with the congregation during the Adult Forum. Following the completion of the 3rd PAR Intervention, a focus group was again held to explore how they experienced the intervention and how it either helped or hindered their growth in relationship with God, with each other, and with the world.

3rd PAR Intervention Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

Table 5.9 3rd PAR Intervention Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

A3.1 Increased awareness of congregation's involvement in community.

- (F3.1) Educational.
- (F3.3) Opened eyes.
- (F3.4) Enlightened congregation to work of the larger church and its involvement in the world.
- (F3.5) Learned ways congregation is involved in the community.
- (F3.6) Opened eyes to outreach congregation is doing both locally and globally.
- (F3.12) Created understanding about how congregation is connected with community and world.
- (F3.13) Shared information.
- (F3.18) Helpful information for visitors.
- (F3.20) Engaged people in hearing the message of our congregation's outreach.
- (F3.21) Created an opportunity for people to discern where they fit into God's plan.
- (F3.44) Seeing actual outcomes of ministries creates buy-in.

Table 5.9 (continued) 3rd PAR Intervention Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

A3.2 Experienced the transforming work of the Holy Spirit making a connection between minds and hearts.

- (F3.7) Attending Adult Forum opened eyes to issue of food scarcity.
- (F3.8) Raised level of thinking about problem of food scarcity.
- (F3.9) Broadened thinking about problem of food scarcity.
- (F3.19) Opened our eyes to something God might be calling us to do.
- (F3.22) Allowed God to open up ears to how one might connect with a particular ministry.
- (F3.23) Started a conversation with others.
- (F3.24) Created dialogue on community issues.
- (F3.25) Increased awareness to community needs.
- (F3.26) Focused attention on community holes in caring for others.
- (F3.36) Holy Spirit was at work triggering things inside us.
- (F3.37) Holy Spirit was at work in setting our minds right.
- (F3.38) Holy Spirit was at work stirring up God's call in us.
- (F3.39) Holy Spirit worked through our minds to affect our hearts.
- (F3.40) Holy Spirit changed our minds to think about things differently.
- (F3.41) Holy Spirit worked through our minds to soften our hearts.
- (F3.42) Holy Spirit made a heart connection with a real-life need.
- (F3.43) Holy Spirit caused us to reason and to question.
- (F3.49) God called us to help through this intervention.

A3.3 Lacked opportunity for active engagement through worship with the community.

- (F3.10) Did not bring much change to worship life.
- (F3.11) Low level of impact overall.
- (F3.14) Needed to provide a direct and immediate way for people to get connected and involved.
- (F3.15) Needed to create some sort of interface for people to connect with the ministry.
- (F3.16) Needed to provide contact information for various ministries.
- (F3.17) Minimal change to worship service.
- (F3.45) Gave people a choice as to their level of involvement.
- (F3.46) Gave people the choice of remaining passive.
- (F3.47) Giving people options is helpful.

Table 5.9 (continued) 3rd PAR Intervention Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

A3.4 Revealed God’s activity in the church, in individuals, and in the community.

- (F3.27) Revealed the good being done in our community.
- (F3.28) Sharing the good that the church is doing holds potential to change view of the church.
- (F3.29) Showed God’s activity in the world.
- (F3.30) Saw God at work in each agency that was represented.
- (F3.31) Affirmed that God’s work is being done.
- (F3.32) God’s good work in the world is happening through people.
- (F3.33) Showed that Christ is alive.
- (F3.34) Showed Christ at work through us.
- (F3.35) Revealed God’s work through the people in our community.
- (F3.59) God works through individuals both inside and outside the church.
- (F3.60) Holy Spirit works through the church.
- (F3.61) Holy Spirit works through individuals.

A3.5 Strengthened a perceived weak connection between worship and mission.

- (F3.2) Involvement with community agencies is not something usually associated with worship.
 - (F3.48) Important connection between worship and sharing community needs.
 - (F3.50) Prayers in worship make connection between worship and the world.
 - (F3.51) Praying for the world changes the world.
 - (F3.52) Prayer opens eyes to needs of others.
 - (F3.53) Church’s community involvement flows out of Christ’s involvement in the community.
 - (F3.54) Mission is essential to the church.
 - (F3.55) Social justice must also serve leading others to Jesus.
 - (F3.56) Jesus is essential to church’s identity.
 - (F3.57) Loving others means meeting their needs.
 - (F3.58) Jesus must also remain the center of congregation’s outreach and mission.
-

Explanation of 3rd PAR Intervention Axial Codes

A3.1 Increased awareness of congregation's involvement in community.

First and foremost, participants described this particular intervention as impacting the mind over and above the heart. The intervention was described as educational and a helpful sharing of information. Panelists shared that it was a helpful means of increasing awareness in the congregation, particularly among visitors, of the different ways the congregation is involved in outreach to the community. It helped to open peoples' eyes to what the congregation is doing.

A3.2 Experienced the transforming work of the Holy Spirit making a connection between minds and hearts.

Though primarily experienced as an intellectual intervention, panelists did identify the Holy Spirit as taking the information that was presented and moving it from peoples' minds to their hearts. Particularly interesting was how the respondents uniformly named the agency of the Holy Spirit as being active in taking the information that was presented and using it as a tool to transform peoples' hearts. Respondents felt the Holy Spirit stirring up God's call inside themselves to get involved, softening their hearts on community issues, and calling them from passive listening to active engagement in hands-on ministry.

A3.3 Lacked opportunity for active engagement through worship with the community.

In contrast to the first two interventions, panelists did not feel like the third intervention had a significant impact on either the worship life of the congregation or on their individual lives of discipleship. The primary reason identified for its lower impact

was the lack of any real opportunity for active engagement. While worshipers heard about how the congregation is involved in community outreach, the intervention lacked any opportunity for worshipers to experience such community outreach. Panelists consistently identified that it would have been very helpful and much more impactful if there had been an immediate way for worshipers to get involved in the highlighted ministry.

A3.4 Revealed God's activity in the church, in individuals, and in the community.

In response to the third intervention, panelists did report an increased ability to see God's activity in the church, in individuals, and in the larger community. Respondents shared that the highlighted ministries revealed Christ alive and at work both in us and in the world. They noted being able to see the Holy Spirit at work both in the church and in individuals. The third intervention affirmed for participants that God's work is indeed being done both in the congregation and in the community.

A3.5 Strengthened a perceived weak connection between worship and mission.

Participants felt that the third intervention helped to create an important connection between what we do in worship and what we do in the community. Respondents appreciated the heightened juxtaposition of worship and mission. They powerfully described the church's mission of community outreach as flowing directly out of Christ's own mission of reaching out to those who were in need. One panel member felt particularly strongly about keeping a close connection between Jesus and social justice, passionately articulating that our social justice must always be a direct result of our Christian confession and not separate from it.

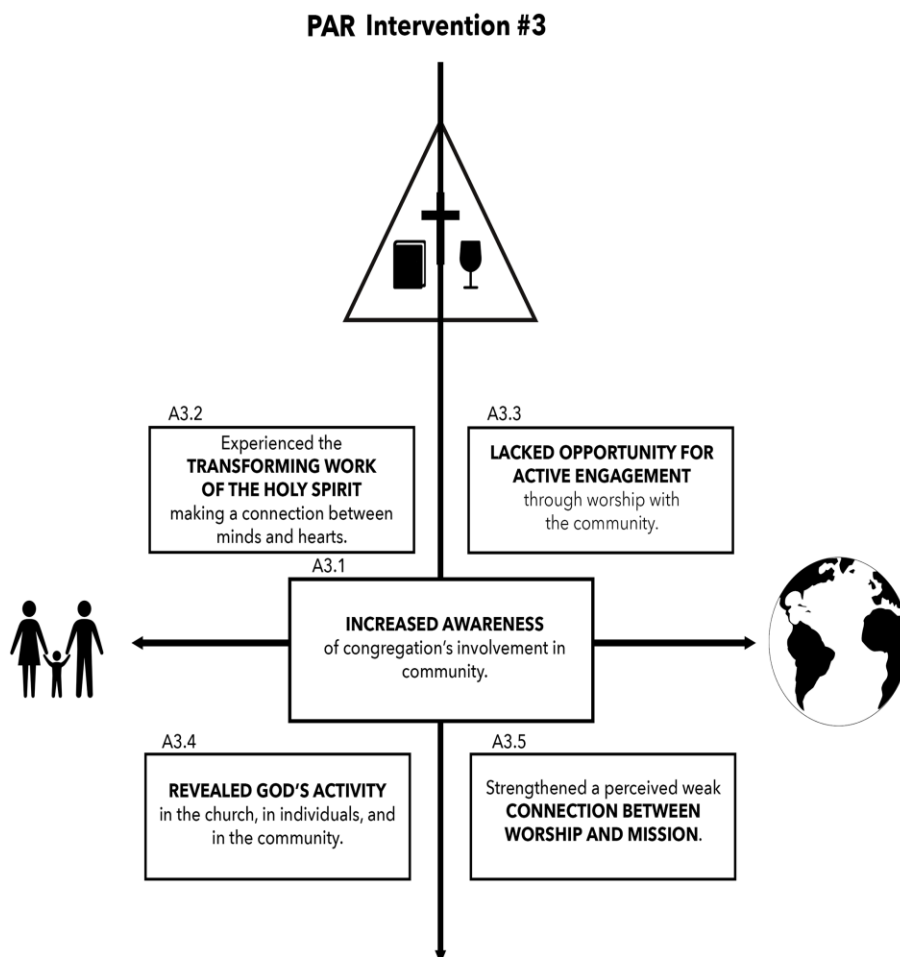
Theoretical Coding of 3rd PAR Intervention

Figure 5.4 Theoretical Coding of 3rd PAR Intervention

The Triune God worked through the 3rd PAR Intervention to grow relationships between the worshipers and the community beyond the congregation's walls. As shown in Figure 5.4, five axial codes emerged from the intervention. These five axial codes both

resulted from the intervention and, though muted, impacted the level of relationship growth worshipers experienced between the congregation and the larger community.

End Line Interviews

Following the completion of the three interventions, one-on-one interviews were conducted with each of the nine members of the panel. In the interviews, panelists were asked the same questions as they were asked in the baseline interviews. Questions were designed to invite panelists to describe how they experience the presence and activity of the Triune God in worship and if and how they experience growth in their relationships with God, with each other, and with the community through the practice of Christian worship.

End Line Interview Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

Table 5.10 End Line Interview Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

AE1 Perichoretic worship requires missional leadership that fully engages God's people in becoming participants in God's work.

- (FE3) God's presence is made known in getting us out of our comfort zones.
- (FE4) God's presence is made known through learning and growth.
- (FE11) Seeing children interact with others frees adults to interact with others.
- (FE13) Congregation needs pastor's permission to engage with others in worship.
- (FE14) Opportunities to engage with others in worship is key to growing relationship.
- (FE19) Interventions increased active participation in worship.
- (FE20) Interventions forced us to engage in the experience of worship.
- (FE29) Increased engagement in worship grows relationship.
- (FE30) God's presence is made known through the liturgy.
- (FE42) Uniformity of Lutheran worship connects us with the global church.
- (FE43) Announcements grow connections with community and world.
world.
- (FE53) Pastors' relatability grows relationship.
- (FE55) Interventions dramatically encouraged growth in relationships.

Table 5.10 (continued) End Line Interview Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

AE1 (continued) Perichoretic worship requires missional leadership that fully engages God's people in becoming participants in God's work.

- (FE59) Personal lack of focus distracts from experience of God's presence.
- (FE60) Personal stress distracts from experience of God's presence.
- (FE70) Welcoming outsiders into worship is a challenge.
- (FE87) Traditional worship seems more passive than contemporary service.
- (FE88) Introverted Lutheranism hinders growth in relationship with others.
- (FE100) Exploring how St. John's is involved in community grows relationship with the world.
- (FE105) Repetition in worship can hinder experience of God's presence.
- (FE106) Change and innovation in worship engages relationship with God.
- (FE109) Lifting up ministries of congregation grow relationship with world.
- (FE110) Outreach beyond walls of church grows relationship with world.
- (FE112) Repeated opportunities to engage with others in worship make it easier over time.
- (FE113) Resistance to change hinders growth in relationships.
- (FE120) Opening liturgy of worship sometimes lacks participatory engagement.
- (FE121) Lack of engagement in worship hinders experience of God's presence.
- (FE122) Lack of connection between liturgy and daily life hinders growth in relationship.

AE2 Singing together in worship is a perichoretic act through which the Triune God works to cultivate holy relationships.

- (FE17) Singing in worship grows sense of participation.
- (FE26) Songs engage people in growing relationship.
- (FE31) God's presence is made known through singing.
- (FE32) Singing engages us in praising God.
- (FE33) Familiar songs engage.
- (FE34) Unfamiliar songs disengage.
- (FE48) Holy Spirit is experienced in singing.
- (FE49) Singing renews faith.
- (FE63) Music grows relationship with God.
- (FE66) Singing together grows relationship with others.
- (FE80) Participating in music amplifies the experience of God's presence in worship.
- (FE81) Through corporate singing, God works through us.

Table 5.10 (continued) End Line Interview Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

AE2 (continued) Singing together in worship is a perichoretic act through which the Triune God works to cultivate holy relationships.

- (FE82) Participating together in music enhances sense of God's activity.
- (FE99) Multi-stanza hymns hinder experience of God's presence.
- (FE118) God's presence is experienced in the hymns.
- (FE119) Music is a gift from God.
- (FE124) Singing hymns grow sense of participation in God's activity.
- (FE125) In singing the hymns, we are actively participating in God's gift to us.
- (FE126) Holy Spirit is experienced in the singing of the hymns.
- (FE128) God speaks personally through hymns.

AE3 Perichoretic worship creatively engages God's people in God's Word in ways that make a difference in their daily lives.

- (FE27) Sermons are primarily a passive activity in worship.
- (FE28) Dialogue surrounding and during sermons could increase engagement in worship.
- (FE35) God's presence is made known in the sermon.
- (FE36) Sermons grow relationship with God.
- (FE37) Applying sermon to daily life grows relationship with God.
- (FE38) Sermons stretch our imagination of God.
- (FE39) Sermons apply God's Word to daily life.
- (FE40) Sermons that relate to current events grow relationship with God.
- (FE45) Applying sermon to daily life grows a sense of participation.
- (FE50) Holy Spirit is experienced in sermons.
- (FE52) Pastors' preaching style grows relationship.
- (FE57) God's presence is experienced through hearing of God's Word.
- (FE62) Children's message grows relationship with God.
- (FE83) Personal engagement with God's Word grows relationship with God.
- (FE103) Sermons are primary means for growing relationship with God in worship.
- (FE104) Sermons that challenge personal responsibility in discipleship have the most impact.
- (FE107) Sermons that challenge us to action grow relationship with God and others.
- (FE111) Personal study grows relationship with God.
- (FE127) God speaks personally through sermons.

Table 5. 10 (continued) End Line Interview Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

AE4 Perichoretic worship creates intentional space for meaningful, subject-to-subject interaction between worship participants.

- (FE2) God's presence is made known in greeting each other.
- (FE5) Greeting one another grows relationship with God.
- (FE6) Looking each other in the eye grows relationship with God.
- (FE7) Making connections with others grows relationship with God.
- (FE8) Being a leader in VBS grew relationship with God.
- (FE9) Being a leader in VBS pushed me outside of my comfort zone.
- (FE16) Participation in VBS opened me up to relationship with our neighbors.
- (FE51) Active congregational life grows relationship.
- (FE12) Praying together in small groups grows relationship with others.
- (FE15) Becoming vulnerable opens one up to relationship with others and the world.
- (FE41) Praying in small groups grows relationship with others.
- (FE44) Prayers grow a sense of participation.
- (FE58) God's presence is experienced through corporate prayer.
- (FE65) Pain can lead to growth in relationship with God.
- (FE67) Actions that are done collectively grow relationship with others.
- (FE68) Small group interactions in worship grow relationship with others.
- (FE69) Diversity in contemporary service grows relationship with world.
- (FE77) Holy Spirit is experienced through corporate prayer.
- (FE78) Corporate prayer grows intimacy with others.
- (FE79) Corporate prayer grows sharing in joy and pain of others.
- (FE85) Difficult to grow relationships with others in traditional worship.
- (FE86) Physical limitations of sanctuary hinder growth in relationship with others.
- (FE89) Lack of intentional time in traditional worship for growing relationship with others.
- (FE96) Need to overcome the divide between the two ends of the building.
- (FE114) Two ends of the building should look alike visually.
- (FE116) Need for one unified worship location.
- (FE117) Physical division of building has created relational divide as well.
- (FE123) Experience of sharing the peace needs to be deepened to allow real relationship growth with others.

Table 5.10 (continued) End Line Interview Axial Codes with Grouped Focused Codes

AE5 The practice of Holy Communion models perichoretic worship in which the Triune God fully engages God’s people in holy relationship with God’s self, with one another, and with the world.

- (FE18) Physical movement in worship grows sense of participation.
- (FE23) Holy Spirit is experienced during communion.
- (FE46) Communion replenishes.
- (FE47) Communion sends us out.
- (FE56) God’s presence is experienced through communion.
- (FE71) Communion grows participation in God’s activity.
- (FE72) Communion gets us out of our chairs.
- (FE73) Communion is active participation in worship.
- (FE74) Communion draws us closer in relationship with God.
- (FE75) Communion draws us into a mutual relationship.
- (FE76) Communion is living into God’s image.
- (FE97) Participating in communion creates an intimate, personal connection between me and God.
- (FE98) Going forward and kneeling at the rail for communion deepens relationship with God.
- (FE108) Participating in communion grows relationship with others.

AE6 Perichoretic worship draws attention to the work of the Triune God in engaging us in holy relationship with God’s self, with each other, and with the world.

- (FE1) God’s presence is made known in quiet time.
- (FE21) Holy Spirit is experienced in the quiet time.
- (FE22) Holy Spirit is experienced in the confession.
- (FE24) Cleansing power of Holy Spirit is experienced through the sharing of the benediction.
- (FE25) Benediction gives hope and strength for the coming week.
- (FE54) Different worship options grow relationship.
- (FE61) Confession convicts us of our sin.
- (FE64) Benediction grows relationship with God.
- (FE84) Holy Spirit is experienced through witnessing a baptism.
- (FE90) Worship draws us into praise of God.

Table 5.10 (continued) End Line Interview Axial Codes with Grouped Focus Codes

AE6 (continued) Perichoretic worship draws attention to the work of the Triune God in engaging us in holy relationship with God's self, with each other, and with the world.

- (FE91) Worship gathers us together.
 - (FE92) Gathering together in worship brings strength.
 - (FE93) In worship, God seeks to get our attention.
 - (FE94) In worship, God centers us for the week.
 - (FE95) In worship, God grounds us in God's Word.
 - (FE101) Worshiping together grows relationship.
 - (FE102) Worshiping together creates community.
 - (FE115) Worship in PLC lacks reverence.
-

Explanation of End Line Axial Codes

AE1 Perichoretic worship requires missional leadership that fully engages God's people in becoming participants in God's work.

Through the end line interviews, it became clear that perichoretic worship, that is, worship through which the Triune God grows holy relationships, requires worship leadership that seeks to fully engage worshipers as active participants in the action of worship. Perichoretic worship requires worship leadership that facilitates active participation *in* worship rather than passive observance *of* worship.

Panelists described the interventions as both forcing them to step outside of their comfort zones *and* freeing them to become full participants in worship. This dual reality was described as bringing both a certain level of discomfort *and* freedom to the worship experience. Pastoral leadership was identified as being key to granting permission and authority to the worship participants to engage fully with God, with each other, and with

the community through worship. Panelists were appreciative of the opportunities to engage more fully in Christian worship and to become full participants. Those being interviewed viewed as helpful worship leadership that provides creative opportunities in worship to become full participants through the unique sharing of their gifts.

In addition, panelists identified one of the key roles of pastoral leadership in worship as being to serve as an interpreter of God's activity in worship and in the world and of how worshipers can become participants in it. Missional worship leaders help worshipers make connections between the work of the Triune God and their participation in Christian worship *and* between their participation in Christian worship and their participation in God's mission in the world through their daily lives. Missional leaders help worshipers name the Triune God as the active subject in worship, in the world, and in their daily lives.

AE2 Singing together in worship is a perichoretic act through which the Triune God works to cultivate holy relationships.

Panelists overwhelmingly identified the act of singing together in worship as one of the most powerful ways in which they experience the presence and activity of the Triune God in worship *and* in which they most feel like participants in what the Triune God is doing in worship. While music in general was often lifted up as communicating God's presence, it was more specifically the corporate act of making music together in worship that seemed to have the most impact in relationship growth. Panelists talked about the act of singing together in worship as engaging and growing worshipers in their relationships both with God and with one another. One panelist even talked about how the act of singing a corporate song can connect with the community beyond the walls of the congregation.

Hymn-singing was frequently described as a participatory act in the Triune God's missional activity in worship. Panelists talked about the Triune God speaking to them through the words of the hymns, as well as through the emotional feelings that certain hymns stir up in them. The youngest member of the panel shared, "The hymns are kind of like a gift. Through singing and listening to the hymns, I'm actively participating in what God has given us" (PM6). It was noted several times that familiar, well-known hymns facilitate active engagement in worship while less familiar, unknown hymns discourage active engagement in worship. Several panelists expressed frustration at music in worship that does not allow them to fully participate either because of its unfamiliarity, its level of difficulty, or a lack of musical leadership that invites and encourages congregational participation.

It was striking how panelists identified the Triune God as acting through music in worship and, particularly, through corporate singing. Panelists clearly experience God through their sharing in music. One panelist in particular spoke eloquently about music as a gift of God to us.

AE3 Perichoretic worship creatively engages God's people in God's Word in ways that make a difference in their daily lives.

The preached Word was identified as being one of the primary ways that God speaks in Christian worship and through which God grows holy relationship. Particularly helpful are sermons that help worshipers apply God's Word to their daily lives. Multiple panelists shared their appreciation for sermons that speak to current events and realities and that help worshipers interpret God's presence and activity in the midst of them.

Perichoretic worship seeks to actively engage worshipers in the hearing and living out of God's Word. Panelists shared a yearning for additional opportunities to actively

engage in God's Word during worship through active dialogue with the preacher and/or with one another. In addition, panelists indicated that any tools or resources such as hand-outs, worksheets, outlines, etc., that help listeners actively engage in the action of preaching could be helpful. Listeners yearn for sermons that actively engage their daily lives with God's Word and that move them from passive listening to active faith and discipleship in the world.

AE4 Perichoretic worship creates intentional space for meaningful, subject-to-subject interaction between worship participants.

Growth in holy relationships happens when intentional space is created within worship for meaningful, subject-to-subject interaction between worship participants. It was readily acknowledged that the worship life of the congregation does not naturally lend itself to meaningful interaction between worshipers. However, the limited interaction that is included through the sharing of the peace and greeting one another before and after worship is meaningful. Opportunities in which worshipers have their own unique personhood acknowledged in worship and in which worshipers are given permission to acknowledge the unique personhood of those around them were highly valued.

Panelists found the second intervention in which worshipers were asked to pray with one another in small groups particularly meaningful and expressed an openness to more small group prayer experiences in the future. Panelists talked about experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit through praying together with others. In addition to interaction with others during worship, panelists identified that participation in other congregational ministries, such as Vacation Bible School and Small Groups, also helps to grow meaningful relationships between one another.

Multiple panelists talked about the physical division between the two sides of the congregation's facility creating both a real and perceived division within the congregation. With a traditional sanctuary on one end of the building in which the three weekly traditional worship services are held and a relatively new Parish Life Center on the other end of the building in which the one weekly contemporary worship service is held, panel members expressed concern and regret over the division that they experience between the two ends. This division in worship location and worship style is experienced as a hindrance to relationship growth among members of the congregation. Multiple panel members talked about the need to be intentional in bringing together the two ends and in creating unity around worship. Worshiping together, regardless of worship style, seems important for growing holy relationships in the congregation.

AE5 The practice of Holy Communion models perichoretic worship in which the Triune God fully engages God's people in holy relationship with God's self, with one another, and with the world.

There seems to be something inherently perichoretic about the practice of Holy Communion. Panelists consistently talked about Holy Communion as the place in worship where they most fully experience God's presence and holy relationship. Holy Communion actively engages worshipers in the action of worship, involving both physical and spiritual engagement. Worshipers talked of their sharing in Holy Communion as the moment in the worship service when they are most clearly a participant both in the action of worship and in the activity of the Triune God.

Panelists described Holy Communion as a personal and intimate encounter between themselves and the Triune God. They talked about Holy Communion as a corporate action in which the community comes together for a meal. They talked about

Holy Communion as sending them out in mission to the community. In short, Holy Communion is experienced as a highly participatory act in which the Triune God engages worshipers in relationship growth with God's self, with one another, and with the world. As such, the practice of Holy Communion models perichoretic worship.

AE6 Perichoretic worship draws attention to the work of the Triune God in engaging us in holy relationship with God's self, with each other, and with the world.

Perichoretic worship invites worshipers into the presence and experience of the Triune God. Panelists talked about the value of quiet times in worship for personal reflection and meditation in which they are invited to dwell in God's presence. Several mentioned the sharing of the benediction as a holy moment for them in which God's presence is felt and experienced personally. Panelists clearly experience worship as the activity of the Triune God seeking to engage worshipers in relationship. One panelist shared, "[In worship], God's reminding us, 'Hey, I'm here! Don't forget about me!'" (PM5). Perichoretic worship is worship that draws attention to the Triune God's activity and invites worshipers into active engagement with it through holy relationship with God, with one another, and with the world.

Theoretical Coding of End Line Interviews

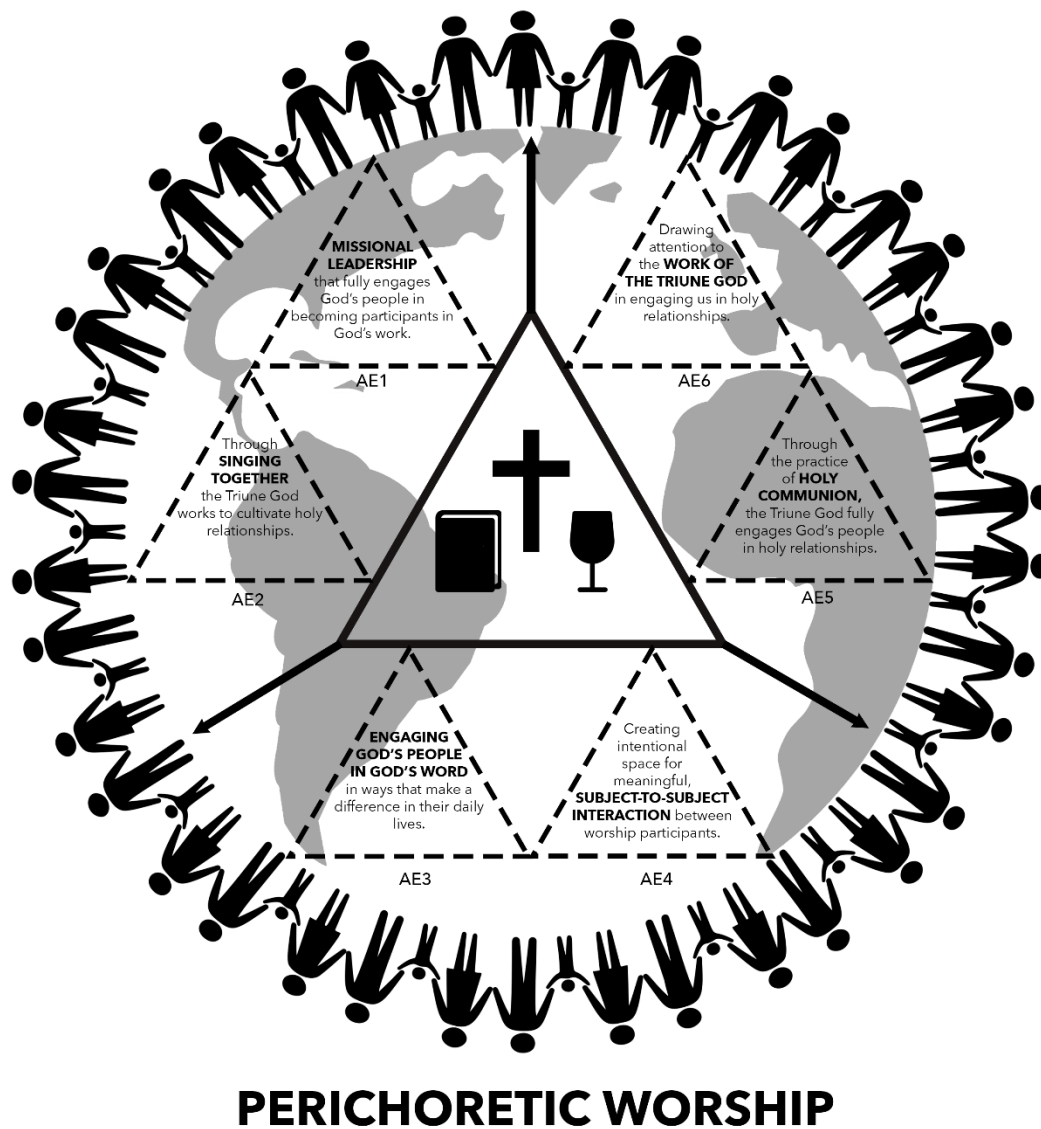


Figure 5.5 Theoretical Coding of End Line Interviews

As figure 5.5 shows, the Triune God stands at the center of perichoretic worship, working through Word and Sacrament to draw all people into relationship with God's self, with one another, and with the world. Through end line interviews with each of nine panelists, six axial codes were developed that describe unique components of perichoretic

worship. The Triune God works through each of these components to grow holy relationships. Each of these components bring together the Triune God, God's people, and God's world in a way that engages God's people and God's world as active participants in God's mission.

Triangulation of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

In looking at the quantitative and qualitative data together, it would appear that the three interventions increased worshipers' level of active engagement in worship. Both the quantitative and qualitative data suggest that this increased level of active engagement in worship resulted in a deeper experience of relationship growth. As the quantitative data show, the study resulted in a significant increase in worshipers' experience of God as the primary actor in worship, thus suggesting that a deeper level of active engagement in worship leads to a deeper experience of God's presence and activity in worship. The qualitative data show that worshipers not only experienced a deeper level of active engagement through the interventions, but also yearn for this deepened engagement. The Triune God is clearly experienced as the primary actor in worship working through engagement with God's people through God's Word and through the meal of Holy Communion (see Figure 5.6). Through other practices, such as singing together, subject-to-subject social interaction, and attentiveness to God's presence, the level of active engagement with what the Triune God is doing is enhanced and growth in relationship is encouraged.

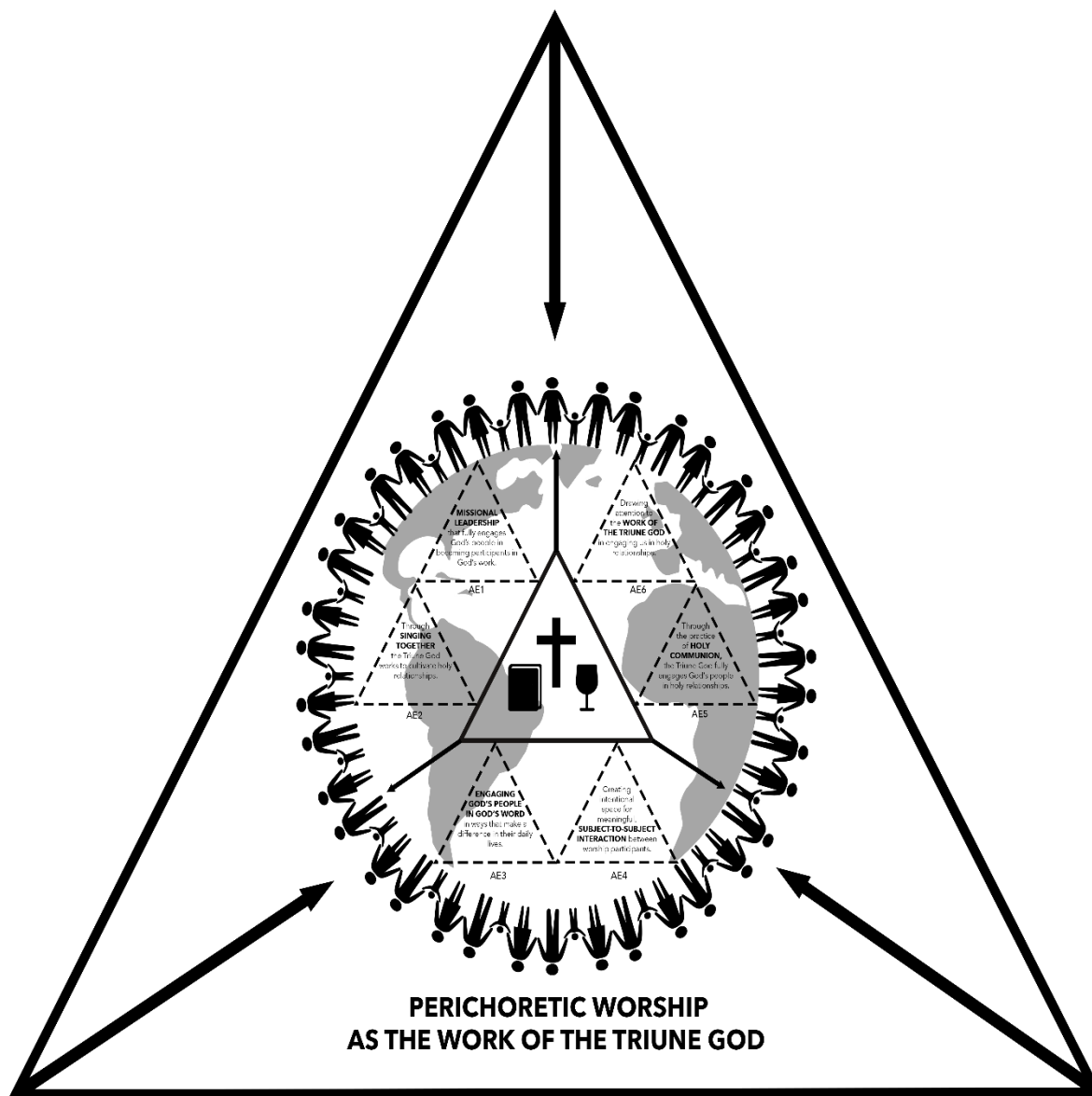


Figure 5.6 Triangulation of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Summary

In this chapter, the results of both the quantitative and qualitative data of the study are presented. Both the quantitative and qualitative data suggest that an increase in the

level of active engagement in worship leads to a deepened growth in relationships. Certain worship practices were identified and lifted up that seem to enhance the worshipers' engagement in worship and that encourage such relationship growth. Chapter six will look more deeply at the conclusions that can be drawn from the data and explore ways in which these conclusions can be applied in the worship life of congregations.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS WITH THEOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL REFLECTION

Introduction

Some years ago now, our family visited Hershey's Chocolate World in Hershey, Pennsylvania.¹ Hershey's Chocolate World classifies itself as a museum, but it is more than your typical museum. It is an experience. From the moment one arrives, guests are welcomed into a multi-sensory, interactive, highly-engaging experience. Guests are invited to create their own candy bar and to design their own personal candy bar wrapper. As one tours the museum, free samples of chocolate to taste are shared and visitors are invited to enjoy a unique chocolate tasting experience if they choose.

For me, however, the highlight of visiting Hershey's Chocolate World was the Trolley Works tour of the town of Hershey and the Milton Hershey School. Like the museum, this historic trolley tour is more than your typical tour. It is an experience. When getting on the trolley, guests are greeted by a friendly conductor in period costume. As the tour travels through the streets of Hershey and the grounds of the Milton Hershey School, two tour guides creatively engage riders in the life and story of Milton Hershey, all the while dressed in period costumes that they change along the way. As the trolley

¹ For more information about Hershey's Chocolate World in Hershey, Pennsylvania, visit www.hersheys.com/chocolateworld/en_us.html.

travels from one historic location to another, the tour guides invite the riders to sing together from a printed songbook featuring familiar and beloved songs from America's past. As riders sing together, a community begins to develop. Riders start to talk and laugh with one another. Through the act of singing together and through their mutual participation in the action of the tour, otherwise complete and total strangers start to share a common story and are formed into a community of sorts, short-lived though it be.

Prior to my experience at Hershey's Chocolate World, I knew virtually nothing about Milton Hershey or his school. However, my experience in both the museum and on the trolley tour inspired me to become an active learner about him and his life. I ended up driving to his school later that afternoon to tour the grounds and visit with some of the staff. I purchased a biography about Milton Hershey and read it cover-to-cover when I returned home. Though I obviously never met the man personally, through my active participation in his story that day and in the days and weeks that followed, a relationship had developed. The story of Milton Hershey had become part of my story and, in a tiny, tiny way, my story had become part of the story of Milton Hershey.

Similar to my experience in Hershey, Pennsylvania, perichoretic worship is worship that fully engages God's people in active participation in the missional story of the Triune God. Through such active participation in the practice of Christian worship, the Triune God acts to draw people into deeper relationships with God's self, with one another, and with the world. The more actively engaged people are in the practice of Christian worship, the more these holy relationships grow and develop. Chapter five presents the quantitative and qualitative results of the Participatory Action Research of this study. Chapter six draws conclusions about the practice of Christian worship from

these results and revisits the theoretical, biblical, and theological lenses undergirding this study, reflecting on how the results of this study interface with each of these lenses.

Significance of Results

Missional Leadership

Worship Leader as Host

Perichoretic worship, that is, worship through which the Triune God actively engages worshipers as active participants in God's mission of growing relationships between us and God, between us and one another, and between us and the world, requires worship leadership that is missional leadership. Worship leaders play a central role in the practice of Christian worship. Yet, worship leaders that are also missional leaders clearly recognize that what happens in worship is not ultimately about them. The Triune God, not the worship leader, is the primary actor within Christian worship. The primary role of the worship leader in perichoretic worship is, therefore, to serve as host, welcoming worshipers into what it is that the Triune God is doing and creating opportunities for the worshipers to engage as full participants in God's missional action.

The role of worship leader as host begins as the worship leader plans Christian worship. Every selection of music, every selection of liturgical action and song, every selection of liturgical dress, liturgical actions, and liturgical space and environment demands of the worship leader as host to consider whether that particular liturgical selection welcomes worshipers as full and active participants into God's missional activity or hinders such full and active participation. Simply put, if our liturgical decisions as worship leaders fail to welcome and engage worshipers in the action of

Christian worship, then our worship is not missional. Like planning a dinner party in which we want all our guests to feel fully engaged in the various activities of the party from eating together to sharing in conversation together, worship leaders as host take great care in planning and creating worship experiences in which all God's people can actively participate.

In addition to affecting how worship leaders plan and prepare Christian worship, the role of worship leader as host also needs to inform how worship leaders actually lead Christian worship. Physical actions and movements during worship should not draw needless attention to the worship leader, but need to be welcoming and inviting toward the congregation, gently drawing God's people into what it is that God is doing. Brief verbal invitations spoken at key points in the worship service, such as when giving instructions for the distribution of communion, should be shared in such a way that worshipers are invited into the action of worship in gracious, non-anxious ways. Even the ministry of preaching can convey the role of worship leader as host as the preacher invites worshipers into an active hearing of God's Word. In both his or her words and actions, the worship leader as host should reflect the hospitality of the Triune God, graciously inviting God's people into holy relationship through the practice of Christian worship.

Worship Leader as Permission Giver

In addition to the role of host, perichoretic worship leaders also serve in the role of permission giver, granting worshipers permission to share their unique, God-given gifts as active participants in the action of Christian worship. Because the worship life of many congregations has fostered the experience of Christian worship as a passive act in

which the worshiper merely watches the action of the worship leaders, participants in this study frequently talked about how refreshing it was to be given permission to engage in worship as active participants.

The role of worship leader as permission giver seeks to give worshipers the freedom to fully engage in worship experiences that cultivate relationships with the Triune God, with one another, and with the world. Perichoretic worship leaders give worshipers permission to experience relationship with God by creating opportunities for the worshiper to engage directly with the Triune God through silent prayer and reflection, active participation in the words, songs, and actions of the liturgy, creative responses to God's Word such as journaling or artistic expression, and, most importantly, Word and Sacrament.

In addition, perichoretic worship leaders give worshipers permission to experience relationship with one another by creating opportunities for personal engagement with one another during worship. Such opportunities might range from the more formal worship practices of sharing the peace and corporate prayer to less formal worship practices such as providing small group discussion guides following the sermon or inviting worshipers to trace the sign of the cross on the person sitting next to them during the benediction.

Finally, perichoretic worship leaders give worshipers permission to experience relationship with the world by creating opportunities for personal engagement with the world both in and beyond the practice of Christian worship. Such opportunities within the practice of Christian worship could include inviting community members to share their faith story during worship, giving examples at the time of the offering of ways in which

the congregation is using its financial resources to serve those beyond its walls, or incorporating music from a variety of cultures. Opportunities for engagement beyond the practice of Christian worship include such things as local mission trips, sponsoring global missionaries, or featuring sign-ups for community outreach ministries in the narthex. Regardless of how the worship leader creates such opportunities, the role of worship leader as permission giver reflects the permission giving of the Triune God who honors the unique sharing of our God-given gifts through our active participation in God's mission in worship and beyond.

Worship Leader as Interpreter

A third role that perichoretic worship leaders hold is the role of interpreter. Perichoretic worship leaders serve as interpreters of what the Triune God is doing in and through Christian worship and how the Triune God invites the worshipers to active participation in God's mission. The role of worship leader as interpreter is to remind the worshipping assembly that it is the Triune God who is active and at work through the practice of Christian worship. It is the Triune God who is speaking to the gathered assembly through the read and preached Word. It is the Triune God who is forming and forgiving the gathered assembly through the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. It is the Triune God who gathers the assembly together and it is the Triune God who sends the assembly out into the world to serve. Missional interpreters name God as the active subject of our worship and, indeed, of our entire life as the church and as Christ's disciples in it.

One of the frequent responses of those interviewed during this study was that they experienced God's activity most clearly in worship through the weekly announcements.

At first, this response was a puzzlement for me as I do not generally consider the weekly announcements to be a particularly Spirit-filled time in the worship service. However, as I probed these responses, what I discovered was that when announcements were shared of various ministries taking place in and through our congregation in the coming week, it helped them connect God to those particular ministries and their involvement in them. For example, it no longer became a matter of spending an hour of the week at choir practice practicing music for next week's service, but rather spending an hour of the week in community with God's people preparing music so that God could work through their music to touch the hearts of God's people. Through the interpretation offered by the worship leader, God became recognized not only as the active subject of the worship service, but of every aspect of congregational life as well.

Singing Together

Encouraging Full Participation

One of the most perichoretic acts within Christian worship is the act of singing together. Singing together in worship, whether singing traditional hymns or contemporary praise songs, is a highly participatory act through which the Triune God acts to draw worshipers into relationship with God, with one another, and with the world around them. While more performative acts of music in worship, such as sharing a musical solo or performing an instrumental prelude, are certainly meaningful both for the musician who performs them and for the congregation that hears them, something more—indeed, something perichoretic—happens when worship participants share in the act of singing together.

Thus, the primary goal of musical leadership in Christian worship should be to engage the congregation in the act of singing together as fully as possible. Hymns and songs should be chosen that allow for the fullest participation possible. Congregational song should be both familiar and singable for the congregation so that the congregation is encouraged in their participation rather than discouraged. When new or less familiar music is used, effort must be made to teach the music to the congregation in a way that allows them to fully participate. When music is used that causes congregation members to feel as if they are failing in their participation, worshipers disengage from the worship experience. Congregational song should be chosen and taught in such a way that allows worshipers to succeed in their participation and, thereby, to fully engage in the worship experience.

Empowering Others to Share their Gifts

If the primary goal of musical leadership in Christian worship is to encourage full participation of the worshiping community in congregational song, then musical leaders must also work to empower others within the worshiping community to share their unique musical gifts. The purpose of the primary music leader in worship is not to be the sole provider of musical leadership during worship, but rather to empower and equip all those with musical gifts in the worshiping community to share those gifts in a way that supports full congregational participation. Recruiting instrumentalists and vocalists from within the congregation to assist in leading congregational song should be a primary focus of the primary musical leader. Perichoretic musical leadership involves sharing leadership, not hoarding it.

Empowering others to share their gifts during worship also helps to ensure that the musical leadership is contextual, that is, that it reflects the unique cultural and musical context of the individual congregation. Inviting the local bluegrass band to share their musical gifts during worship or encouraging the sixth-grade band student to squeak out on her clarinet the notes of a familiar hymn tune during the offertory honors the gifts of the local community and keeps the worship experience grounded in the unique musical and cultural context of the congregation. The sharing of diverse musical gifts in worship bears witness to the diversity that exists within the Triune God and to the unity we share as the people of God gathered around Word and Sacrament.

Making Congregational Song Accessible

Multiple participants in this study talked passionately about the frustration they experience when they are not able, for one reason or another, to fully participate in the congregational song during worship. In addition to selecting congregational song that is familiar and singable for the worshiping community, music leaders need to lead congregational song in a way that helps rather than hinders congregational participation. Musical leadership must be strong enough to actually lead the congregation in singing. Accompaniment of the hymns and worship songs should support and not detract from congregational singing. Musical cues must be provided so that the congregation can follow along, knowing when to begin and when to end. Tempos and rhythms must be consistent so that the congregation can sing with confidence. Every decision the musical leader makes should take into consideration whether such a decision helps or hinders full congregational participation.

Creative Engagement with God's Word

Reading God's Word in Worship

Perichoretic worship is worship that is centered in Word and Sacrament through which the Triune God acts as the active subject inviting people into holy relationship with God, with one another, and with the world. Opening worshipers up to God's action through creative engagement with God's Word is, therefore, one of the primary objectives of missional worship. Such creative engagement with God's Word begins with its reading during worship.

The reading of God's Word in worship must be done with the expectation that God is, indeed, going to speak through the reading to the congregation both individually and corporately. It is God's Word, after all, not ours, and God will speak through its reading. Readers in worship should approach their task as a holy task in and through which the Triune God is going to act upon the hearts and lives of its hearers. Readers, therefore, must take care to adequately prepare their readings so that their reading of God's Word does not distract the congregation from what it is that God is saying to the congregation through it. The reading should not simply be read, but rather proclaimed. The reading is God's Word for God's people. The reading of God's Word in worship should grab people's attention, alerting them to the promise that God is speaking to them for the purpose of drawing them more deeply into relationship. Any creative ways to draw the congregation's attention to God as the active subject of the reading would be most helpful.

Preaching God's Word in Worship

Not only is God the active subject when God's Word is read in worship, but also when God's Word is preached. The Triune God speaks and acts through the preaching of God's Word. Preaching, therefore, that is perichoretic in nature is preaching that opens the congregation up to what it is that God is doing in their lives through God's Word. Missional preaching lifts up God's people as participants in what it is that God is doing, helping listeners draw connections between God's Word and their daily lives. Participants in this study consistently shared that the preaching that is most helpful in worship is preaching that helps them apply God's Word to their daily lives and that helps them interpret what God is doing in the world in light of current political and world events. Such preaching does not necessarily seek to make conclusions for God's people as much as it invites people to creatively imagine what it is that God might be doing in their lives and in the world and how God might be inviting and calling them to participate in it.

In addition, perichoretic preaching is preaching that seeks to involve the congregation in the act of preaching itself. Some creative possibilities for engaging the congregation as participants in the act of preaching include shared dialogue between the preacher and listeners, building in times for small group discussions among the worshiping community during the sermon, or inviting the congregation to in some way share a written response either during or after the sermon. Anything that can be done to more actively engage the worshiping community as a participant in the act of preaching has the potential to more actively engage the worshiping community in what it is that the Triune God is doing in and through the worship experience.

Applying God's Word beyond Worship

In addition to creatively engaging God's people in God's Word during the worship service, it is helpful to provide resources for the worshiping community to apply God's Word in their daily lives once the worship service is over. Such resources could include a printed copy of the sermon or a sermon outline, devotional materials to use throughout the week that connect with the weekly worship theme, or discussion questions for parents to use in the car with their children on the way home from church. Resources such as these increase the worshiping community's sense of participation in God's Word and in what God is doing in and through God's Word in their daily lives and in the world around them. In short, through reading, preaching, and application, perichoretic worship seeks to creatively engage the worshiping community as full participants in God's Word and in what God is doing through it.

Subject-to-Subject Interaction

Creating Space for Social Interaction

If part of what the Triune God is up to through the practice of Christian worship is growing relationships between worshipers, then it is necessary to create openings in the worship experience for social interaction among worshipers to take place. Most of the time, such social interaction is limited to the act of sharing the peace. Possibilities for creating additional opportunities for social interaction within the context of Christian worship include inviting worshipers to pray with and for one another during the prayers of intercession, inviting worshipers to share in small group discussions surrounding the reading and proclaiming of God's Word, or participating in a hands-on service project together. Such opportunities create space for the Triune God to act. The more

opportunities for social interaction that are given, the more opportunities there are for holy relationships between members of the worshiping community to develop.

At their core, such social interactions are all about hospitality, that is, creating welcoming opportunities for people to engage with one another as mutual subjects. Normally, hospitality is thought of as what happens in churches before and after worship. Certainly, creating opportunities for hospitality before and after worship is important. However, perichoretic worship seeks not only to provide opportunities for hospitable, subject-to-subject exchanges before and after worship, but also during the worship experience itself. Christian worship is a communal practice. It is something the Christian community does together. As such, creating spaces within the practice of Christian worship for the Triune God to grow relationships within the community is important and holy work.

Making Worship Personal

While Christian worship is at its core a communal practice, acknowledging each individual participant in Christian worship as a uniquely created human subject with whom the Triune God yearns to share relationship is central to a practice of Christian worship that is perichoretic in nature. The Triune God seeks not only to be in relationship with the community as a whole, but also with each individual worshiper. As such, efforts need to be made by worship leaders and worship participants alike to acknowledge and include each and every individual worshiper as a full participant in the action of Christian worship. Such efforts include acknowledging each individual person by name, worship leaders making eye contact with worshipers in the pews, and caring for those with unique

needs such as hearing assistance, wheelchair accessibility, or being a single parent with small children.

It is likely that each of us has experienced attending a worship service in which the actions and words of the worship leaders seemed entirely disconnected from and even ignorant of the people sitting in the pews. If the Triune God truly is a God of relationship who seeks to engage us as full subjects in that divine relationship then our worship of that Triune God also needs to engage the worshipping community as full subjects within the action of Christian worship.

Unity in Diversity

Relationships matter. In the small and mid-sized congregation, relationships develop between worship participants organically and without much intentionality. However, the large congregation must work much more intentionally at developing relationships, particularly when the congregation is comprised of many diverse and unique groups and communities. The latter is certainly the case in the congregation represented by this study. With a membership of over 2,000, an average weekly worship attendance of over 500, and four distinct weekly worshipping communities, two of which happen simultaneously on two different ends of the building, developing meaningful relationships can be a challenge. This challenge seems to be exacerbated by the two simultaneous 10:30 a.m. worship services that happen on Sunday mornings—a traditional worship service in the sanctuary and a contemporary worship service in the Parish Life Center. Panelists talked of both a perceived and real division in the congregation between these two ends, as well as a desire for greater unity. Panelists closely tied together the perceived disunity with their desire for deeper, more meaningful relationships.

Regardless of whether the panelists preferred traditional or contemporary worship, they were in agreement that a unified 10:30 worship experience that would bring both ends together would help in growing meaningful relationships in the congregation.

Such a move toward a unified 10:30 worship experience, while facilitating an increased sense of unity and growth in relationships, brings with it many complex challenges, including the lack of a worship space large enough to comfortably host both worshipping communities. Until the day when a unified 10:30 worship experience could become possible, there are, however, smaller steps that could be taken to facilitate increased unity between the two services. Quarterly combined worship services could be held in which both communities worship together in one space. Elements from the contemporary worship service could begin to be incorporated into the traditional worship service and vice-versa. There could be an increased sharing of musical leadership between the two ends. Fellowship and service events could be planned that intentionally focus on building relationships across worship services. At the end of the day, cultivating worship practices through which the Triune God is invited to grow relationships between us and God, between us and each other, and between us and the world around us overcomes preferences of worship style and holds a unity that is possible even in the midst of diversity. Indeed, such unity in the midst of diversity is reflective of the perichoretic nature of the Triune God.

Holy Communion as a Perichoretic Act

Growing Relationship with the Triune God

In addition to being central, alongside of God's Word, to the practice of Christian worship, participation in Holy Communion is an inherently perichoretic act in that it

involves the worshipping community as active participants in subject-to-subject relationship with the Triune God, with one another, and with the world. Indeed, Holy Communion is one of the most participatory acts within the practice of Christian worship, engaging the worshiper in physical movement, the act of eating and drinking, verbal response, prayer, music, and more.

Participants in this study talked at length about Holy Communion being an intimate and personal encounter with the Triune God. It is in their participation in Holy Communion that worshipers experience the Triune God's presence and activity most deeply. In Holy Communion, the Triune God acts as the initiating subject, making the crucified and risen Christ present to the gathered community in, under, and with the bread and the wine. In the sharing of the meal, the Triune God forgives sin, strengthens faith, and deepens relationship. In the coming forward and receiving the physical elements of bread and wine, members of the worshipping community also participate as subjects, coming to the table to meet God just as they are, receiving by faith the gifts that God freely offers, and then taking these gifts with them into their daily lives. Through the encounter that happens between the Triune God and the individual worshiper in Holy Communion, the Triune God, by the power of the Spirit, grows the relationship.

Growing Relationship with Others

Holy Communion, however, is not a private act involving only an intimate encounter between the individual worshiper and the Triune God. Holy Communion is a meal given for and shared together by the entire community. It is a meal to which all God's people are invited and welcome and in which the entire community, not just individual members of it, is fed and strengthened. We come to the table together. We eat

the bread and drink the wine together. We hear the promise of Christ's presence with us together. We are sent from the table into the world together. One can no more share in Holy Communion apart from the community of faith than one can share a family dinner apart from one's family. Holy Communion is, by its very nature, a communal act.

When one comes forward for Communion, one either kneels or stands at the altar rail next to their sisters and brothers in Christ. It is possible that those with whom one eats share much in common with one another or hardly anything at all. It is possible that those with whom one eats are best of friends or the worst of enemies. It is possible that those with whom one eats are complete strangers or members of one's most immediate family. Yet, regardless of how different or how similar folks are, in coming together to the table, bringing along one's sin and brokenness, and in sharing a meal of forgiveness and reconciliation together, the Triune God grows relationships between God's people, making of them one body, eating the same bread and drinking the same cup. Through our active participation in the meal of Holy Communion, the Triune God not only grows our relationship with God's self, but also with one another.

Growing Relationship with the World

In addition to growing relationship with God and with others, our active participation in the meal of Holy Communion also leads us ever deeper into relationship with the world around us. To eat at God's table is to share in God's mission to feed the hungry, clothe the poor, welcome the stranger, and forgive sinners. To share in the abundance of God's table is to be ever mindful of those who lack abundance and who hunger not just for spiritual bread, but for physical bread as well. To enjoy a meal with our sisters and brothers in Christ is also to notice those members of our community who

still do not have a place at God's table and to whom we are called to share an invitation to the banquet.

Having eaten at God's table, worshipers are sent into the world with these or similar words: "Go in peace. Serve the Lord."² These words send the gathered community into the world to share with the world what they have received at God's table. These words place upon the gathered and now sent community the responsibility of God's mission, placing them in relationship, however uncomfortable or challenging that relationship may be, with their neighbors, both those they know and those they do not yet know. Having been gathered into relationship by the Triune God with both God's self and with one another, the faith community is then sent in relationship to the world to actively participate in God's mission there.

The Agency of the Triune God

Being in God's Presence

A statistically significant result of this study's quantitative research is that the more actively worshipers participate in the practice of Christian worship, the stronger sense they have of God as the primary actor within Christian worship. Perichoretic worship is worship that in all ways seeks to acknowledge and lift up the Triune God as the primary agent. It is God, not us, who is first active in Word and Sacrament, drawing us into relationship with God, with each other, and with the world. Perichoretic worship, thereby, calls for worship leaders who draw attention in both their words and their

² Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada., *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

actions, not to themselves, but to God's presence and God's activity. The point, after all, of Christian worship is not to draw the congregation into the presence of a dynamic preacher, a talented organist or praise team, or even a beautifully crafted liturgy, but into the presence of the Triune God.

Everything that is done in Christian worship, from the music that is sung to the words that are spoken to the arrangement of the worship space, should be done in such a way to invite people into the presence of God. Worship leaders should provide cues to the congregation throughout the service that invite the gathered community into God's presence. A simple invitation before the musical prelude might state, "We enter into God's presence as we hear this morning's prelude." Periods of silence might be lifted up throughout the service inviting the congregation to focus on God's presence with them. Even the gathering of the offering provides an opportunity to point the worshiping community to the presence of God as the worship leader says these or similar words: "We respond to God's presence among us as we gather this morning's offering." Worship, after all, is about God's actions, not our actions. The role of the missional worship leader is to, from beginning to end, invite the congregation to see, hear, feel, taste, and know the Triune God in whose presence they are gathered.

Experiencing God

Acknowledging the agency and activity of the Triune God in Christian worship means that the point of Christian worship is not learning about God or hearing about God or coming to know about God, but rather to experience God first-hand. Christian worship is the experience of the Triune God alive and at work in our lives, in the community of faith, and in the world. We experience the Triune God in the community gathered

together by the Holy Spirit. We experience the Triune God in the music that is shared together and in the prayers that are lifted up. We experience the Triune God in the Word that is read and that is proclaimed. We experience the Triune God in the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, coming to us in the ordinary elements of water, bread, and wine, joined together with the Word. We experience the Triune God in the world to which we are sent, experiencing God in the poor, in the stranger, in the homeless, in the refugee, in the weak and vulnerable and voiceless.

If the Triune God is truly active and alive in and through the Word and Sacrament of worship then the gathered community should come to worship expecting nothing less than to experience God in all of God's fullness. When we are invited to friend's home for dinner, we do not arrive simply expecting to hear someone else tell us about how wonderful that particular friend is. Instead, we arrive expecting to experience how wonderful that particular friend is for ourselves. The same is true of Christian worship. Perichoretic worship seeks to engage the worshiping community as active participants in the action of Christian worship so that they can experience the work of the Triune God for themselves. In encouraging such a hands-on experience of God in worship, worship leaders honor the worshiping community as full subjects invited into a living relationship with God rather than treating them as objects limited to a secondhand experience of God mediated through the words and actions of the leaders themselves.

Living in God's Love

The author of 1 John defines God as love, a love that becomes known to us in Jesus and a love that becomes real in the Christian community as we love one another.

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for

God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. (1 John 4:7-12)

If the mission of God is to draw us and all creation into God's redemptive and reconciling love, a love made possible only through the cross, then the heart of Christian worship is living in God's love, a love that draws us into relationship with God, with one another, and with the world. Missional worship, that is, worship that extends out of God's mission for the world and that invites all creation into active participation in God's mission for the world, has at its heart the cross. It is into nothing less than the love of God that perichoretic worship invites us to dwell, a love that is shared within God's own Self as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a love that extends out to us in Jesus inviting us as full participants into the love of the Triune God, and a love that sends us out into the world to invite others into what God is already doing in their lives and in their communities. Missional worship, at its core, is God's celebration of God's love for us and for the world, a love into which all creation has been invited to live.

Theoretical Reflections

Ritual Studies

One of the roles of ritual is to draw people into a story through active participation in an action that makes them part of the story. When it comes to the relationship between ritual and the practice of Christian worship, the use of ritual is never for the sake of the ritual itself. Instead, the use of ritual must always be used in service to God's perichoretic mission of drawing worshipers into holy relationship with God, with

one another, and with the world. Ritual for the sake of ritual itself quickly deteriorates into a form of idolatry. However, when ritual is used as a tool through which worshipers are able to become active participants in God's story, the use of ritual in Christian worship can become quite useful and meaningful. Indeed, it is even possible that the ritual itself becomes a tool through which the Triune God works to transform people's hearts and the heart of the community.

One such ritual that invites the worshiping community to become active participants in God's story in a powerful way is Holy Communion. Through the ritual action of coming forward to the altar rail, eating the bread and drinking the wine, hearing the words, and sharing in the prayers and song that surround the ritual, worshipers become active participants in the action of Christian worship and, in so doing, become part of the story even as the story itself becomes part of them. While it is not the ritual itself that becomes transformative in the worshiper's life but rather the activity of the Triune God through the ritual, the ritual becomes the instrument through which the worshiper and the Triune God participate together in holy relationship. For many, the sacrament of Holy Communion serves as the central ritual within the practice of Christian worship, a ritual in which the Triune God and the worshiper meet one another in an intimate, subject-to-subject encounter.

In addition to being a meaningful way for worshipers to become active participants in God's story, ritual also becomes the meeting place within Christian worship between what it is that we think or believe as Christians and what it is that we do as Christians. In ritual theory, our thinking influences our actions and our actions influence our thinking. In theological terms, our beliefs influence our practices and our

practices influence our beliefs. Having right beliefs help shape right practices. Having right practices help shape right beliefs. When it comes to Christian worship, active participation in the actions of worship help to form a relationship of belief and trust in the Triune God. When our worship practices are perichoretic in nature, then we also grow in perichoretic relationship with the Triune God and, through our perichoretic relationship with the Triune God, in perichoretic relationships with one another and with the world.

Again, the ritual of Holy Communion within the practice of Christian worship is an example of this interdependent relationship with thought and action, belief and practice. Our Christian belief that the crucified and risen Christ is present in, under, and with the bread and the wine of Holy Communion is the theological basis for the practice. At the same time, the practice of regularly eating the bread and drinking the wine in the community of faith strengthens our belief that the crucified and risen Christ is truly present with us. This coming together of thought and action in the ritual of Christian worship leads to an integrity of faith that becomes transformative for the individual worshiper and the worshipping community.

Faith Development Theory

In chapter two, James Fowler's Faith Development Theory is discussed at length. One of the more helpful points of Fowler's work is his identification of faith as being primarily relational. Fowler goes on to distinguish between bi-polar relationship, that is, a relationship between a person and a transcendent being, and tri-polar relationship, that is, a relationship that involves not only a person and a transcendent being, but that also

involves others.³ Reflecting the inherent relationality of the Triune God, relationship with God and with others is central to the Christian faith.

Christian worship that is perichoretic in nature must also therefore be Christian worship that is relational, that is, worship that draws us into holy relationship with the Triune God, with one another, and with the world. Through the inherent relationality of Christian worship, the Triune God works to grow faith. As worship leaders think about how to reach out to those who are new to the Christian faith or to engage those who have been away from the church for some time, more attention needs to be given to those worship practices that help worship participants engage in meaningful relationship with God, with others, and with the larger community. If Christian faith is formed and developed most fully through relationships, then missional worship must be highly relational in all three of the poles identified by Fowler's theory. For the sake of growing faith, worship that is missional must seek to engage worshipers as active participants in relationship with God, with one another, and with the world. As both the quantitative and qualitative data of this study show, the more active worship participants are in their engagement with Christian worship, the more aware they are of the work of the Triune God in worship and in their lives of faith. Simply put, active participation in holy relationships grows faith.

Personhood and Social Relationships

As humans, our personhood is always distinct from and yet, at the same time, interdependent with the social relationships we share with others. To be a person is to be

³ Astley and Francis, *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development: A Reader*, 9.

in relationship with others. Yet, our identity as persons also always needs to be self-differentiated from the personhood of those with whom we share relationship. Such self-differentiated relationships are best understood as subject-to-subject relationships in which each person respects and interacts with the other persons as full and equal subjects, each maintaining their unique, differentiated agency of action within the relationship. When a subject relates to another person as an object rather than as a full, participatory subject, the other person's personhood is diminished. Such an understanding of subject-to-subject relationships reflects the perichoretic understanding of the Triune God in which each person of the divine Trinity is an equally active subject, yet, at the same time, interdependent with the other two subjects in the relationship.

Cultivating active participation in Christian worship honors the subject-to-subject relationships that exist between us and God, between us and one another, and between us and the world. Instead of worship leaders treating the worshipping community as objects for whom worship is performed, worship leaders who honor the worshipping community and each individual member of it as a full subject in the relationship seek to engage the entire worshipping community as active participants in the practice of Christian worship. Worship leaders who honor the subject-to-subject nature of human relationship and, even more so, the subject-to-subject relationship we share with the Triune God, seek to equip others to more fully share their unique gifts within worship as full, contributing participants within the worshipping community.

In order to honor this subject-to-subject nature of human relationships, the practice of Christian worship must provide deeper opportunities for persons to engage with one another and with the world. In many experiences of Lutheran worship,

opportunities for meaningful engagement with others and with the world outside the congregation are severely limited. Missional worship leaders must think creatively about how to engage worship participants in relationship with one another and with the larger community if our worship is going to be truly perichoretic in nature and, thereby, transformational. As we engage with one another and with the world, we trust the active agency of the Triune God to work through those relationships, by the power of the Spirit, to create and strengthen faith.

Biblical and Theological Reflection

John 15:1-17

The image of the vine and the branches used by Jesus in John 15 serves as a powerful metaphor for perichoretic worship. The inherent relationality of the vine to the branches reflects the inherent relationality between us and Christ and, through Christ, with the Father and the Spirit. The inherent relationality of the branches one with another, through their shared connection to the vine, reflects our inherent relationality with one another, through our connection with Christ. Jesus' command to us, the branches, to bear fruit in the world reflects our sent relationship with the world. The life of discipleship to Christ is a life of relationship, a life that should both be inherent to, and flow from, our practice of Christian worship.

Jesus makes clear in calling his disciples friends rather than servants that, through him, the relationship we share with the Triune God is subject-to-subject and not subject-to-object. As subjects, Jesus appoints us to be full participants in God's mission in the world. "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name"

(John 15:16). Through perichoretic worship, the Triune God invites us into subject-to-subject relationships with God's self and with each other and then sends us out to engage in subject-to-subject relationships with the world around us. As branches of the vine, our active participation in Christian worship strengthens our connection to the vine and to the other branches so that we might bear the fruit of God's kingdom for the sake of the world.

Luke 24:13-35

One of the most significant findings of this study is that through the three PAR interventions the congregation's experience of God as the primary actor, or agent, in Christian worship grew. This finding is supported biblically in the story of the risen Jesus appearing to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24. As the two disciples walk along the road, the risen Jesus encounters them. The risen Jesus initiates the conversation with the two disciples, asking, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" (Luke 24:17). The risen Jesus interprets "to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (Luke 24:27). The risen Jesus takes bread, blesses and breaks it, and gives it to them. Through the breaking of the bread, their eyes are opened and they recognize him (Luke 24:30-31). The risen Jesus causes their hearts to burn and the scriptures to be opened to them (Luke 24:32). The risen Jesus is the primary actor in this story, not the two disciples. It is the activity of the risen Jesus that opens up in these two disciples the eyes of faith. The risen Jesus is the actor or the agent of God's mission in these two disciples' lives.

It is also so in our lives when we participate in the practice of Christian worship. The Triune God acts through Word and Sacrament, the two central things of Christian

worship, to open our hearts and to create in us the gift of faith. In our hearing the Word and in our sharing in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, the Triune God acts to grow us in relationship with God, with each other, and with the world. Perichoretic worship is worship in which the Triune God meets us along our road, opening our lives, and transforming them through Word and Sacrament with the gift of faith.

Acts 2:37-47

Luke's description of the early Christian community in Acts 2:37-47 also lifts up the centrality of Word and Sacrament. As Luke writes, "[The newly baptized] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). What do these early Christians do once they have become part of the community? They worship, gathering together around God's Word and a shared meal. From the very beginning of the Christian community, the practice of Christian worship centered in Word and Sacrament has been central to its identity.

In addition, the worshiping community, gathered around Word and Sacrament, becomes a witness to the gospel, through which the Triune God works to grow the community. "And day by day," writes Luke, "the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47b). Through the gathered community, the Triune God grows relationships with others. Here in Acts, we see the Triune God acting to draw people into relationship with God's self, strengthen the community's relationships with each other, and grow the community's relationship with those beyond its walls.

Acts 8:26-40

The exchange between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40 is a powerful example of the importance of the relationships we share with others,

particularly those who are different from us, and how the Triune God works through those relationships to accomplish God's mission in the world. Through the agency of the Spirit, Philip goes to the eunuch and engages him in a holy conversation. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asks. The eunuch responds, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:30-31). Through the subject-to-subject relationship shared between Philip and the eunuch, the Triune God works to draw the eunuch into a holy relationship, leading him to the transforming water of Baptism.

Perichoretic worship seeks to create space within the practice of Christian worship for people to engage in subject-to-subject relationships one with another so that the Spirit can work through these relationships to grow the gift of faith both within individuals and within the community. As we grow in relationships with one another, we also grow in relationship with the Triune God and with the world around us. Holy hospitality toward others, particularly those who are different than us, in which we remain open to the transforming work of the Spirit, is a mark of perichoretic worship and a practice toward which all worshiping communities must aspire. Perichoretic worship leaders do not create such relationships, but rather create spaces within the practice of Christian worship for the Spirit to work within such relationships to accomplish God's mission. The story of the Philip and the eunuch serves as a model of how the Spirit works through such open spaces within the context of Christian worship centered in the reading of God's Word and participation in God's sacraments.

Perichoresis

The central theological lens through which this study examines the practice of Christian worship is perichoresis, a word used to describe the inherent relationality and

mutuality of the three persons of the Trinity that both flows forth from and, at the same time, constitutes their divine oneness or unity. The 15th-century Russian artist powerfully depicts the inherent relationality of God's Triune self in his icon *The Trinity* (see Figure 6.1).⁴ Although originally depicting the three messengers who visit Abraham and Sarah at their tent near the Oaks of Mamre in Genesis 15, the work has long been interpreted to represent the three persons of the Holy Trinity. In the work, the divine persons are seated around a table holding a vessel of food. One of the divine persons sits on each of three sides of the table, leaving the side of the table nearest the viewer of the icon empty. It is as if the icon invites the viewer to join the three persons of the Trinity at the table, to enter into the relationship that they share, and to participate in the meal of which they are about to partake.



Figure 6.1 Andrei Rublev, *The Trinity*, 15th century.

⁴ Andrei Rublev, *The Trinity*. 15th c. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity_\(Andrei_Rublev\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity_(Andrei_Rublev)).

In many ways, Rublev's icon captures the essence of perichoretic worship. First and foremost, through the practice of Christian worship, the Triune God works through Word and Sacrament to invite people into full participation into God's life and mission. In worship, the Triune God sets the table for us, preparing for us a place, and inviting us to feast on God's wisdom, life, love, mercy, and grace. In worship, the Triune God invites us into full participation in what it is that the Triune God is doing.

Christian worship, however, is not only an invitation into relationship with the Triune God, but also an invitation into relationship with the others who are seated at the table. This relationality with one another is also depicted by Rublev's icon as it is impossible to sit at the table by oneself. Sitting at the table and sharing in the life of the Triune God automatically means being in relationship with those around us, both those who are like us and those who are different than us. One cannot receive the invitation to sit at God's table apart from the same invitation also received by others.

Finally, because there is no restriction to who is invited to sit at God's table and, thereby, to participate in the divine life of the Trinity, the invitation to sit at God's table is an invitation that opens us up to relationship with the entire world. It is not just that Christian worship places us in relationship with the others who are also at the table, but also with the others who are not yet there but for whom the Triune God also gave God's life. As the Triune God exists in relationship to the world God creates, God's invitation to us to be full and active participants in the life and mission of the Triune God also places us in relationship with God's world in all of its fullness and with all of its brokenness.

The theological concept of perichoresis defines the relationships that are shared between the three persons of the Holy Trinity as subject-to-subject relationships. Subject-

to-subject relationships are those in which each person within the relationship shares mutual agency, both differentiated from the other persons in the relationship and yet, at the same time, always interdependent with them. Worship that is perichoretic in nature, that is, worship that is reflective of the perichoretic life of the Triune God, is worship in which worshippers are invited to participate as full and active subjects within the holy relationships with God, with one another, and with the world, and not as passive objects. Inviting worshippers to participate in the practice of Christian worship as full and active subjects means engaging worshippers fully, creatively, and wholly in all aspects of Christian worship. In short, perichoretic worship is not a spectator sport. Through it, the Triune God invites us into full and active participation and, through such active participation, by the power of the Spirit, transforms our lives and the life of our communities. Once one has sat at the table and shared a meal with God, with each other, and with the world, one is forever changed.

Lutheran Worship

Lutheran theology teaches that God's Word and God's Sacraments are the very center of Christian worship. It is through God's Word and God's Sacraments that the Triune God promises to work to draw us into relationship with God's self, with one another, and with the world. Cultivating holy relationships through the practice of Christian worship means deeply engaging worshippers as active participants in the hearing and proclamation of God's Word and in the receiving and sharing of the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. It is through these two means of grace—Word and Sacrament—that worshippers experience most fully the presence and activity of God.

As such, Lutheran theology strongly affirms the missional understanding of God as the active subject of our Christian mission, worship, and life. The central Lutheran theological claim that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone radically asserts that our relationship with the Triune God is entirely dependent on God's saving work on our behalf through Christ by the power of the Spirit and not at all dependent on anything we can possibly do on our own. Lutherans understand salvation to be entirely dependent upon God's agency and not our own. As the quantitative results of this study suggest, the more engaged worshipers are as full participants in the practice of Christian worship, the more deeply they experience and are able to articulate the agency of the Triune God as the primary actor in worship. With the Triune God as the primary agent within worship, a deeper participation in and engagement with the practice of Christian worship leads worshipers to a deeper experience of God's presence and activity in their lives, in the church, and in the world.

Finally, the Lutheran theological understanding of the priesthood of all believers frees the practice of Christian worship from being merely an act performed by the worship leader on behalf of a passive audience. Instead, to understand all Christian believers as living priests both claimed and called by God to participate in God's mission in the world frees the worshiping assembly to be full and active participants in the practice of Christian worship. Indeed, as priests within God's mission to draw all creation into a right relationship with God, with one another, and with the world, the Triune God invites the worshiping assembly into a living and life-transforming encounter with God's self through Word and Sacrament. This encounter is not one mediated through the worship leader, but one in which worshipers, through Christ's redeeming death and

resurrection, exist as free and active subjects, called to full and active participation in God's mission.

Faith Practices

As a faith practice, Christian worship brings together what we believe with how we act or live into a transformational unity. As a faith practice, Christian worship not only teaches us the shape of our beliefs but also shapes what it is that we believe. As a faith practice, Christian worship flows forth from our confession and, at the same time, leads us ever deeper into that same confession. As such, our active participation in the practice of Christian worship ever more deeply opens us up to the Spirit's transformational work in our lives, in our church, and in our world. As we actively participate in the practice of Christian worship, the Triune God opens us up to a deeper experience of God's presence, deeper understanding and relationship, and deeper involvement and commitment to God's mission in the world. As we actively participate in the practice of Christian worship, the Triune God, through Word and Sacrament, continually forms and transforms us into the people, into the church, and into the world God yearns for us to be. Cultivating the practice of Christian worship in such a way that worshipers are fully engaged in the activity of the Triune God working in peoples' lives, in the life of the community, and in the life of the world for the sake of God's mission is important, holy, and perichoretic work, indeed.

Limits of Generalization

Limits of generalization for this study include the fact that this particular Participatory Action Research study was completed in a single congregation in a single Christian denomination in a specific geographical locale. In addition, participants in this

specific study were primarily white, upper-middle-class, and highly educated. Care should be taken in appropriating the results and conclusions of this study within other contexts.

Questions for Future Research

Questions for future research stemming from this study include, but are not limited to: What makes the act of corporate song a perichoretic act? How can our worship song become more participatory and, therefore, more perichoretic? How can the act of preaching become more participatory and, therefore, more perichoretic? What is the relationship between vulnerability and the formation of Christian community through the practice of Christian worship? How might non-Christians experience the activity of the Triune God through active participation in the practice of Christian worship over a prolonged time?

Summary

Perichoretic worship is worship that actively engages the gathered assembly as full participants in the perichoretic work of the Triune God to grow holy relationships between God and God's people, God's people and one another, and God's people and the world. Perichoretic worship leaders are leaders that cultivate space within the practice of Christian worship for worshipers to participate in what it is that the Triune God is doing and, thereby, to be transformed by it.

Like our family's experience of visiting Hershey's Chocolate World in which we not only learned about Milton Hershey but actively participated in a transformative experience of Milton Hershey's work and legacy, perichoretic worship seeks to engage worshipers as full and active participants in an experience through which the Triune God

works to transform their lives, drawing them into holy relationship. The invitation to such transformative participation in God's perichoretic life and mission comes from none other than Jesus himself—"Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:4-5).

In his hymn *Draw Us in the Spirit's Tether*, Percy Dearmer prays for the Triune God to transform us both individually and corporately through the practice of Christian worship. Dearmer's prayer is mine as well.

Draw us in the Spirit's tether, for when humbly in your name
Two or three are met together, you are in the midst of them.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Touch we now your garment's hem.

As disciples used to gather in the name of Christ to sup,
Then with thanks to God the giver break the bread and bless the cup,
Alleluia! Alleluia! So now bind our friendship up.

All our meals and all our living make as sacraments of you,
That by caring, helping, giving, we may be disciples true.
Alleluia! Alleluia! We will serve with faith anew.⁵

⁵ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada., *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, #470.

CHAPTER SEVEN

EPILOGUE

The focus of this thesis has been exploring the perichoretic nature of Christian worship. Perichoretic worship is worship in which the Triune God invites the worshipping community into active participation in God's mission of growing relationships between us and God, between us and one another, and between us and the world. I have argued that the practice of Christian worship centered in Word and Sacrament is central to God's mission and that God's mission is inherent in this practice, particularly as experienced through a Lutheran theological lens. Personally, I have experienced God's mission of growing holy relationships primarily through the practice of Christian worship within the community of faith. Yet, surely God's mission is not limited to the practice of Christian worship. Surely, the Triune God works in and through a myriad of ways, both inside and outside the practice of Christian worship, to grow holy relationships. In a very real and powerful way, I have experienced anew the work and activity of the Triune God over the course of the past four years as I have journeyed through this doctoral program in congregational mission and leadership.

First and foremost, the Triune God has worked through this doctoral program to grow my relationship with God's self. Intentional engagement with the theological lens of perichoresis has opened up for me a much deeper understanding of who God is and what God's mission is in the world. By definition, the Triune God is a God of

relationship. The internal relationships within the Trinity between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are subject-to-subject relationships in which each person exists only and always in relationship to the other two and yet, at the same time, only and always as a distinct subject, fully differentiated from the other two. This inherent relationality of the Triune God is also always open, that is, always making room for others within God's self. This openness to be in relationship with others, indeed, with the entire world, is the heart of God's mission. Within God's self, there is room for the world. Indeed, within God's self, by Christ's saving death and through the power of the Spirit, there is room for me with all my human sin and brokenness. The very mission of God is nothing less than to draw me and you, together with all creation, into the life and being and love of God's own self.

Not only does the Triune God yearn to be in relationship with us, but, again by Christ's saving death and through the power of the Spirit, the Triune God invites us into this holy relationship not as objects but as subjects. As a result, our selfhood as persons is no longer merely, or even mostly, about doing and performing, but rather about being and dwelling. We are called into the freedom of being in relationship with the Triune God as interdependent subjects. We are called into the freedom of dwelling in God's own being and presence. This free relationship is given to us wholly and purely as gift, by no doing of our own but wholly and purely through the agency of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This relationship, as in everything flowing forth from God's mission, happens not because of *our* agency, but because of *God's* agency. How freeing it is knowing that life, salvation, the church, ministry, and God's mission in the world is

dependent on God's agency and not our own. As active subjects, we are invited into God's mission, but, thankfully, God's mission is not dependent on us.

When I was growing up, I spent a lot of time at my grandma's house. I spent a lot of my time there helping her with chores such as mowing her yard, raking her leaves, planting and watering flowers, cleaning out her basement and her garage, vacuuming her rugs. I *did* a lot of things. However, the best part of my time with her was spent sitting at her kitchen table, drinking green tea and eating homemade sugar cookies. It was there that we shared conversation and stories with one another. It was there that we played games together and told jokes to one another. It was there that we most enjoyed one another's presence, not doing anything other than being fully present with one another. There was always work that still had to get done and somehow always did, but that work never took the place of our time together at that table.

Over the course of these four years, I have learned anew that the most important thing we do in our lives of faith and, particularly, in our lives of leadership in the church, is to spend time at the table with the Triune God. The work is still there to do and, somehow, the work always gets done, but that work flows forth from the relationship we share with God at the table and, in no way, effects the relationship. Our primary job as missional leaders in the church is to create space in our ministry for simply dwelling at the table with God. It is from that table that the Triune God then sends us forth into the world to share in what God is already doing.

In addition to growing my relationship with God's self, I have experienced the work and activity of the Triune God over these past four years growing me in my relationships with others. As a strong introvert, one of the aspects of this particular

doctoral program that I was not particularly looking forward to was being part of a cohort of learners that would journey together over the course of four years. What if I did not like these others? What if these others did not like me? What if we annoyed one another more than enjoyed one another? What if we were called upon to work together rather than working independently? Going into this program, I was not a big fan of group projects or even group sharing. I preferred to work by myself, both in learning and in ministry. Having completed these past four years, I am more convinced than ever that God has a sense of humor.

One of the most surprising gifts of these past four years for me has been the deep relationships the Triune God has grown between the members of our learning cohort. Through mutual support and encouragement, through praying and dwelling in God's Word together, through meals and times of fellowship together, through the joys and challenges of ministry and family life, the Triune God has worked through this diverse group of learners to grow something beautiful and lasting. The depth of the relationships that are shared within our learning cohort is yet another reflection of the nature of the Triune God who called us together. For the past four years, we learned in community together. For the past four years, we learned as collaborators, not as competitors. For the past four years, we learned as fellow travelers on a journey led by God, not as runners trying to cross the finish line before anyone else. Such collaborative community is a model for what it means to be missional leaders serving in a missional church called and empowered into service by a missional God.

A word that has taken on new meaning for me is the word "hospitality." The practice of Christian hospitality is about more than simply wearing name tags and serving

coffee and donut holes. The practice of Christian hospitality is about making room for others and, particularly, those others who are different than us or who exist on the fringes of our communities. As a cohort, we lived out the practice of Christian hospitality as we made room for one another, as different as we were from one another, and, as we opened ourselves to learn from each other.

Making room for others through the practice of Christian hospitality lies at the heart of what it means to be a missional church and to be missional leaders in it. Over the course of this program, I have become a much more collaborative leader, seeking out and welcoming the involvement and input of others, including those who are different than me, in a way that I never have before. I have started to seek out what God is doing in and through others and to try to learn from them. In a very real sense, it has been one of the most freeing moves I have ever made in ministry. In doing so, I find myself more and more getting out of God's way and simply letting God do what God has wanted to do all along, rather than fooling myself into trying to somehow control God's ministry. As I get out of the way, I am finding that there is not only more room for God to act, but also more room for others to sit at the table as full participants in ministry and to share the gifts God has given them. Making room for others at the table of Christian ministry is about treating others as fellow subjects within God's mission, not as objects to be controlled, manipulated, or bought. In so doing, these others are freed and empowered by God's Spirit to generously share their gifts alongside of us as they actively participate in God's mission.

As the Triune God has worked throughout this program to grow my relationships with God's self and with others, so too the Triune God has worked throughout this

program to grow my relationship and the relationship of the congregation I serve with the world beyond the church walls. At almost exactly the same time that I began my doctoral work four years ago, the congregation with which I serve cut a hole in the fence that serves as a boundary between the congregation's property and the adjacent apartment complex. During my first seminar week during the summer of 2014, the congregation hosted its first ever Wednesday night Dinner-on-the-Lawn for both the congregation members and the congregation's neighbors in the adjoining apartments. Through the hole in the fence they came and an ongoing missional experiment began in which the Triune God has been working to grow relationships between two very different and distinct communities. There have been plenty of joys and plenty of challenges along the way, but it has been abundantly clear that what is happening through the hole in the fence is a significant part of what God is doing in our community. In many ways, the congregation's burgeoning ministry with the neighborhood has been a real-time research laboratory in which I have been able to observe the Triune God at work, inviting and involving the congregation as active participants in God's mission in the world. Though only indirectly connected with the congregation's worship life in which my primary research took place, the Triune God has used our growing ministry with the neighborhood to grow and challenge me in my pastoral leadership in some significant and transformative ways.

In closing, I am grateful. Despite the arduousness of the journey these past four years, despite the many times along the way that I failed to meet the demands of both my studies and my full-time ministry, despite the innumerable moments along the way when I was unable to be fully attentive to my family, despite the almost overwhelming

challenge of being Christ's church in a rapidly changing and increasingly complex world, I am grateful. I am grateful because these past four years have been all gift. The Triune God has gifted me by the growth that has been completed in me in my relationship with God, in my relationship with others, and in my relationship with the world. I am grateful for the relationships I have shared and continue to share with the members of my cohort and for the gracious wisdom and patient guidance of my professors, especially Dr. Daniel Anderson and Dr. Alvin Luedke. I am grateful for the congregation I serve and for those faithful disciples in it whose prayerful and financial support along the way have encouraged me to keep going even when I wanted to quit. I am grateful for my family—my wife Maressa and our three children, Emma, Luke, and Liam—for their incredible patience and understanding and for holding me to the fire. Most of all, I am grateful for the power, presence, and grace of the Triune God who called me through the water and Word of Baptism into a life of ministry, who has gathered me into various worshipping communities along the way in which I have been nurtured and fed with God's Word and at God's Holy Table, and who continues to send me into the broken and hurting world to bear witness to the promise that God's love for us in Jesus is more powerful than suffering, more powerful than hate, more powerful than even death itself. In the words of the beautiful hymn text by Fred Pratt Green,

For the harvests of the Spirit, thanks be to God.
 For the good we all inherit, thanks be to God.
 For the wonders that astound us, for the truths that still confound us,
 Most of all, that love has found us, thanks be to God.¹

¹ Ibid.

APPENDIX A: IMPLIED CONSENT LETTER FOR SURVEYS

Implied Consent Letter for Surveys

Date

Dear Disciple,

You are invited to participate in a study of the practice of Christian worship. I hope to learn how congregation members most effectively experience God's activity in worship and, particularly, how the practice of Christian worship helps and hinders the cultivation of meaningful, faith relationships. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your active participation in the weekly worship life of our congregation.

If you decide to participate, please complete the enclosed survey. Your return of this survey is implied consent. The survey is designed to discover how effective our current practice of Christian worship is at cultivating relationship between God and us, between us and one another, and between us and the world. It will take about 15-20 minutes. No benefits accrue to you for answering the survey, but your responses will be used to measure the effectiveness of several changes in worship practice that will be introduced into our worship life over the coming months. Any discomfort or inconvenience to you derives only from the amount of time taken to complete the survey.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relationships with either Luther Seminary or our congregation. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please ask. If you have additional questions later, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Pastor Greg G. Busboom

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Perichoretic Worship: Cultivating Relationships with the Triune God, with One Another, and with the World

You are invited to be in a research study of how the practice of Christian worship can be designed to cultivate God's work of growing relationship. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an active participant in the weekly worship at our congregation. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by me as part of my doctoral thesis in Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary. My advisors names are Dr. Dan Anderson and Dr. Alvin Luedke.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand how possible changes in the worship life of our congregation might help worship participants more fully experience God's work of growing relationships between them and God, between them and one another, and between them and the world.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things.

- Regularly participate in weekly worship during the seasons of Epiphany, Lent, and Easter in 2017, approximately January through May.
- Participate in a focus group interview at the conclusion of each of three seasons listed above in which participants will be asked to discuss how they experienced God's activity through the changed practice.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There are no identified risks of being in this study.

There are no direct benefits of participation in this study.

Indirect benefits to yourself/or the general public of participation are an increased appreciation for the practice of Christian worship and the ways in which God is actively at work through Christian worship growing relationships; the creation of new worship practices that enhance peoples' relationships with God, with one another, and with the world; and, the joy of sharing your experience of Christian worship with a small group of fellow disciples.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. If I publish any type of report, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. All data will be kept in a locked file in my office; only my advisors, Dr. Dan Anderson and Dr. Alvin Luedke, and I will have access to the data and, if applicable, any tape or video recording. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. While I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

Conversations with the focus groups will be digitally recorded for the sole purpose of accurately recording and transcribing the interview. Only my advisors, Dr. Dan Anderson and Dr. Alvin Luedke, and I will have access to these recordings.

All raw data in this study, including digital recordings, will be destroyed in June 2021. (Federal guidelines specify a minimum of 3 years for retention of data.)

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary or with the congregation. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships..

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Greg G. Busboom. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me.

Phone: XXX.XXX.XXXX

The researcher's doctoral advisors are Dr. Dan Anderson and Dr. Alvin Luedke.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information or have had it read to me. I have received answers to questions asked. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of investigator _____ Date _____

I consent to be audiotaped (or videotaped):

Signature _____ Date _____

I consent to allow use of my direct quotations in the published thesis document.

Signature _____ Date _____

Created 9.15.16

APPENDIX C: BASELINE QUESTIONNAIRE

Each of the following questions asks the respondent to indicate on a Likert scale with the following response options: Strongly Agree, Agree, Slightly Agree, Slightly Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree.

1. I experience God's presence through worship.
2. God is active through worship.
3. Through worship, I experience growth in my relationship with the God.
4. Through worship, I experience growth in my relationships with others in the congregation.
5. Through worship, I experience growth in my relationship with the world outside the walls of the congregation.
6. God is the primary actor in worship.
7. The pastor is the primary actor in worship.
8. Worship engages me as an active participant in the worship experience.
9. Worship discourages me from being an active participant in the worship experience.
10. As a worshipping member of the congregation, I am one of the primary actors in worship.
11. I experience the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit through my worship life.
12. Growing in our relationships with God, with one another, and with the world is central to the worship life.

For each of the questions below, please choose the one answer that best describes you.

13. Gender Identity – Male; Female
14. Age – 18-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50-59; 60-69; 70-79; 80-89; 90-99; 100 and above
15. Length of Membership – 0-9; 10-19; 20-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50-59; 60-69; 70-79; 80-89; 90-99; 100 and above

16. Worship Service You Most Regularly Attend – 5:00 p.m. Saturday; 8:00 a.m. Sunday; 10:30 a.m. Sunday Traditional in Sanctuary; 10:30 a.m. Sunday Contemporary in Parish Life Center (PLC)
17. a. Have you been a Lutheran your entire life? – Yes; No
- b. If no, list the denomination you most identified yourself with prior to joining the Lutheran church. _____
18. Level of education – 8th Grade; 12th Grade; Some College; Associates Degree; Undergraduate Degree; Graduate Degree; Post-Graduate Degree

APPENDIX D: END LINE QUESTIONNAIRE

Each of the following questions asks the respondent to indicate on a Likert scale with the following response options: Strongly Agree, Agree, Slightly Agree, Slightly Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree.

1. I experience God's presence through worship.
2. God is active through worship.
3. Through worship, I experience growth in my relationship with the God.
4. Through worship, I experience growth in my relationships with others in the congregation.
5. Through worship, I experience growth in my relationship with the world outside the walls of the congregation.
6. God is the primary actor in worship.
7. The pastor is the primary actor in worship.
8. Worship engages me as an active participant in the worship experience.
9. Worship discourages me from being an active participant in the worship experience.
10. As a worshipping member of the congregation, I am one of the primary actors in worship.
11. I experience the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit through my worship life.
12. Growing in our relationships with God, with one another, and with the world is central to the worship life.

For each of the questions below, please choose the one answer that best describes you.

13. Gender Identity – Male; Female
14. Age – 18-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50-59; 60-69; 70-79; 80-89; 90-99; 100 and above
15. Length of Membership – 0-9; 10-19; 20-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50-59; 60-69; 70-79; 80-89; 90-99; 100 and above

16. Worship Service You Most Regularly Attend – 5:00 p.m. Saturday; 8:00 a.m. Sunday; 10:30 a.m. Sunday Traditional in Sanctuary; 10:30 a.m. Sunday Contemporary in Parish Life Center (PLC)
17. a. Have you been a Lutheran your entire life? – Yes; No
 - b. If no, list the denomination you most identified yourself with prior to joining the Lutheran church. _____
18. Level of education – 8th Grade; 12th Grade; Some College; Associates Degree; Undergraduate Degree; Graduate Degree; Post-Graduate Degree
19. Did you complete this same survey in December 2016 at the beginning of Pastor Busboom's research? – Yes; No

Baptism of Our Lord

January 7-8, 2017

God's Word for Us from Matthew 3

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. ¹⁶And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to you** through God's Word?*

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to our congregation** through God's Word?*

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to the world** through God's Word?*

Epiphany 2 January 14-15, 2017

God's Word for Us from John 1

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ³¹I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." ³²And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him." ³³I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

³⁵The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). ⁴²He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to you** through God's Word?*

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to our congregation** through God's Word?*

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to the world** through God's Word?*

Epiphany 3

January 21-22, 2017

God's Word for Us from Matthew 4

¹²Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

¹⁵"Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles —
¹⁶the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death
light has dawned."

¹⁷From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

¹⁸As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea — for they were fishermen. ¹⁹And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." ²⁰Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. ²²Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

²³Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to you** through God's Word?*

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to our congregation** through God's Word?*

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to the world** through God's Word?*

Epiphany 4
January 28-29, 2017

God's Word for Us from Matthew 5

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to you** through God's Word?*

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to our congregation** through God's Word?*

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to the world** through God's Word?*

Epiphany 5 February 4-5, 2017

God's Word for Us from Matthew 5

¹³"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

¹⁴"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

¹⁷"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to you** through God's Word?*

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to our congregation** through God's Word?*

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to the world** through God's Word?*

Epiphany 6 February 11-12, 2017

God's Word for Us from Matthew 5

²¹"You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' ²²But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. ²⁶Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

²⁷"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' ²⁸But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.

³¹"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' ³²But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

³³"Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' ³⁴But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to you** through God's Word?*

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to our congregation** through God's Word?*

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to the world** through God's Word?*

Epiphany 7 February 18-19, 2017

God's Word for Us from Matthew 5

³⁸"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' ³⁹But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; ⁴⁰and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; ⁴¹and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. ⁴²Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

⁴³"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to you** through God's Word?*

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to our congregation** through God's Word?*

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to the world** through God's Word?*

Transfiguration of Our Lord

February 25-26, 2017

God's Word for Us from Matthew 17

¹Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." ⁸And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. ⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to you** through God's Word?*

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to our congregation** through God's Word?*

Question for Reflection

*What do you hear God saying **to the world** through God's Word?*

APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Focus Group Questions following each Intervention

1. Describe your experience of the change in worship practice that was introduced.
2. What did you find helpful about this particular change in worship practice?
3. What did you find unhelpful about this particular change in worship practice?
4. Describe how this particular change in worship practice helped or hindered you in experiencing growth in your relationship with God.
5. Describe how this particular change in worship practice helped or hindered you in experiencing growth in your relationship with others in the congregation.
6. Describe how this particular change in worship practice helped or hindered you in experiencing growth in your relationship with the world beyond the walls of the congregation.
7. Where, if at all, did you experience God's activity in the midst of this particular change in worship practice?
8. Where, if at all, did you experience the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the midst of this particular change in worship practice?
9. How did this particular change in worship practice either help or hinder your participation in the worship experience?
10. How did this particular change in worship practice either help or hinder your participation in God's mission?

Demographic Information to Record on each Participant

1. Gender Identity
2. Age
3. Length of Membership in Congregation
4. Worship Service most regularly attended
5. Level of Education
6. Denominational History

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