

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:

**CHASING THE RAINBOW: *GENDER-RELIGIOSITY* AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN THE MUSIC AND RITUAL OF THE METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA**

Gaetano Romano Lotrecchiano, PhD 2005

Dissertation Directed By:

Carolina Robertson, PhD  
Professor of Ethnomusicology,  
Division of Musicology and Ethnomusicology

Luke Jensen, PhD  
Affiliate Assistant Professor of Musicology,  
Division of Musicology and Ethnomusicology

The intersection of belief, identity, and performance enacted in the Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia (MCC NOVA) - a lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, queer community of faith, provides an arena for ethnomusicological inquiry into ritual performance and identity construction. As a safe-haven for persons marginalized by mainstream religious traditions, MCC NOVA serves as an alternative to historically oppressive and suppressive worshipping environments where LBGTQ lifestyle is often considered antithetical to the goals of religiosity. It grounds ritual and musical practices in its core values: elastic theology, inclusiveness, diversity, community, member-ministers, and love and acceptance. These core values are the basis of a variety of performative events which allow for the self-fashioning of identity and spiritual exploration on both an individual and corporate level. Affected by a variety of “cradle

traditions”, this LGBTQ group draws on a complex assortment of sacred musics and ritual practices which form a unique *gender-religiosity* as MCCers journey to describe and re-invent their collective self. MCC NOVA intensifies the experience of faith through its multi-gendered condition, alternative spiritualities, and idiosyncratic performance events by fashioning a Judeo-Christian-based LGBTQ spirituality in light of freedoms which allow for exploration beyond the boundaries of the Christian *ordo*.

This project deals with a series of unexplored important questions concerning the significance, process, problems, negotiations, and repercussions involved in performing a variety of hegemonic ritual musics and acts in light of MCC NOVA’s emerging central core values. Analyses are a consideration of the behavioral aspects of conversion considered in light of the process of establishing a self-concept and its affects on socialization. The musical material is analyzed through a methodology which considers musical change as a consistent domain in the perceptions and performances of MCC NOVA rituals. Foremost is a consideration of the relationship between individual *existenz* and corporate identity and the role this relationship plays in understanding the commonality between continuity and discontinuity of performances in relationship with core values. The overall methodology of the research strives to interpret the multifaceted expressions of this community by understanding them through a series of analytical lenses.

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By

Gaetano Romano Lotrecchiano, PhD

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Advisory Committee:

Carolina Robertson, PhD, Co-Chair, Professor of Ethnomusicology  
Luke Jensen, PhD, Co-Chair, Affiliate Assistant Professor of Musicology  
Katie King, PhD, Associate Professor of Women's Studies  
Judith Freidenberg, PhD, Associate Professor of Anthropology  
Jonathan Dueck, PhD, Lecturer of Ethnomusicology

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## Preface

Although this research began in 2001, in many ways it is a culmination of personal revelations from over twenty years ago and in fact even from childhood. My interests in liturgical musics began at an early age as my own musical abilities and sensibilities were framed within a highly ritualized context. Being a cradle Roman Catholic, ritual and music served as a means of identifying with a corpus of belief supported and fostered by my own Italian-American heritage and the social hegemonies that culture represented. As a youngster, music-making played an integral part in the process of exploring my own diverse and sometimes confusing identity. Learning a variety of instruments, participating in many ensembles and shows, and discovering my own musical voice were not only musical achievements but vehicles for understanding my own self-concept in light of an emerging *persona*. These revelations promoted what would become an intimate relationship between my own religious heritage, my self perceptions, and a life of occupational music-making.

These factors played a major part in the decision to pursue a spiritual life. I began preparation for religious life as an Augustinian friar at age 14. Through experiences of a religious vocation, every aspect of life had the potential to contain liturgical and ritual consequences. Everyday living proved to be a constant translation of spiritual, material, hierarchical, and even sexual realities into a symbolized and ordered expression of what it meant to be an individual living amidst corporate priorities.

As a gay man, religious and liturgical life afforded me many venues for understanding how performance was integral to the self disclosing of my own sexual

orientation and ultimately my integrated *gender-religious* identity. In retrospect, I discovered that amidst the sometimes debilitating structures and confines of religious community, ritual and music performance were opportunities to disclose facets of my own identity which at times seemed to be contradictory to local and church cultural expectations. As a friar, the program of daily ritualizing often proved to be a privatized expression of self, breaching the taboo discourses embedded in same-sex religious interactions. On the one hand, as a musician, it allowed for latent discoveries about my own maturing self identity to be performed and disclosed amidst the guise of normative liturgical expression.

Stereotypes about the marginal *personas* of artists and musicians and the charisms<sup>1</sup> which they exuded became the material from which discourses of freedom and liberation arose. The constructs which make them up were constantly negotiated and systematized by those of us who were afforded greater gender latitude –for lack of a better term—as a result of perceptions about the interrelationship between musicality, creativity, and spirituality. A life of immersive musical and ritual performance served in this case as a “cloak”, masking the unspoken reality of gender marginalism, ambiguity, and homosexuality found in all religious communities of same-sex men.

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<sup>1</sup> Charism is a term used by religious communities of both men and women which describes an outlook toward spirituality designed on founding and operative priorities. A religious group’s charism may be one which highlights service, a preferential option for the poor, or community building. Ultimately this is related to personhood, a way of life, and the intimate relationship between being and doing as having an innate relationship based in a spirituality. In this context, the statement about the charism of artists and musicians draws attention to the innate relationship between being creative spirituality. It allows for an interpretation of beliefs and acts that one embodies as being integral to their own innate identity. More specifically in this case, the charismatic identity of musical and artistic members of the community served as a means for latitude and license in light of gendered behavior.

Ritual expression served as a means for disclosing these latent aspects of religious life. It provided for an arena where the outlawed and often times uncomfortable reality of male same-sex communal living was performed publicly. On the surface, aesthetics of Catholic (monastic) ritual served to embellish gender diversity. Flagrant costuming, liturgical and everyday religious garb, and a general desire to maintain an artistic and sensitive existence simply served as normative aspects of religious and liturgical life shared and accepted universally, even though they simultaneously represented an outlet for gender variable performances. These activities spoke of the real and otherwise unspoken subculture of gay life within religious communities of men. For many homosexual friars, the normativity associated with liturgical practices was a public opportunity to disclose otherwise unaccepted personal tendencies in a public setting.

Ritualized same-sex embraces and affections which were identifiably charismatic aesthetics among Augustinian men served as a means for disclosing the interconnectedness between personal and often undisclosed self-awarenesses and the affinities felt between same-sex individuals. It proved to be a source of consternation for some friars who experienced it as threatening to gender stability while for others it was a constant reminder of their own sexual dynamism. Flower arranging, sewing, music-making, candle-making, and incense burning, all contributed to a latent, but very real alternative setting. The performance of certain liturgical aesthetics, the normativity of ritualized physicality between community members, or the subtext of gay culture as played out within these constructs, each served as a latent reminder of the relationship between personal identity consciousness and the community. Even though from the

observational standpoint this all occurred amidst the expectations of religious/liturgical appropriateness, it represented a discourse based in gender and religious identity as the two were intrinsically connected. For me and others it provided a venue of self disclosure on an elemental level as it symbolized the connection between an intimate internal awareness and a spirituality performed publicly. The opportunity to remain true to one's own gendered self identity was rooted in the freedoms afforded to us who were devoted to a life of cultivating them. On a more significant level, these liturgical activities served as a public display of internal self-awarenesses, publicly and ritually normalized in an environment where these values seemed impertinent.

The experience of religious ritualizing has always been for me a translation where human tendencies and feelings entered into a conversation with a community of ideals. Throughout life this had been a source of comfort and stability as my own beliefs and awarenesses, accepted or denied, found solace in the multivalency of ritual and music, at times imbedded in the metalanguages of ritual structures. This dynamic is not specific to any group of ritualizers, nor is it a particularly gender relative matter. Rather, it is a constant and often unexplored aspect of ritual interaction. Even after many years of study and practical experience, it was late in my intellectual life when I began to associate the inner workings of liturgical celebration and the plurality and negotiations which it embodied. Furthermore, it is of late when the analysis of the dynamisms between individuals and their corporate practices has been of interest.

The research at hand is ultimately a question of *how* individuals translate life experience into a corporate body of meaning. It assumes that ritual life is at times a



reflection of culture perceived as an extension of personal awarenesses. This culture may be the *ex officio* of the church and established. It may be belief based in newfound internal revelations. It may be a subculture or a reaction to the metaculture of religious practice. In whatever context, ritual and its musics stand as a font from which meaning is constructed and negotiated. Meaning of ritual experiences are something that which can not always be ascertained through simple ritual analyses that assign meaning to ritual aesthetics as if they are a related outcome of corporate consensus. Ritual's dynamism is where the discourses of life's inconsistencies, and sometimes consistencies, are found.

The experience of this research explores these assumptions. It strives to show that ritual and music are governed by a complex of domains describing the apparent and unapparent, the measurable and the immeasurable, and more importantly, the dynamism associated with the seemingly static array of ritual and musical structures.

*For Pauly*

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My advisory committee has encouraged me in many and different ways over the years. Some carried me through the process of learning in my graduate program. Others are newly established acquaintances. Together, as a community of dedicated individuals, they have supported and respected my efforts and shared their own insights to this work. For these I am truly grateful.

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

Many gifts, one spirit, many songs, one voice.  
Many reasons, one promise,  
Many questions, one choice.

O God we pray for unity, give guidance from above.  
In our differences unite us in a circle of your love.  
O God, remind us we are not alone.  
Though we move on different pathways, we are walking to your [throne] home.

Help us learn to love each other (Help us to love),  
Show us ways to understand (Help us understand),  
We are members of one family (We are one family)  
Growing strong by joining hands (growing stronger)

O God remind us we are not alone.  
Though we move on different pathways, we are walking to your [throne] home.

Take our many ways of working; blend the colors of each soul  
Into the beauty of a rainbow,  
Give us life [Lord] God, make us one.  
(Many Gifts, One Spirit, SATB Chorus with keyboard accompaniment, by Allen Pote)<sup>2</sup>

Worship at the Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia describes the embedded agendas of suburban LGBTQ culture. For its members it is a safe haven from a sometimes unsympathetic world while it is concomitantly a public celebration of internal and corporate awarenesses of what it means to be gender marginal. MCC NOVA's rituals are an opportunity to translate human experiences, those supported and nurtured, as well as those condemned and obscured, into a homogenized setting of self and corporate actualization and religious belief. The translations which it embodies are an ongoing process where individual self disclosure is met with a community where importance is placed on the role of the person and the affect his/her self awarenesses have on ritual celebration and *vice versa*.

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<sup>2</sup> This anthem has been a staple of MCC NOVA worship for many years. It is an excellent example of the sentiments of MCC NOVA church members as they "chase the rainbow" of greater self understanding. It incidentally was the first anthem I ever heard performed by the MCC NOVA choir.

Throughout my career as a liturgical musician and in my work with Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Unitarian/Universalists, and especially with the Metropolitan Community Church, I've found that unilaterally, ritual is a complex situation where human tendencies provide for tension and conformity between corporate beliefs and personal experiences. The expressions of many religious groups are not only an intricate web which supports and contradicts individual experiences, but they are in fact the place where continuities and discontinuities of religiosity are worked out in conversation with such experiences. Many of this happens on the ritual plane itself as the rites and traditions become the battleground by which resolution to this discourse is sought.

My root assumptions about ritualizing have always included an understanding that no ritual, celebration, or rite ever truly satisfies individual self convictions, nor does it always provide a solution to the interior unresolved issues associated with human dynamism. Seemingly inconsistent with the underlying *modus operandi* of liturgical celebration which strives to exercise *known* aspects of faith, religious rite more often exemplifies the contradictions between the ever-evolving human condition and the hegemonic structures of society and history, making strange bedfellows of tradition, self-awareness, and practice.

LBGTQ culture and its religious performances, the source of inquiry in this work, is one of these contradictions. It calls us to question the relationship gender has to the corporate and religious beliefs of participants brought together by a communal thread of marginalism. Lesbians, gays, transsexuals, bisexuals, and other gendered individuals

marginalized by mainstream<sup>3</sup> society operate from the only perspective they are able— one grounded in their innate and ontological description of selfhood. This perspective is one where marginality is depicted as normal and the ritual and musical activities which make up their religious practices are the crucial conclusions of their own perceived and ever-growing ontological identity which is both religiously and sexually grounded.

### **The Insider Researcher's Challenge.**

The somewhat anti-traditional ecclesial setting of MCC NOVA has played an important and definitive part in the interpretation of my role as a researcher. My participation in the life of MCC NOVA as a gay spiritually-minded man is one which I believe has been critical to the research and deserving of address.

The research has been riddled with many obstacles. Modern liturgics, from which most of my perspectives on liturgy have originated, is a field where normative tendencies far outweigh a descriptive stance based in participant-observation. Christian liturgical studies are still in need of a standard of research which focuses on describing rituals from an objective point of view rather than prescribing appropriate praxis. In the search for appropriation in religious rituals, the modern liturgist is often preoccupied with the establishment of “right” rituals as a consequence of “right” theologies, ethics, culture, and dogma in light of host traditions. This preoccupation of the liturgist is shared amongst professional ministers in all mainstream churches. This research has tested my

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<sup>3</sup> I use throughout the text the term ‘mainstream’ in comparison to popularized ‘mainline’ when referencing society and church culture. This is any intentional departure from the latter which has overtime come to represent a notion of ‘accepted’ and ‘validated’ church practices. The former term deflates distinctions between normal and so called abnormal society simply referencing alternatives as being additional perspectives and not countercultural ones. In the end the choice of terminology is an ethical one.

own training grounded in such preoccupations and has forced me to abandon many of the tendencies which scrutinize ritual on its merit as praxis. It has been conducted with a major modification of this perspective and has been a constant concern as I have attempted to transform a lifelong ministry in liturgics to one grounded in anthropological inquiry.

With respect to religious tradition and conviction, as a researcher, personal beliefs have been obstacles requiring careful navigation. In this light, MCC NOVA represents a reorganization of the Christian ethos to include priorities which exist outside of the historical and theological hegemonies of the Christian *ordo*<sup>4</sup> as I have known it. This brings to the forefront an impasse with regards to research. Analysis of MCC rituals could attempt to interpret alternatives to hegemonies found in mainstream traditions, highlighting the unique qualities of MCC worship practices and commenting on their significance as alterations to hegemonies found in other contemporary religious circles. In fact, some portions of this research are offer as a means of stressing the borderline similarities with other practices and the significance of these alterations. Rather than stressing difference however, the material of MCC NOVA rituals has been analyzed as normative and containing for itself an extemporaneous quality which is in direct relation to the perceptions of the subjects themselves.

As with all ethnomusicological research, the musical material studied is one which challenges the mind of the musician-researcher who embodies preconceived

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<sup>4</sup> The term *ordo* is used frequently in the text. Its meaning is variable yet draws on the elements of Christian tradition. These elements may be tangibly ritualistic referring to structure, design, rites, and other aspects of ritual. It may refer to the pantheon of Christian tradition rooted in ideologies, ethics, histories or accepted myths. Ultimately, it is used here to describe the Christian corpus of tradition inclusive of its historical and theological evidence.



theories and convictions about the properties and social ramifications of sound. This is even more so the case for the pastoral musician whose musical corpus of knowledge is based in traditional and ritual musics which strive to provide function and form to rites and ceremonies. For this type of music researcher, style, genre, content, and impact are interpreted in light of their meaning with regards to accepted historical, ritual, theological, and traditional values. The musical content of MCC NOVA rituals is comparable to other mainstream religious traditions. It contains for the most part similarities at least from the audible perspective. This close proximity between the musical content and that of other mainstream churches and the affect this has on research perspective is the first of two main sensitive topics worth mentioning. The second is a similarity between me as a gendered researcher and MCC NOVA members on the plane of sexual experience and culture.

Unlike other researchers whose subjects represent a seemingly unknown community of ideals where knowledge is learned through experience, in this case a certain amount of familiarity already existed prior to embarking on the research enterprise (though the LBGTQ worship stance was not). My presence as a researcher afforded one a unique exchange where my musical history and my own self awareness of gender have affected the research. MCC NOVA represented an expansion and journeying into an unknown realm of my own self-understandings as both a liturgist and a gay musician who for the most part had lived as a public minister in the context of a private sexual-history.

This stated, the experience of MCC NOVA affected my own self perceptions as well. Much of my own experience has been based in mainstream churches with clearly defined ritual expectations. Over the years this has instilled a certain outlook toward the efficacy of ritual and the cultural information ascertainable through observation. As a gay male, on the one hand, the research forced me to associate with the community on an immediate level which historically had not been religiously relevant as a professional liturgist. On the other hand, it confirmed much of what had been a major part of my own process of religious maturity, namely the association between my own self identity and my ritual/religious beliefs. Typical to all field research, regardless of the proximity of the researcher to the subject, my growing intimacy with the subject played a critical role in accessing the sub-religious-culture which is UFMCC. This unique access allowed me to consider actions in light of other mainstream religious practices and the role these experiences have had in shaping the perceptions of individuals and the community at large. Ultimately, this access was an inquiry into the personal realm of LBGTQ ontology, peppered with emotions ranging from anger and rejection about religious history to the elation and satisfaction celebrated by MCC church members. It was my own personal “beingness” as a faithful LBGTQ participant that granted me access to these feelings resulting in a trust and willingness on the part of the participant informants as we uncovered the complexity of being MCCers.

This brings us to question and challenge of what some ethnomusicologists and anthropologists call “insider research.” Much of ethnomusicological (and anthropological) inquiry has for many years, been based on an outsider’s view of

tradition and culture. This is indeed traditional research for our discipline. The research at hand ascribes to a growing and slightly ambiguous stance which at times has proven to possess dangerous and hazardous outcomes.

There are two main facets to the question of objectivity with respect to fieldwork. The first is objectivity in terms of analysis and stems from the need for modern ethnomusicologists to understand the task of “learning” the musical culture of the subject as a method for disseminating knowledge about it. This has important ramifications for the insider researcher who maintains commonality with the subject but clearly is charged with the task of generating a translation for a greater audience.

In dealing with this problem, certain methods have led ethnomusicologists to employ a variety of functional and structural approaches in the hope of devising objective means for dealing with the subjective process of music-making. Kenneth Gourlay has criticized these approaches on the grounds that in an attempt to supply empirical means for analysis which seemingly ensure objectivity, ethnomusicologists have relied greatly on the axioms of inquiry which have permeated Western scholarship in the twentieth century based in scientific approaches to discovery (Gourlay, 1978:3; Myers 1992:26). Gourlay points out that the first borrowed method which has affected the ethnomusicological process of inquiry is based on the presupposition that data exist independently from the human interaction between researcher and subject, allowing for the testing of theories (Kaeppler, 1971: 175; Herndon 1976: 220). Secondly, communication is often seen as the result of non-subjective mechanisms which contribute in some instances to a mathematic or scientific organization of data for the

purpose of later analysis (Freeman and Merriam 1956; Merriam, 1967; Lomax, 1968; See Herndon 1974: 250). A third criteria includes the methodological testing of conclusions by those other than their originators allowing for objective codifying of behavioral theories, research methods, and data collection models (Herndon, 1976: 219). Finally, an empirically based research appealing to ‘science’ and ‘reason’ as guarantors of objective truth in research has led to a ‘sciencing about music’ interpreting sound and culture by means of calculating and conclusive argumentation (Merriam, 1964: 25).

Gourlay notes that the empirical solutions offered in these approaches do not solve the problem of maintaining objectivity in the field and more so offer pseudo-solutions within the comfort of a false sense of empiricism (Gourlay, 1978: 5). He stresses, “that to humanize the ethnographic experience, ethnomusicology must stress the active, positive, reciprocal, and recreative aspects of the ethnomusicological dialectic. By seeking to understand, interpret, and recreate music, we come to understand, and recreate ourselves” (Gourlay 1992: 411-412, 417).

Achieving total objectivity by simply devising analytical methods based in statistical and paradigmatic practices is only hopefully marginal as well as a lofty methodological expectation. Many ethnomusicologists have been lured by these possibilities bringing us to a second question of objectivity in fieldwork. Here, the success of objectivity is based less in empirical strategies as stated above, and focuses more on the individual

and his/her effective positioning within the musical field. For the most part, this is the main overarching method of the research.

In an early article, Benjamin Paul states that in achieving efficacy in the field it is critical for the researcher to understand his/her role from the perspective of the “natives” (Paul’s terminology) being studied. He states that researchers will sometimes be required to participate in certain types of role-playing based on, of course, the idiosyncratic situation of the research project. This role is one which promotes a stance of learning and the ability to maintain with the subject, the researcher’s interest and willingness to become a student of the subject (Paul, 1953: 430-441). This being the case, the researcher must understand the parameters and the avenues available through participation. As Paul maintains, participation with the musical subject may be relative to age and sex distinctions, the learning of seemingly non-musical as well as musical skills, cohabitation and personal contact, and the performance of ritual roles. In this situation, we may expand these conditions to include being as marginalized as the subject, performing within the unique ritual music structures of the group, and the process of sharing musical talents as an expression of connectivity and inclusion.

Understanding the task of the research and the role of the researcher in this project has been of paramount concern. First and foremost is the question of establishing a means for analyzing the alternative stances of MCC NOVA worship without making comparisons with mainstream styles and priorities. It has required an open attitude toward musical participation allowing for the priorities of MCC NOVA to

become that of one's own musical experience regardless of indoctrinated perceptions of "proper" Christian musical practice. This attitude provides for an analysis of MCC NOVA worship that allows for a glimpse into the re-creation of mainstream hegemonies into meaningful and normalized local practices. MCC NOVA worship is a culmination of traditions and tendencies worked out and reconsidered in light of LBGTQ priorities. The research presume that an interpretation of meaning can only be derived based on the understanding of *how* worship provides meaning for the MCC NOVA native who is both the product of lifelong experiences and the source of newly created interpretations.

The relationship between the human subject and the researcher (and the ethnographic audience) therefore is a personal one where issues of method and analysis are the mechanisms by which relationships are established, built, and sometimes even divorced. They are avenues of participation as much as they are observations. To use John Blacking's phrase, if there is a "myth of objectivity in ethnomusicology" in establishing these relationships, it is the result of fieldworkers who in their attempt to become objective have divorced themselves from the subject equation. Since for all practical purposes the research at hand presumes a certain insider's view as described above, it would be helpful to review some of the major perspectives on the precariousness of the insider's stance and its relevance to analysis and perspective, ethical considerations in the research, and the very question of gender being considered.

## **Pertinent Trends in Anthropology.**

### *Analysis and Perspective.*

Throughout the 1960's and 70's new trends in anthropology placed increasing emphasis on the stance of field researchers and their abilities to strive for objectivity in light of the inherent biases of the human observer. In his seminal work, *Talley's Corner*, Elliot Liebow embodies the mind of the postmodern ethnographer by presenting a critical ethnography which places the researcher into the equation of the research. The epilogue of his short ethnography traces the steps Liebow took to incorporate himself into the scenario of street-life of the District of Columbia urban environment he strove to study. Liebow, (the "outsider"), was required to approach his subject from an "insider's" perspective, managing his own research methods from the position of the subject and in an environment of relative commonality with the struggles and social conditions of those he was studying (Liebow 1967: 232-256). This perspective may have had less to do with the impertinent tactics and strategies which anthropologists (and ethnomusicologists) strive to perfect, but more so was based on the casual, informal, intuitive, and personal experiences in which the researcher partook when interpreting meaning prior, during, and after time in the field (Agar, 1996: 58).

For myself, participation in the musical activities of MCC NOVA rituals was a natural occurrence from the perspective of the community as I was invited (and expected) to participate in an awakening of the gendered self in light of religious belief. This is a critical stance of all MCC NOVA ritual participation—to challenge one's own perceptions and to experience spiritual growth from a perspective of gendered self

awareness. Shared music-making established the continuity between my own gendered self and the values that the community placed on music and performance by ensuring that my own research interests were in concert with the community's activity of searching for an appropriate performance of itself. It ensured my role as a participant worthy of observational involvement.

Analysis is not based simply on the obvious musical experiences or acts of the subject, but it requires a reflexive attitude which approaches the base practices of fieldwork: listening, watching, and interpreting (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973). This is a turn from the analytical subject as defined by Raymond Firth, where he describes this reorientation of the research focus as “a retreat from the empirical reality” including “the recognition of observer-effect” and “a challenge to positivism” (Firth, 1973: 125). This critical turn from the preoccupation with analytical methods to one of experiential collectivity presents more interesting and useful debates over the position of the researcher in the global reality (Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 9). And for the research at hand, it draws the researcher into the crucible of MCC worship which is an experience based reassignment of what it means to be religiously active.

As of late, this experiential turn has produced fieldwork methods focusing more diligently on the process by which the transfer of knowledge from the informant to the researcher is done allowing for the maintenance of a personalized experience with the subject. Handbooks for fieldwork describe less specified analytical methods, but rather intimate the analytical outcome of the research experience through the processes included in the fieldwork experience (Spradley, 1979, 1980). This modified disposition of the



ethnographer is popularly maintained throughout anthropological and ethnomusicological settings as the participant-observer's stance that strives to capture a middle ambiguous place where the outsider's inquiry is met with the insider's authority. A self-reflective attitude on the part of the researcher developed as a trend in both anthropology and ethnomusicology to re-invent the experience in the field by allowing the subjective biases of the fieldworker to permeate his/her results and to include the subject in the "grapplings" of the research perspective.

The greatest consequence of this research are issues of positionality, interpretations of both obvious and latent characteristics, and the methods used in the transfer of knowledge from subject to fieldworker. In the first of these, the intimate and prolonged involvement with the subject has been one which satisfied the establishment of a relationship based in the commonality brought on through familiarity with the struggles, negotiations, and triumphs of LBGTQ persons spiritually involved in a religious journey. Secondly, the interpretation of the events and priorities which are a reflection of this commonality required a willingness to question the seemingly obvious, while maintaining an acceptance of the unusual as normative. Lastly, the methods which embodied this transfer of knowledge were based in an experiential intimacy with the subject, who through music and ritual invited the researcher into their own process of self discovery on both the personal and ritual plane.

The result of this emphasis on the dialectic relationships between outsider-insider, informant-researcher, formal-informal, and participant-observer transcends further to include the absorption of the divide which has plagued qualitative and quantitative

approaches, though this is not to dismiss the interrelationship between them (See Bernard, 1994). This merging of the margins displays the discursive tendencies of ethnography and challenges the researcher to place ambiguity and liminality at the forefront of analytic tendencies recognizing that at no time is meaning completely embodied in any one experience (Clifford, 1988:64-65, Urban, 1991: 123-147). The crux of this approach rests in the ability to maintain that things may not seem as they are while at the same time, they are as they seem (Turner, 1987:143, Abrahams, 1986: 66-69) subject to the culturally specific “relationship between fact and law- the is/ought” (Geertz 1983: 170).

In essence, the ambiguous stance which comes from navigating the insider researcher’s task in this case leads to greater insight into the mind of the subject. MCC NOVA worship, its music and acts, are not simply an experience of social ordering or social reordering based in alternative reinterpretations of the Christian *ordo*. Rather, it is a process where self actualization is met with the authority of public display. It is a dialectic and a process where involvement is critical to understanding and changes in perception leading to greater immersion into its inherent uniqueness and diversity.

### ***The Ethical Considerations.***

Generally speaking, the issues of ethics in ethnomusicological inquiry have received little (though growing) attention in the past thirty years. Born from repercussions of ignited interests in American anthropology which systematically set out to outline expectations for the ethical treatment of human subjects (See Slobin, 1992: 333), the focus on moral and responsible behaviors in the field has become an imperative

for the modern fieldworker. Ethnomusicologists' responses to sensitivities about ethics have evolved slowly. However, the treatment of human subjects remains an important and illusive topic when considering objectivity in the field.

On the surface, the issue of the ethical treatment of the human subjects of this research seems to follow suit with categories of commonsense and protocol. Contemporary protocol would seem to be defined by empirical science where collaboration in the research enterprise is subject to privacy and confidentiality flagrantly stressed in contemporary academics (See Appendices A-D). Stressing that these tools suggest a relative scale of meaning (contextually applicable), furthering the complex application of ethical considerations is the problem of recognizing how these affect the objective stance in the field. It would seem that the ethical treatment of human subjects is simply a matter of ascertaining and putting into practice some key factors involving interactions between researchers and informants. A primary stratification of ethical behaviors would follow this sequence: the priority of informants, the maintenance of rights, the integrity of those being studied, sensitivity to cultural idiosyncrasies, the protection of privacy, the condemnation of exploitation, and the availability of information (Spradley, 1980:20-25).

Ethical considerations in this research, though inclusive of the above stated stratification, are more greatly dependant on the interpersonal relationship between the researcher and the individuals who perform. They rest with the ability to share in the musical and gendered experience and the ability to trust the researcher in light of his/her recognition of the importance these play in understanding the subject. The research

methods which we often employ, interviewing, videotaping, audio archiving, etc. each proved to represent a significant measurement of the anxiety and unrest in the subject and the trust placed between MCCers and myself as an inquiring entity. The tools used in the research were at times indicators of the risk for those concerned about public disclosure (both to other MCCers and to the ethnographic audience). The method required a twofold sense of the intimate relationship between music and ritual and their disclosing capabilities in describing personal and identifying descriptions. Ethics in this case are not solely relegated to the possession of knowledge but attend more to the personal and intimate relationship between the researcher and subject and the sensitivities required in assessing the intimate character of music and ritual.

Delving deeper into the mire which ethnomusicologists cope with in the field, Daniel Sheehy has discussed four strategies which help in identifying how ethical considerations affect the generation and dissemination of ethnographic material. He suggests that in coping with objectivity in the field, these strategies help in maintaining a consciousness of the proximity of the research to its human subject's interpretations of itself. Within these ethical considerations this research has been most preoccupied.

Firstly, he suggests developing new frames for musical performance which gives meaning to events. Here he follows the perspective of Erving Goffman (1974) and stresses that "actions in one situational frame may not have the same meaning or implications for the actor or viewer as in another frame" (Sheehy, 1992: 331). This is helpful in ascertaining meaning of like musical elements with other mainstream religious tendencies. Sheehy further states that by objectifying the researcher's position in the

research project, he or she may become more able to understand the information studied. Is music being studied within in a shared framework?, to be presented to a similar culture?, employing common vocabularies and markers?, is the research being done so that a music may be presented to a culture not privy to the “ethnic” codes and symbolisms contained therein?, or, is a researcher looking into one “ethnic” situation for presentation to another group? The translation from the host framework to the framework of the “other,” especially in music, may be effected beyond the realm of perception from the primary frame of an ordinary context to the frame of a different set of rules and conventions in another context (Goffman, 1974: 21-22). This strategy is of particular importance in the musics and rituals discussed in this dissertation since on the surface, they are familiar to the audience, based in seemingly familiar religious constructs, while clearly embodying thicker meanings to the subject in light of their social situation.

A second strategy that Sheehy presents is the “feeding back” of cultural models to the community from which they originate. This aim is directed at helping the researcher to involve the informant in the process of constructing models of the material being researched. It challenges the research to be a benchmark in validating the models of deduction and analysis constructed in ways in which the informants themselves would deem viable. Here we embark on the very question of objectivity and its relationship to normality as perceived by MCCers. The ethical stance employed in my work is one which admits to the normativity of the subject’s perceptions in light of a tendency to compare practices with mainstream churches which may be at the very least an

antiquated and unrealistic comparison. In other words, the properties of MCC NOVA worship are not solely alternatives to mainstream religiosity but rather they represent a normative existence without comparison.

His third strategy focuses on community access and the dissemination of knowledge to a wider public. This may involve a variety of mechanisms within the research project involving written and academic endeavors, and may include the dissemination of the ethnomusicological stance as well, involving the informant, his or her host culture, and those traditions which the music embodies to become part of the creative authorship. This is to say that the manipulation of information (musical and otherwise) should be ethically considered in the hands of researchers who are required to disseminate information to others. The responsibilities therein involve a deep consideration of understanding the limits, possibilities, and consequences that the power of dissemination affords the researcher. Sheehy's approach draws attention to an important and critical reality applicable to LBGTQ cultural aesthetics which supports the dissemination of information about the community by members of the *queer* community. This stance is one which requires a connectedness with the community on levels beyond academic objectivity and stresses to the importance of insider relationships with the subject. Access and dissemination are critically connected to solidarity and advocacy and these are ultimately crucial to access.

Fourthly, Sheehy states that the responsibility of the ethnographer is to devise broad structural means. This final strategy may in itself transcend the others in that it requires a clarification of the fieldwork for the purpose doing ethnographic studies. The

researcher possesses the authority empowered by the information granted him or her by informants to use such information to benefit not only his or her personal endeavors but the greater cause associated with the subject. By investigating the struggles, conflicts, and shortcomings the host culture needs to resolve, the researcher clarifies his or her task by understanding the perceived importance of the research project as well as the importance of the information supplied by the informants in their own quest to describe their own developing identity.

Michael Agar's notes that in developing strategies and tactics for ethnographic research, the personality (means, ways, and comportment) of the researcher greatly affects his/her abilities to interject into the subject's life experience. This is not simply a fieldwork technique but rather an ethical consideration. From the standpoint of the investigator, the perception of his or her position on matters musical, academic, authoritative, etc., affects greatly his or her ability to maintain an oneness with the research subject. More specifically here, the ability to savor and participate in the peculiarities of gender-rich religious acts is a matter of this ethical consideration. The ability of the researcher to maintain objectivity has less to do with ethnomusicological or anthropological methods and theories, but rather hinges on the treatment and comportment he/she has towards the human subject (Agar, 1980:104-106). Lest we go full circle and expect that this sort of "personalizing" of the researcher may simply reinforce Machiavellian tendencies of earlier fieldworkers and their quasi-superior roles played out in local research sites (Paul, 1953), Leonard Schatzman and Anselm Strauss offer the following commentary:

Yet unquestionably, we want our hosts to do exactly what we wish them to do and the tactics we use make it possible to for them to do it. However, also, unquestionable is the moral requirement to maintain the relative comfort and security of the host. Therefore, if his means to research are benign, and his purposes good, the researcher can regard himself as expressing both intelligence and human concern. He needs both strategy and morality. The first without the second is cruel. The second without the first, is ineffectual (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973: 146)

As traditional and non-traditional researchers alike have noted, the role of the insider researcher differs slightly in comparison to others. Firstly, the insider researcher brings with him/her a background which affords not only a knowledge of the subject but an insight into the underlying critical questions, informing the research overall. They are potentially more potent in their contribution to the disciplinary fields (such as modern liturgics, ritual studies, sacred music studies, and theology, to name a few) which rely on ethnomusicology and anthropology for its observational value (See Sandstrom, 2000 and Dueck, 2003). In the case of this research, the anthropological stance employed has the ability to inform the local culture itself and also to serve as a vehicle of translating knowledge to the greater liturgical music community who searches for alternative means toward ritual and cultural observation (See Lotrecchiano, 1997).

These cited studies present firstly, the “problems” of the research in terms of a method and analysis which is subject-driven, highlighting the needs of communities which they study as they service the greater academic community with insights into the life of local performers. Secondly, though these insights can act as diversions to the research process, they also serve to identify the insider researcher’s role as unique from other types of researchers. The insider researcher is one who approaches the subject and communicates with them on a level of shared vocabulary. The results of the research provide a translation to both the “other” community and the “insider” community. In



effect, the researcher serves as informant to both the professional ethnographic audience as well as an adversary for the community-subject (i.e. for a liturgical/music world who is interested in the unique quality of LGBTQ religious music *and* a LGBTQ religious world which is constantly chasing the rainbow of authenticity). This stance affords and promotes a relationship which is unique, addressing the concerns of both the subject as well as the academic community in which he/she is part.

This second characteristic has proven to be of crucial importance for the success of this research. Though seemingly public in design, the rituals of MCC NOVA represent a critical axis in the lives of its membership as they travel from situations of individual isolation to public shared experience. Throughout the research it had become evident that like many aspects of individual's lives, the public platform of MCC NOVA is one of apprehension and risk as people share their own sexual condition and affiliations within a public setting. For those who chose to participate in this research, a level of trust and a high level of confidentiality had to be maintained. The trust I was afforded in the process was the result of my own connection with the community as an "insider" evidenced in my own sharing in the moral and ethical priorities this community espouses. The ability to translate this information into a vocabulary germane to an academic community is dependant on this relationship.

### ***The Gender Question.***

MCC NOVA represents an opportunity to enter into one of the many areas of discontinuity between individual awareness and corporate belief: the question of identity and its religious consequences. Within this community where gender and sexual

orientation are staple concerns in this negotiation, I thought that many of my own questions about the translational quality of ritual would be answered. These questions had been based on many presumptions about the somewhat foreign rituals and culture of LGBTQ spiritual individuals and the means they took toward celebrating their own gender identity in this context.

The presumption that within this church environment sexual- and gender-specific displays fueled liturgical celebration is foremost scrutinized. As members strive to relate their own identity to the constantly developing beliefs of this church in its infancy, discourses produced gender relative performances. Some of these are accidental while at times they are planned. Over time it became apparent that it was futile to expect that the complexity of MCC NOVA worship would depend only on these scarce performances. In fact, the research shows that overtly gay qualities perceived as normative within the LBGTQ social community and by the stereotypical assertions of outsiders played only a minor part in the development and interpretation of ritual by its participants.

We can not assume that MCC NOVA rituals will always reflect an LBGTQ culture in its most overt sense, drawing our attention to those stereotypes which depict gays and lesbians as flamboyant, gender bending, exotic, ethically deviant, etc. Gender studies in ethnomusicology have typically ranged from concerns about performances as they relate to the sexual counterparts: male and female. On this end of the spectrum, partly due to politics apparent in research focused on the marginalism and oppression between these counterparts, gender has been identified as sexually relevant. The scope of this type of research has shown to explore the often untapped material about how men

and women differ in a variety of culture specific performance arenas. Other types of research have attempted to prove that the sexual divisions between biological males and females are a cultural rift where biology is interdependently considered along with culture. In these instances the identity of the human being is constantly considered in light of the sexual condition of individuals though not entirely defined by it (See chapter 4, p.235).

The approach to the gender question in this research strives to transcend both of these attitudes within limits. While the research questions are certainly rooted in the unique relationship between religiosity and the gender marginal participants which comprise it, the gendered scope is used as a means for understanding how this unique relationship describes humanness and becoming more authentic to an ontology of gendered performance. This definition is a slight altered of traditional interpretations which emphasizes that the sexual condition of participants is germane to their brand of religious expression. It also points to a deeper and more important question in light of human development. The alteration of the definition of gender is not only theoretical. It is directly related to the research subject and has come out of the experience of striving to understand why MCC NOVA ritual events are so likened to other more mainstream religious traditions, though clearly interpreted as an alternative to mainstream religion by its membership.

Describing how gender plays an important part in MCC NOVA rituals at times proves to be difficult. This is especially true as the research attempts to search out those overt performances of a LBGTQ lifeworld based in stereotypical notions of what it

means to be *gay* and to worship *gay*. Rather than striving to create a depiction of the community based on this objective, the research attempts to describe the priorities which are the result of the intermingling of religious performance and the gender-rich society which performs it. This intersection I term *gender-religiosity*. Amidst the “normality” of MCC NOVA rituals, there is a subtext of gender relative material which points more specifically to the consequence of *gender-religiosity* rather than the unique and peculiar qualities which this condition may describe, ritually and musically.

### **Overview.**

The means by which certain ethnomusicologists have guarded against the problem of a lack of objectivity brings to the research a question of analytical means. Gourlay attempts to isolate this problem and supply some solutions to the problem as we have seen. In this research, isolating a universal analytic approach has been difficult. This is mainly due to the complex task of focusing on gender, liturgy, and ritual music as one integrated domain for analysis. The problem arose out of the fieldwork itself as different domains of inquiry began to surface needing individualized attention. Lest the variety of approaches chosen in this research be interpreted as haphazard, the analyses offered should be considered as an attempt at providing a spectrum of interpretive approaches to similar questions as they appear in a variety of domains. These means may at times be rooted in a behavioral-structural approaches (as in Chapter 2); they may be drawn from an ethnomusicological criticism (as in Chapter 3), or even in methods more suited for metaphysical or ontological inquiries (as in Chapter 4). The point in providing these

diverse approaches is to test the problem of integrated research domains from divergent perspectives. The analytic perspectives are meant to describe discourses often viewed in opposition. In some cases they may seem to be structuralist while at other times they may depend more on a cultural dialectic.

Since the research at hand is a culmination of seemingly unlike domains for analysis— music, gender, and ritual, this report is constructed to represent a series of relevant methodological and analytical approaches. In the end, the dissertation strives to draw into one conversation a description of the means and theories which describe human becoming in light of MCC NOVA’s brand of ritual and musical performances, so as to delve into the possibility that performance of religious ritual in this context is both a source and font for *gender-religiosity*. This stated, the thesis is constructed to investigate material germane to the discussion of human self consideration by showing that the plurality in MCC NOVA perceptions and memberships is critical to the process of conversion. Conversion in this sense is inclusive of social, gendered, musical, and ideological transitions from a world of the “other” to an integrated holistic world constructed through local community.

In the second chapter an overview of some of the disparate ideologies in MCC NOVA membership will be explored in light of research on socialization and the place of conversion in this process.

In the third chapter, corresponding examples of MCC NOVA ritualizing and music-making will be presented to show that amidst continuity and discontinuity, the *gender-religious* agenda of this LBGTQ community is established and nurtured. This is

considered in light of commonly accepted theories on cognition and change which illustrate the mechanisms of bridging the gap between various domains which all MCCers find themselves translating in the process of ritualizing.

This chapter offers a transition to the fourth chapter of the dissertation which entertains an ontological approach to analysis including the possibility that in the MCC NOVA context, human becoming is evidenced in LBGTQ priorities assigning a unique role to MCC NOVA rituals. It stresses the ability to enable ritual and musical activity to be considered in light of an ontology which highlights a *gender-religiosity*, enacting conversion, and transforming the religious arena into a gender specific environment through the negotiations found therein.

In the final and fifth chapter an overall summary, conclusions, and future of the research based on the divergent approaches in the middle chapters will be offered.

## Chapter 2: Sociological Insights: Self Concept, Conversion, And Motivation

### Diversity in Gender-Religious Life at MCC NOVA

One: Behold, How good it is to gather, in a rainbow of affections and sexualities

**Many: in the house of a God Who loves each of us as we are created, without limit and forever.**

One: How sweet it is to gather, women and men together,

**Many: in the house of a God who transcends human limits and categories**

One: How pleasant it is to gather—together, people of many faiths—

**Many: in the house of a God Who hears the prayers of all people.**

One: How fine it is to gather, people with firm beliefs together with people with questions in our hearts—

**Many: in the house of a God Who values deeds of justice and caring far above the recitation of creeds.**

**All: Behold, how good it is, as we join together to worship God.**

(Call to Worship, Pride Day Celebration June 13, 2004)

### **Pluralism: tolerance and acceptance in the context of social change**

Social and ritual life at the Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia illustrates the triangulation of LGBTQ lifestyle, unique religious priorities, and the negotiations which ensue when a community intentionally strives for creative and valid performances to describe itself. For this community of LGBTQ individuals, common life is a complex of complementary and incongruent beliefs, tendencies, desires, wants, hopes, dreams, and behaviors. Within the process of negotiating these, the complexity of this community's *gender-religious* lifestyle finds a place of convergence.

Worship at MCC NOVA is an intentional and corporate act of meaning teetering between the relative comfort of familiarity with mainstream church hegemonies and newly generated aesthetics of ritual practice. This environment is a conglomeration of church and culture providing meaning within a new religious realm. Defining and exploring gender diversity and appropriate expressions become a stabilizing preoccupation in the establishment of this community brought together by a number of

factors. This collective enterprise of exploration and intentional networking between members brought together by a myriad of reasons occurs within the context of a religious lifestyle where LBGTQ tendencies and the desire to establish a salient religious community gives way to a paradigm of corporate ritual behavior embedded with *gender-religious* priorities. Individuals change in their gendered self-perceptions and in their interpretation of sacred beliefs. As the everydayness of church is played out musically, socially, and ritually, paradigms of LBGTQ lifestyle are performed so to stylize a Christian *ethos* which is the embodiment of a conversion process which is both spiritually and socially based. Both gender diversity and religious plurality promote a display of the community's belief that "queer religion" is more than a priority. It is normative.

In this chapter, we will explore some examples which expose the inner workings of the negotiations between LBGTQ lifestyle and the religious tendencies at MCC NOVA.

The first section is devoted to an introductory survey of some of the mechanisms at play in MCC NOVA ritual performances as well as some of the root perspectives of its participants and musicians. Three main themes will be explored. First, through the drawing of LBGTQ individuals together into a one community of religious mindedness, gender issues and religion are negotiations of belief and at times are variable entities rather than concretized assertions. Second, while gender appropriation in performance is of paramount importance, gender validity is not always rooted in sexually charged politics but rather in the desire to promote a greater self-awareness and acceptance. This



may have little to do with sexual orientation or gender polarity but more so with a construction of gender that by definition is rooted in human expression, and not simply the role of sexual politics in public behavior. Last, the processes associated with this *gender-religious* priority are instrumental in a conversion that is the product of the dialogue between issues of gendered self-awareness and religious exploration.

The second section is a discussion of sociological discourse on the subject of self-concept, conversion, and motivation. This will be presented to inform a deeper analysis of the musical performances. As a departure therefore, I will propose that this conversation is rooted in the question of one's involvement in the mechanisms at play contributing to the construction of one's self-concept (a perception of personhood rooted in internal and external interactions). We will consider the process of conversion (a process of change which draws on one's own self consciousness in relation to socialization). And lastly, through a consideration of motivations (the behavioral means through which one describes the latter) we will strive to bridge the gap between internal awareness and public performance.

### **A world view of plurality: an interview with JM and JO**

Within many circles of research, a dichotomist approach of dealing with gender marginalism in the context of religious prioritism focusing on the relationship between gender conditions and the outplay of performance has led some to interpret the construction of a self concept through differing mechanisms. This is especially true when dealing with subjects who possess both the former (gender marginalized) and the latter (religious) tendencies. It can lead to methods which favor or denounce the parallels

between a core religiosity and a gender awareness overlapping and providing a collection of states or a collective “master status”.

As Scott Thumma points out in his work with Gay Evangelicals, striving toward a collective “master status” (a holistic acceptance of a social *milieu*) presumes that a core identity construct may contribute to the maintenance of both religious and homosexual priorities through a “sacred canopy” of indicators which allows for and accommodates the seemingly dualism between homosexuality and conservative religious/biblical interpretation. He states,

The identity negotiation requires that these Christians accept a historical critical approach to the Bible, but it does not change them into liberal Christians. The negotiated identity allows them to accept their homosexuality, while not requiring that they deny their faith. Socialization into Good News’s<sup>5</sup> ideology, alters, but does not eradicate, member’s Evangelical religious identity. Good News offers a unique brand of identity negotiation. It presents an opportunity to ‘have one’s cake and eat it too’...a change in self concept becomes both the impetus and result of the integration of a strengthened gay identity with an accommodated Evangelical Christian religious identity...In conceptualizing religious identity change or conversion as either/or proposition, researchers may be overlooking the subtlety of the individual’s identity negotiation (Thumma, 1991: 345).

Homosexuality and Christianity is a collective status which creates a tension between divergent aspects of one’s overall approach to self-wholeness. The self-fashioning of an outlook which absorbs both entities into one holistic perspective requires a state of conversion that is charged with gender and religious consequences. Viktor Gecas (1981) states that the further one is willing to indoctrinate themselves into the

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<sup>5</sup> A helpful resource for understanding Evangelical’s scope of “Good News” theologies can be found at <http://www.ecinc.org> which describes the Evangelical’s attempt to create a caring and accepting environment for people of gender marginalism. This sensitivity is a growing trend within mainstream churches to create an environment from which LBGQT community members may find a place of acceptance with religious community. This trend has been adopted by many mainstream churches including Evangelical Lutherans (See: <http://www.lcna.org>), Episcopalians (See: <http://www.integrityusa.org>), United Church of Christ (See: <http://www.ucccoalition.org>), and United Methodists (See: <http://www.rmnetwork.org>).

*milieu* of the religious organization, the more he/she is likely to change. Arthur Greil and David Rudy explains that within ITOs (Identity Transformation Organizations), the physical, social, and ideological act as means for one to transform their ideal self into a status which is complimentary to the group. It is an attempt to interact with an important reference group (Greil and Rudy 1984: 261-262). This process allows the socialized to evaluate themselves and their world in terms of the viewpoints of significant others (Mead 1962) and provides a social network of support in maintaining “plausibility structures” (Berger and Luckman, 1967: 154-155).

Determining the indicators of conversion within a *gender-religious* context requires a presumption that (seemingly) neither the gendered tendencies nor the religious priorities will always act in concert with each other. Furthermore, they will not always lend themselves to a clear depiction of the relationship between the two. Religious performance and gender awareness as understood through the process of constructing a religious self-identity are intrinsically and at times indelibly linked. Priorities of genderedness may be less associated with sexuality as they are with other aesthetics of human awareness development. In essence, the transformation one makes which leads to an incorporation and acceptance of these two traditionally divergent states of being contributes to a conversion occurring on many levels. From a performative perspective therefore, behaviors only partially indicate the overall interplay of self identity construction in light of conversion because of the varieties of conversion operative at any given time and within a given individual pending on their proximity to the overall social group.

Being *gay* and worshipping *gay* is a stance that involves tension and negotiation. From the corporate perspective, MCC NOVA strives to provide a place of safety and acceptance where queer life is normalized and empowered by Christian faith. This construction of time, space, and environment is a place where expectations are tested, assumptions are questioned, and meaning in light of behavior is worked out. The interplay between lived faith and lifestyle is riddled with conflicts and cohesions. On the surface these human tendencies seem to play a minor role in the overall achievement of a “safe harbor” for expressiveness. When considered closely however, worship supplies a detailed explanation of the processes of assimilation and negotiation constantly at play.

Since the expression of this relationship between a lived lifestyle and a religious behavior is rooted in the intricacies of performance, analysis requires a consideration of the variety of venues where behavior is either an extension of belief or more subtly, representing beliefs expressed through behaviors. Since ritual activity is a performative arena encompassing both of these mechanisms, it presumes the instrumentation of social qualities as well as acts as sources for social awareness to occur. As we consider the sources of belief imbedded in performance we must also consult with individual beliefs which crystallize the relationship between expressions and motivations.

In an early interview with two long-time partnered male members of the church, it became clear that though “queer religious” tendencies are pronounced in their perceptions, a strong operative sense of acceptance and even traditionalism (for lack of a better term) is at the forefront. Within these are latent tendencies which at times seem to

contradict assumptions about LBGTQ priorities and tendencies. Even as people who genuinely share the goals of MCC's brand of church structure, they are constantly engaged in the processes of assimilation and tolerance in an overall sense of being accepted, both ideologically and sexually.

*Q: How long have you been at MCC NOVA?*

*JO/JM: 3 years a least*

*Q: Before then?*

*JM: Nowhere*

*Q: For some reason I thought you were with the church longer?*

*JO: Maybe it has been longer. Three years sounds like a long time. It's probably about 3-4 years.*

*Q: How did you find NOVA? Or did they find you?*

*JO: We found them, somehow or another we come across it in the BLADE, or F and A told us about it. But I don't think they have ever been before.*

*Q: At the time, were you looking for a place?*

*JO: We decided that we would check this out and that's what happened.*

*Q: And what's kept you there for three years?*

*JM: Boy, that's a loaded question. Sometimes I wonder.*

*Q: What do you wonder about?*

*JM: Why I am still there.*

*JO: I have a great deal of problems with it that so many people come and stay a while and then they go. It is somewhat of a revolving door type situation.*

*JM: That is my biggest concern about the church. The way people come and go.*

*Q: Do you have any idea why you think that is?*

*JM: I don't know.*

*JO: I have sort of thought about it. Maybe it doesn't coincide with their preconceived notion with what they think Church should be and they try for a while and then I guess for some reason, they wonder off. They have a preconceived idea.*

*Q: You mentioned that you were concerned as to why you have been staying there for three years. What did you mean by that?*

*JM: I can't put my finger on it.*

*JO: It's very difficult to put your finger on it.*

*JM: I think for some of the people they have friends.*

*JO: JM has connected socially with some people.*

*JM: but not really.*

*Q: What would you say is at the center of your involvement at MCC NOVA? You two are in very different places I know. What really makes or breaks you getting up on Sunday and going to Church.*

*JM: JO being in the choir. (laugh)*

*Q: So you are connected more to the music than you know. If JO was not in the choir, would it be different?*

*JM: It would be more difficult. I wouldn't go.*

*Q: In your experience as either a Sunday worshipper or just as a member of the church, what is your impression of how you fit into that community? Where do you see yourself as plugging in? JO has a choir dedication but JM you are not part of those groups.*

*JM: For a while there when the men's ministry was going well, I think that that was a very helpful type thing.*

*Q: You both were involved?*

*JM: They didn't do much.*

*JO: Well once a month.*

*JM: Of course, as JO knows, I think they have too many potluck things.*

*JO: He likes things to be structured. (laugh) If we entertain, I do certain things, and you know he does others.*

*JM: I think some people just need to be members of the church, and I think I'm probably the oldest member of the church.*

*Q: If there was no MCC NOVA around or Dignity or Lutherans Concerned, etc. would the need to be part of a gay church be important enough for your to search one out OR is it more a matter of convenience?*

*JO/JM: That is certainly part of it.*

*JO: Say for example, the only place that I know Dignity is in town (DC).*

*Q: Knowing the community here, since you are in it for somewhat a matter of convenience, the choir, locality... What would your impression of MCC NOVA and where the two of you are in your life, your age, the beliefs that you have, the history, the experience... how does it match with where you are?*

*JO: I think it is a good mix. I come from a Catholic tradition and he comes from Baptist. I think it is a good blend of both.*

*Q: Are there times when it is not a match?*

*JO: It seems like it matches most of the time. There are times when he should feel right at home because of the Baptist hymns.*

*JM: I don't think sex needs to be put into the pulpit.*

*JO: Is it ever?*

*JM: Well yeah, they talk about it.*

*JO: What kind of things?*

*JM: I guess I don't mean sex. I mean homosexuality.*

*JO: Ok.*

*Q: You mean the politics of sexuality?*

*JO/JM: Right*

*Q: And how does this work into your religious experience? Can you unpack that a little bit?*

*JM: I think this church should be more formal I guess.*

*Q: Does that exclude sexuality to you? Because it could be much more formal and still be focused on homosexuality.*

*JO: I think that's where he (JM) is trying to go with this is if for example, if his sisters were to come up that we could go to church there.*

*Q: What would make it more comfortable?*

*JM: O My God... Two guys kissing, two girls kissing..holding hands...*

*Q: In your mind, is that unacceptable in any situation, or in that situation or?*

*JO: I have no problem with that aspect of it at all in church. Usually, what happens is when his sisters do come up, we usually go to the National Cathedral. Someplace to get some serious "organ".*

Church involvement for these two men is a consideration of normality and negotiation. Interpretations of the style of worship, belief, past and present traditions, and even their expectations of the community is a process of establishing a place of tolerance and acceptance. These serve as ways in which both evaluate location on their own journeys of genderedness by making associations with their own beliefs based on their interpretations of what church life should be.

MCC NOVA represents for JO & JM a spiritual place on a journey where past experiences lead them to new awarenesses. These may be awarenesses about the comparisons sometimes made between interpretations of normality existent outside of MCC NOVA as well as comparisons between appropriate and inappropriate behaviors within MCC worship. Though their interpretations are the result of over 40 years of established homomonogamy, they never truly loose sight of the alterations LBGQTQ culture makes and is established in MCC NOVA ritual polity. They even mention the polarity between members' behaviors and their own traditional interpretations of these behaviors.

*Q: This is a very interesting point, because as you can imagine, there are different degrees of intention and levels of familiarity and comfortability in the community. We have a community that in a sense almost transcends the church community. When we decide we want to worship together, this community comes together. I think for some people, the church community becomes that community that they can become part of. And there is a lot of stuff which happens to all of us to the time from when we first came out to the time we first dated to the time we ran to different bars...sometimes that all gets played out in the church environment because it is a safe place.*

*As a gay church, you said you had some reservations about bringing your sisters there. How much of that has to do with where you are in your life cycle. Not just agewise but also in years of your relationship.. How much do you think that has to do with your perception?*

*JM: I'm sure it does.*



*Q: Before we move forward I want to go back to the whole question of formalism. This is a preference of yours which is fine. If MCC were more formal, what would that mean to you? What is the definition of formal to you? Is it people's actions, is it sounds, is it words, is it dress?*

*JM: One would be people's dress. It would be a preference of mine. I enjoy going to church dressed the way I am...but I certainly would not go to church in shorts.*

*Q: How do you cope with the fact that MCC is not a church with a steeple and stain glassed windows?*

*JO: I'd rather that it did...But I realize that from a practical point of view these things are pricey.*

*JM: I think that they should be working on it. They should have a building fund.*

*Q: What would be more formally sounding? We just talked about what would be more formally looking. The sounds that you come in contact on Sunday. What would be more like a normal church?*

*JO: I like K's sermons. They sound much more like B.*

*Q: So K is more? What is the comparison?*

*JO: I think B was too politically active. We are both are on the conservative side and tend to vote republican which is a minority position. One of the things that I remember, I guess when the election was taking place, I was the only one that was quiet. When it sounded that Gore was winning, they were all happy.*

*Q: JM? Formal? Its sounds like you are telling me what's more normal. What's Normal?*

*JO: Say for example, the prayers, I think that is very good.*

*Q: What makes it good?*

*JO: The personal nature of it. I think everyone prayed for JM when he was having his surgery.*

*Q: So this is where you think things should be?*

*JO: (not sure)*

*Q: In your estimation, what is going on that shouldn't?*

*JO: I would say that since K has been there, things seem to be more where they should be. I don't think that things should be preached from the pulpit.*

*Q: Like what?*

*JO: He (B) was in a week where he was doing all these social justice things and he got into areas that I did not think he should. He got into things...umm....that almost told you how to vote...."Don't go there"*

*Q: So what does preaching, prayers, music, etc. have to do with political affiliations, works, ethics, in general the outside life? How much is the church experience supposed to encroach on that? Are they connected?*

*JO: They tend to be connected to some extent. Although you don't think about it, it is in the back of your mind.*

*JM: They overlap a little bit.*

*Q: the reason why I am going down this line of thought, is because the question in which we started and your comment "I don't like the sex in the pulpit thing".*

*JM: I don't think we have to constantly be reminded that we are...*

*JO: Oppressed, and a lot of those things. I don't think I am oppressed.*

*JM: I don't think so either.*

*Q: That would be one subject...I would agree, you have lived a long life and happy I would guess, and I would think that you don't need to be concerned with beebie guns as you walk down the street, and you have not been in a while concerned about if you are wearing the wrong thing, or its in your past.*

*JM: I felt bad when they had the retreat...we did not go...But I'm glad I didn't go because...I'm not sure what word to use...well, its like you were nobody because you didn't go... You are not a good church member...look I'm 67 years old...I've been there already...I didn't need to go to a retreat...*

*Q: Some if not all of these life issues are in your past and have been worked out or not...*

*JM: Right...I don't know who went to the retreat...I never saw a list...but I would bet if you look at the list, there are already people that no longer come to the church. I am just guessing. So that the people, that don't come to church, are the one making the policies...maybe not the policies.*

*Q: Well maybe in the loose sense.*

*JM: I don't think that I should be treated differently because I don't volunteer for all of these things that go on. And I don't enjoy potlucks. And certainly don't like them once a month. I think that certain people think that you are not a good church member if you do not do potlucks.*

*Q: How important then that you participate in certain activities? what ever they are....*

*So lets go back full circle again and come back to some tangibles. It seems to me that because you are not there anymore, it is not that important to you that the service looks like a gay religious fest?*

*JO/JM: Right.*

*Q: So how important are contemporary readings to you.*

*JO: Especially if they connect with the scripture readings.*

*JM: I think they are good.*

*Q: How important is vesture to your experience?*

*JO: Yes, very.*

*Q: How do you feel when the pastor doesn't wear them?*

*JM: I think it's inappropriate*

*JO: I am inclined to agree.*

*Q: Let's shift to music a bit.*

*Q: Gospel music? Black Gospel music?*

*JO: I have no problem with that.*

*JM: I have no problem with that.*

*Q: Baptist hymns?*

*JO/JM: Love..OK*

*Q: Drums?*

*JM: I think..They're ok.. Not if they go on for 15 minutes.*

*JO: We go to the Kennedy Center and every once in a while they go out and it a piece of music which they commission its all drums and it drives you nuts. I am ok with the drums as they are currently structured.*

*Q: So periodically, as an addition?*

*JO: As an adjunct to the music ministry.*

*Q: Let's talk a little bit more about music. I have been fascinated with trying to figure out- what makes music for our place acceptable, unacceptable, good, bad, better, worse?  
What in your mind does the music play in creating an environment for you?  
What does it represent for you?*

*JO: From my point of view, it basically builds on our connection with God.*

*Q: Are there times when it doesn't.*

*JM: Music presents a certain ambiance.*

*Q: What does it create for you?*

*JM: An atmosphere.*

*Q: Can you describe the atmosphere? Let's try an easier question. What would lack if there was no music?*

*JM: We have been through that. It's not very good.*

*Q: Is it because music is more entertaining, because it gives you more things to do, because it affects your senses, emotions, etc?*

*JO: I think for me it connects emotionally at times...It connects with God at times. It connects with the congregation at times. It has different roles at times.*

*JM: I agree. Music is important to a religious experience.*

*Q: Let me ask this question bluntly. Is the music gay enough for you?*

*JM: Yes (laugh).*

*Q: Does that mean it's gay?*

*JM: No*

*Q: What would be too gay?*

*JM: Why does it have to be gay...?*

*Q: You both mentioned before that the politics of gay was not important to your experience.*

*JO: I don't think it does that.*

*Q: Do you have an interest in it becoming that way?*

*JM: Oh forget it.*

*JO: Don't even go there.*

*Q: But why wouldn't that work for you?*

*JM: Why do we always need to remind everyone of that?*

Though JO & JM's religious perspective seem rooted in hegemonies that come out of church expectations of less liberal than one would expect, their interpretation of the relationship between spirituality, music, and politics shows an integrated perception of ritual aesthetics and gender expectations. One interpretation of their stance could include the necessity to equate interiority, musical experience, and homosexuality with a style of worship that reflects traditional mainstream church life. If this were the case, as they have stated, they would opt to participate in worship in a space which more reflects their expectations inclusive of aesthetics like "Sunday dress" and steeples, and possibly organ music and less public emotional guided behaviors.

Rather than relegating their interpretations as traditionalistic, one might read between the lines and recognize that their participation in MCC NOVA rituals satisfies an

innate need to be connected. We may at this point recognize the obvious. Music serves as a means of being connected to the group, at least for these men. Either through participation in ensembles or by other music opportunities, a spiritual and communal connectedness is achieved by musical involvement which supplies an element of inclusion. These opportunities are integral to the experience of belonging and establishing a method of faith bringing one closer to God, though in no specific way. This basic understanding, one which is not so different from mainstream constructs, is in dialogue with other ritual politics less complementary to the men's social outlook. Being gay is not something in need of reminding. It does not, for them, represent a system of oppression or suppression, but is an integrated experience of their own religiosity. Furthermore, even though they criticize the politics which often permeate worship, they overtly recognize the appropriateness of musical idioms which express the very spirit and "other-worldliness" of people of oppression like those found in Gospel and "ethnic" musics.

*Q: You are making a very strong point that the experience that you are having does not have to constantly reinforce that we are gay. It seems that the two of you would be very happy just going to a church to worship where you could be gay and accepted BUT don't need to be in a gay context. Is this true?*

*JO/JM: Yes.*

*Q: So the fact that you are at MCC NOVA has less to do with your need to be with other gays at worship as much as it has to do with your comfortability there?*

*JO/JM: Yes.*

*Q: So what about this inclusive language issue?*

*JO: So for instance if the hymns might say our LORD, we would say my GOD. KINGDOM may be DOMINION.*

*Q: In my estimation, when we do this we are degendering instead of choosing what God's gender is. What do you make of this? Is this different from what you were talking about in terms of sexual politics?*

*JM: Yes.*

*Q: This is a different type of politics.*

*JM: Neutral language does not bother me.*

*Q: what are the reasons for it?*

*JM: Because some people object to it.*

*Q: Who do you think the people are?*

*JO: I think it's mostly the girls. But I feel sensitive to their needs. I don't believe God has any sex one way or the other and to attribute sexual quality to God is hard to do.*

*JM: I don't have a problem with it.*

*Q: The whole issue of degendering for some creates a problem because it makes God an IT rather than something like us. How much of all this is pertinent to the fact that we are a gay community?*

*JO: I think it fits in very well.*

*Q: What would make it better? My problem often is – God is not always HIM of course, but sometimes God is HER- but we don't say that very often do we? I am not being exclusive, but all of a sudden, instead of taking into account all the bigness of God we are avoiding the part of the bigness that pissing someone off. How much of all this gets in the way of sometimes of your experience of God, Jesus, spirit? Does it ever get in the way for you?*

*JO/JM: No.*

*JO: God the CREATOR is fine..in fact it is probably more appropriate.*

*Q: If you never hear the words “God the Father” would that mean anything to you?*

*JO/JM: No*

*JO: I don't think the Baptists hold to the trinity as much as Catholics.*

*Q: Let's flip it around. What about if it is was turned the other way? What about if there were more than a balanced diet of SHE, HER, Jesus rarely referred to as a male, etc. How would that affect you?*

*JO: Certainly, God at certain times, and through certain actions had behaved as a male and other times, as a female character. God embodies the universe of feelings.*

*Q: How many times have you ever said this before?*

*JO: Never I guess, outside of that joke I told you. My faith tradition is God the Father, and as far as if I never heard it again I have no problem with that.*

*Q: Know in the community, one that is largely women, how much of this has anything to do with who's “turning the knobs”? Let me flesh this out a bit. I'm the music minister. We are constantly looking at language, “ok...get your pencils out”...We are constantly changing LORD to God, etc. The reason that I do this is that the group was already doing this before I got there. The group is marginally ok with it...Some question “why are we doing this?”*

*JO: And some of them are women.*

*Q: Someone's making a decision (at all times) what should we preach, sing, look like, the retreat people, creating. Do you ever have that have to do with politics?*

*JO: Some of that I think is true to form... When JD first came (last music director) we were just singing the words the way they were. Then someone said "There were too many Lords" (laugh) and that was about the time...one of the hymns we were doing was "May the Lord Bless and Keep You" which is a very beautiful hymn but I don't know how you change it to make it work. JD got up and there were copyright issues with this particular hymn and we can't change the language.<sup>6</sup>*

Amidst JO & JM's need to establish a sense of normality in their religious experiences, traditionalism accompanies their desire for a truly integrated religiosity. However, within that desire is the tolerance and accompanying complexity of relating their own genderedness, either overtly or latently, to their interpretations. They desire normalcy but understand the intricate differences between politics and polities about religion. They recognize that style and diversity are relative to their own expectations and realize that inclusivity is something that is not only political but stresses a unique interpretation of a god who is beyond the confines of gender distinction.

Being *gay* and worshipping *gay* exists within a wide spectrum of acceptability and expectation as seen in this example. Within both of these social predispositions, MCC church members encounter the "other" by sharing their social priorities as expressed through experiences, ideologies, and beliefs which test solidarity. Belonging sometimes requires participants to arrive at decisions selectively as individuals incorporate the overarching goals of the church into their lives. At the same time, belonging allows already assimilated positions, partly concretized through past life experiences, to inform and affect present behaviors, desires, critiques, and interests. In light of the statements by

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<sup>6</sup>(Interview: 5-25-03.02.T)

Thumma, Gecas, Greil and Rudy, Mead, and Berger and Luckman this type of social *milieu* is one which is a paradigm of social involvement as well as social expectation (p.30).

Through this process of assimilation, diversity and inclusion are paramount. MCC NOVA strives to allow for the possibilities that avail themselves when people of different backgrounds, ethnicities, gender constructs, and sexual interpretations come together with a common *gender-religious* goal in mind. Naturally, this tends to create multiple interpretations in both the religious and social realms. Of the 40 to 60 (70-90 as of late), worshipping members of MCC NOVA, any number of religious traditions can be represented at any given time. Concomitantly, a multitude of gender roles and sexual orientations can also be represented. Religious diversity is multiplied when one considers that for MCCers, *church* has historically been a *place* of many realities—comfort, alienation, reunification, division, anger, abuse... and the list proves to be extensive. Therefore, interpretation of the church environment is equally broad, enabling avid spiritualists and atheists alike to enter at their own pace into a Christian-based but gender-driven social environment with as little or as much spiritualistic expectation- as one sees fit. In an interview with a MCCer on the subject of past histories and present expectations, one individual highlighted the complexity of the relationship between personal religious history and her own expectations of ritual.

*Q: Could you say that experiences somehow become associated with different ritual acts? It doesn't only have to be music.*

*A: Yes. Absolutely. There are certain things that we say in the service. Recently a passage was introduced as part of the communion service which was almost exactly taken from the Catholic liturgy—The holy, holy, holy, hosanna, hosanna, etc.*



*Q: And?*

*A: And when I first heard it, in my mind I thought, this does not belong here, this is Catholic, get it out! In my mind—Catholic bad—out, ritual, you know— gone! For other people, the body and blood of Jesus Christ, when those words are used, all types of alarms go off and they don't like that. For some people, relatives who are Catholic who come to MCC, the whole idea of having communion and not having to be blessed by going through five of the sacraments in order to be worthy (emphatic emphasis) to receive, you know that whole thing is blasphemous! You know there are a lot of rituals. A ritual of holding candles and lighting candles in darkness. What a powerful ritual! A ritual of gathering in a circle, and having that central object that we sometime use in Sacred Places. The ritual of using incense, all those things either speak or scream at an individual based on what they have been exposed to in their life.*

*Q: What is the defining line between the two? What do these things mean to you?*

*A: (Referring to the holy, holy). The hymn itself I have no problem with. Reciting those words in a choral response format (yuck!)*

*Open communion would fit into the good. The singing as a way of blessing the elements is very inclusive to me.*

*Q: Is that the defining line? Inclusivity?*

*A: Yes.*

*Q: What pushes something over the edge between the good and the bad?*

*A: Probably my memories. If I can take it back to something that irritated me then it goes on the bad side. If it is new or if exactly pleasing, or if its, like African American Spirituals, those where not part of my upbringing in church. They are not associated with my church. They were camp songs. I can see them in the context of a Christian service. They don't push any bad buttons. They push a different button.*

*Q: What is connected with those things that are pushing the bad button? It's not the expressions is it?*

*A: No it's the memories.<sup>7</sup>*

Historical and newly conceived interpretations of how one's genderedness contributes to the expectations and assumptions of practicing church members fuels interpretation of a series of diversity matters. Sexuality, gender, religious identity, appropriate behavior, shared idioms, economics, familial expectation, definitions of ethnicity, and core beliefs all contribute to the establishment of a *gender-religious* state in that they construct an identity is which rooted in a multitude of social elements. Diverse

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<sup>7</sup> (Interview: 6-22-03.01.A)

religious backgrounds and systems of belief combine with various lifestyles to create a collage of the familiar and unfamiliar.

### **Experimentation and the Exposition of the Sacred: *Sacred Places* as Ritual of Exploration**

As a meditation group focusing on quiet reflection and small group sharing, *Sacred Places* supplies an expanded experience of sacredness to the community by performing alternatives to the common Christocentric aesthetics of MCC Sunday worship. This community within the MCC NOVA community strives to allow for greater creativity while maintaining its connection with other church rituals, institutionalizing itself as a church ministry subject to the core value system of the whole. This venue values individual introspection, and ritual content results from collective religious understandings with the common experiences of members leading others to new concepts of sacredness. The *Sacred Places* preamble:

Hush, this is a holy place, a sacred place, where the visions dwell, where the dreaming of a race began. Someone's God has stepped here, slept here, knelt here, dwelt here, spoken here of life, of death, of holy things. When you come, come softly, walk softly, talk softly, be mindful of the dreams. This is a sacred place. (Opening and closing monologue of all *Sacred Places* rituals, from *Sacred Places*, by Jane Yolen, 1996)

This predominantly female group of MCCers strives to explore means of worship and contemplation which de-emphasizes Christian rituals and stresses freedom through realms of more natural or humanistic *ordines*. In past years, monthly meditations have revolved around core themes: Dance, Pilgrimage, Wilderness, Dreams, Peace, Solstice, Security, Courage, Reconnecting with Nature, Angels, Wisdom, and All Creatures Great and Small.

The performance of the rituals follows a patterned cycle of creative exploration of the thematic focus of the day leading members in the monthly ritual organized through free association. The ritual pattern is often the same with a) meditative sounds as a calling; b) welcome by the leader with patterned instructions; c) readings (often accompanied by sounds and time for short meditations); d) extended meditation (20-30 minutes); e) group sharing (often with the use of talking stick); and f) closing prayer and recitation of the *Sacred Places* preamble.

On June 1, 2003, the *Sacred Places* meditation, “All Creatures, Great and Small” began with the meditative music from Solitudes: Environmental Sound Experiences Composed of Authentic Natural Sounds, by Dan Gibson which provided nature sounds from a rainforest. Below is the order of this service.

*THE GATHERING:*

*“Music” by Solitudes, Environmental Sound Experiences Composed of Authentic Natural Sounds, recorded & produced by Dan Gibson, Copyright 1984 Dan Gibson Productions Ltd., in Toronto, Canada*

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

*Welcome to Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia. This is our “Sacred Places” meditation ceremony. During this special time together, we will explore alternative methods of awakening to God, the Creative Force, the Universal, the Sacred, the Seen and Unseen. We will focus our attention on what will feel, to many, to be a more ancient way of honoring all that surrounds us. We will briefly turn our attention away from the bible of our European ancestors and explore an esoteric method of spiritual knowing, reflection, and growth.*

*Our theme for this year is “Body, Mind and Spirit.” This theme, like our two previous themes, “The Four Elements,” and “Mother Earth,” will permit us to explore the boundaries of nature and the physical world. It will enable us to explore topics on wholeness and balance, awakenings and enlightenment.*

*Tonight’s topic is called “All Creatures Great and Small: What the Animal Realm Teaches Us About the Spirit.” Many of us who are spiritual people can readily find spiritual renewal in a variety of ways: in music, in scripture or other inspirational readings, in worship, or in silence. In spite of our diverse natures, when you ask the question, “What makes your spirit soar?”, almost every person at some point will mention “nature.” It should come as no surprise that nature worship – communion with the Holy present in bird, beast, and forest – may be the original and most elemental form of human spirituality. In the high mountain caves of Germany and Switzerland, Old Stone Age implements lie side by side with the skulls of cave bears that appear to have been arranged into symbolic patterns. Some of the world’s first religious art appears as cave drawings of magnificent images of bison, deer, and horses.*

We will explore tonight our connection with the animal realm and how this connection enhances our understanding of the Holy, the Divine, and the living Spirit. Our format tonight will include six readings, each followed by a brief meditation period. Later there will be a time to share your thoughts and feelings if you wish to do so. There are pads and pencils beneath your chairs for writing; please feel free to use them. I encourage you to leave the pressure behind, relax and just be. Let your thoughts and feelings wander where the Spirit leads them. At the end of the service, there will be a quiet time and we ask that you please take the silence with you, until you have exited the sanctuary. Let us take a moment to center ourselves.

We will begin this journey with a sound recording of “The Lizard Song” from the CD “Heartbeat: Voices of First Nations Women.” It is a creation story chant from the Karuk tribe of Northern California: “They once told lizard. They said ‘Don’t make human beings because they won’t get along.’ But lizard said, ‘I’m going to do that anyway.’ The chant encourages the people to settle disputes and to be in harmony with one another.

**(CD info: Heartbeat: Voices of First Nations Women, recorded and produced by Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings, copyright 1995 Smithsonian/Folkways Records in Washington, DC.)**

**FIRST READING: Written by Friar William Rewak, Executive Director of a Jesuit Retreat Center in California (from a column that originally appeared as the Executive Director’s Message in El Retiro’s Winter 1999 newsletter).**

Mark Twain tells the story, made more familiar by Hal Holbrook’s rendition of it on the stage, of the differences he found between the animal world and the human world. Animals, he said, are more reasonable, and he proved it by teaching a cat and a dog to be friends, then putting them in a cage with a rabbit, whom they learned to accept. He gradually added a fox, a squirrel, a goose, and some doves, and finally a monkey.

He tried the same procedure with humans by putting in a cage a Roman Catholic and a Presbyterian. Then a Turk, a Greek Christian, a Methodist, a Buddhist, and a Salvation Army colonel.

After a time, he checked the cage of animals; they were living quite peaceably together. When he checked the cage of humans, he found a gory chaos of turbans and fezzes and plaids and bones. No one left alive. As he says, “These reasoning animals had disagreed on a theological detail and carried the matter to a higher court.”

While it seems clear that God does not intend, for example, the splintering of Christianity, it is also clear that over the centuries the human race has discovered, in good conscience, myriad ways to seek and honor the Creator. And Twain’s story stands not simply as a critique of our penchant for religious persecution, but as a metaphor for all the frightful ways we treat one another’s differences. Why do our differences – theological, ethnic, nationalistic, whatever – result in conflict? Why is it we perceive the richness of God’s creation, its diversity, its continuing newness and creativity, as fodder for disagreement rather than as a cause for rejoicing?

It is a fact of our human condition that we find it hard to trust God’s creative diversity. We want everyone to be like ourselves – or at least not too different. There’s no easy, no permanent solution to this obstinacy, but it does seem that the closer we move to God and the nearer we are to God’s heart, the more we are able to see the vein of the Divine in every creature. We are then able to honor and respect every creature.

**SECOND READING: from the book The Souls of Animals (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) by Gary Kowalski, copyright 1999, published by Stillpoint Publishing in Walpole, NH.**

My dog has deep knowledge to impart. He makes friends easily and doesn’t hold a grudge. He enjoys simple pleasures and takes each day as it comes. Like a true Zen master, he eats when he’s hungry and

*sleeps when he's tired. He's not hung up about sex. Best of all, he befriends me with an unconditional love that human beings would do well to emulate.*

*Chinook does have his failings, of course. He's afraid of firecrackers and hides in the clothes closet whenever we run the vacuum cleaner, but unlike me he's not afraid of what other people think of him or anxious about his public image. He barks at the mail carrier and the newsboy, but in contrast with some people I know he never growls at the children or barks at his wife.*

*So my dog is a sort of guru. When I become too serious and preoccupied, he reminds me of the importance of frolicking and play. When I get too wrapped up in abstractions and ideas, he reminds me of the importance of exercising and caring for my body. On his own canine level, he shows me that it might be possible to live without inner conflicts or nerves: uncomplicated, genuine, and glad to be alive.*

**THIRD READING: From an article in the journal "Mainstream", Volume 27, Number 1, Spring 1996; Religion and Animal Rights by Evelyn Elkin Giefer.**

*All major religions of the world extol creation and teach compassion and love of all living creatures.*

*Islam teaches animal equality. The holy prophet Mohammed said, "It behooves you to treat the animals gently. All creatures are like a family of God."*

*The Hindu religion denounces violence to animals. The Bhagavad Gita proclaims that a self-realized soul is able to understand the equality of all beings. To a Hindu, animal souls are the same as human souls. To kill an animal stops the progression of the soul and thus causes great suffering.*

*Buddhist faith also teaches that sentient beings are subject to rebirth as other sentient beings, and that consciousness cannot be killed. Thus there is an interconnectedness of all living beings.*

*Judaism embraces the Hebrew concept of preventing the sorrow of living creatures. The scriptures teach that God made covenants with animals as well as humans. The Hebrew term for "a living soul" was applied to animals as well as people.*

**FOURTH READING: From "The Souls of Animals" by Gary Kowalski (see reference above).**

*Birds inspire and uplift us with their carols. George Meredith, a novelist and poet of the nineteenth century, was the author of an anthem called "The Lark Ascending" that still appears in some church hymn books:*

*In singing till the heaven fills,  
'Tis love of earth the lark instills,  
And ever winging up and up,  
Our valley is a golden cup,  
The lark the wine which overflows  
To lift us with her as she goes.*

*No, birds do not sing "for the glory of God." But they do share with us a creative impulse, and creativity is a hallmark of the Creator. For in every creative work there is an element that is transpersonal. In the music of both birds and humans, beauty is "the wine which overflows."*

*When the last lark has fallen silent, something holy will have vanished from the world. The chorus of life will be muted. The cathedral of the earth will have lost its choir.*

**FIFTH READING:** From the book *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, copyright 1969 and published by Penguin Books.

*Love all God's creation, the whole of it and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light! Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. And once you have perceived it, you will begin to comprehend it ceaselessly more and more everyday. And you will at last come to love the whole world with an abiding, universal love. Love the animals: God has given them the rudiments of thought and untroubled joy. Do not, therefore, trouble it, do not torture them, do not deprive them of their joy, and do not go against God's intent. Do not exalt yourself above the animals: they are without sin, while you with your majesty defile the earth by your appearance on it and you leave the traces of your defilement behind you – alas, this is true of almost every one of us!*

**SIXTH READING:** From the book *The Animals Came Dancing: Native American Sacred Ecology and Animal Kinship* by Howard L. Harrod, copyright 2000 The Arizona Board of Regents, published by The University of Arizona Press in Tucson, AZ.

*The Northern Plains native peoples believed that animals were kin, but they also believed that animals were different from humans. They had their own societies, their own territories, indeed their own worlds. But they also believed that our human bodies were vital organisms that shared a place with other nonhuman bodies. All of these bodies are the field for endless expressions of life, and it is this dance of life that constitutes the profound kinship among all of us.*

*This insight has deep meaning for our present situation as we move into the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That world, which is presently coming to meet us, may include the further erosion of animal's worlds as well as the territories that are their habitats, their "homes."*

*If we allow this to occur, then all of the humans who remain on the earth will be greatly diminished. They would have lost, indeed, would have destroyed, one of their deepest and longest relationships.*

MEDITATION: (20 minutes)

*The "music" for our meditation will be from the CD "Sounds of the Bayou," featuring the songs of birds, frogs, alligators, crickets and other insects. It will last about 15 minutes. I will call people back from the meditation with the sound of my voice. I invite you to relax your body, empty your mind, and free your spirit, and enjoy the sounds as they call to mind your own thoughts about the animal spirits that have enhanced your lives.*

**(CD info: Sounds of the Bayou, recorded and produced by SPJ Music, Inc., copyright 1999 SPJ Music, Inc. Hauppauge, NY)**

SHARING:

*Come back to the circle. I invite you to take a moment and collect your thoughts. We will allow some time to share what it was like for each of us during this meditation.*

*We will pass around this giraffe. Only the one holding this may speak. If you do not wish to share, please just pass it on to the next person. Remember, this is a safe place. Let us listen to each other's words, and respect that what is said tonight is that person's truth. It does not have to be profound; just share from your heart as you are able.*

ENDING PRAYER:

*Let us close this evening by gathering in a circle and joining together in a prayer written by John Galsworthy.*

*To all the humble beasts there be,  
To all the birds on land and sea,  
Great Spirit sweet protection give,  
That free and happy they may live!*

*And to our hearts the rapture bring  
Of love for every living thing;  
Make of us all one kin, and bless  
Our ways with Christ's own gentleness.*

*(the participants leave one by one in silence)*

In comparison to other forms of worship at MCC NOVA, this ritual is free form. This is not to say that the Judeo-Christian *ordo* from which many of the participants originate is not actively embedded in its ritual structures. Preconceived notions of worship are challenged as the content of the service is provided for by the internal experiences of individuals who bring to the group their heartfelt beliefs about a variety of sacred meanings. Even though the ritual is open-ended, at times it is clearly the machination of like-minded individuals striving to test the limits of religious interpretation.

On the basis of structure alone, the *Sacred Places* ritual conforms to traditional worship hegemonies in many ways with a priority for reception of knowledge through readings and insights from pertinent authors, a defined ritual pattern which moves from gathering to word-centered transmission to sharing, to an ending which focuses on the unfinished work of the ritual (intuited by the further mediation as some are leaving the space). Even musically speaking, the expectation of sound in ritual is similar to other forms of worship in that it serves to convey meaning in two very basic ways. First, it

provides for a content in its sounding. This content may be meditative or it may be based in the symbolism afforded certain sounds (i.e. sound of nature). Since in this case the music is entirely instrumental, we may speculate that sounds of nature have the ability to symbolically translate a connection between the other aspects of worship like the readings and the participants shared reflections into a whole of understanding. Second, the presence of music in strategic places, for instance as gathering, as introduction to meditation, haphazardly interspersed between readings, all serve to describe the relatedness between music sound and transmission of awareness, even though (at least in this ritual) participation in the musical elements of the service is passively active.

*As a participant of the ritual, I found myself initially asking “what was so freeing about the ritual if the content of the service was so decidedly predetermined and pre-directed?” and “was this activity simply an isolationists’ reaction to a more confining Christian ritual system?” As the service continued and the readings began to unfold, I began to notice that amidst the very eclectic combination of readings, the theme of the day began to take on its own life and music, sight, sound, smell, text, meditation, and form, contributed to a complex of symbolism. The surface values described in the welcome evolved into a myriad of themes. During the playing of Lizard Song the readings unfolded in my mind into a literary potpourri of fiction, reflections, religious truths, poetry, naturalism, and ethnology. The traditional circle of chairs gave way to the typical, and non-changing rite where within it the usual table of objects, now adorned with giraffe print cloths, zebra striped candles, and a few smaller objects like a serpentine turtle, and for later use, a carved giraffe which would become the talking stick, stylized the patternedness of the space into the predetermined theme of the day. After the sharing, which included memories of lost pet-friends, reflections on the simplicity of nature, thoughts about the sounds, and even descriptions of visions and visitations, the closing prayer encapsulated the event with a Christian allusion (Fieldnotes).*

The overarching aesthetics within this *Sacred Places* meditation encapsulate and reinforce those found in other types of ritual events embodying less traditional Christian attributes. The grassroots environment of simplicity and organic self-meditative reflection, freedom, validity of human experience, a sense of accessibility, expansion of sacred expectations, individualism in light of group process, interpersonal ordering, and



free-form creativity contributes in similar ways to other ritual and musical events though clearly drawing from a different pallet of performance aesthetics.

*A: Ok. We came together to offer a service at 6 O'clock at night. We came up with a format. The format was good. People like format. They were attracted to things that have a pattern. If we do it in the same format we get people to come back to it. There were a group of 6 of us who brainstormed and that created the core group.*

*Q: So in the beginning you wanted to continue experiences that worked?*

*A: The time was valuable. That mysterious 6pm.*

*Q: Was there a connection between the environment of the space? Was it more of a back-to-nature type of thing?*

*A: Exactly.*

*Q: Did that play a major part in some of the themes that you continued over the years?*

*A: Yes. Not completely. But they became part of the experience. The last thing that we have been doing in the last year is mind, body, and spirit. So it's not all nature anymore. Yeah. It's very much in season. It's very much in touch with people's feelings. It's not dogma. It's feelings.<sup>8</sup>*

Universalizing the sacred experience and drawing aesthetics from other rituals focused on more egalitarian ordering (a more personal *ordo*), the presence of spiritual communicators (animals, nature, music, and introspection), ecological and natural powers, and borrowings from primitive cultural scripts (ritual paraphernalia), all contribute to a lessening of the Judeo-Christian ritual *ordo* and an enlivening of creative processes enabling unencumbered self-enlightenment through ritual. In general, the ritual acts, music, sights, smells, and posture describe a reinterpretation of the Judeo-Christian script to include experiences of each individual's interactions with meaningful existence. In essence, personhood is performed as having ritual meaning as it freely enfolds from a

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<sup>8</sup> (Interview: 06-22-03.1.A)

ritual script discovered and performed simultaneously. The exploration of new forms of performance acts as a vehicle for this process to have a freeing and meaningful outcome.

### **Liturgy: Dialogues with Hegemonic Structures**

It would be prudent at this point to discuss briefly some of the liturgical dialogues at play within MCC NOVA member's perspectives and specifically how they translate to interpretation of hegemonic structures. The examples of an interview with JM & JO and the *Sacred Places* ritual represent two poles in the ritual life of MCC NOVA. They show how the liturgical *ordo*, embraced and practiced in this community, is a variable entity. This is a consideration of liturgical definitions. Quite basically, liturgy, as an operative term, has been defined in a number of ways across many traditions. On a historical level, it is the establishment and development of tradition as understood by a sect with a religious history and a sense of spiritual script (i.e. Christian, Jewish, Tao, Hindu, etc.). This definition interprets liturgy as the pertinent and secured expression of faith as informed by people, events, and myths contributing to the experience of faith (Schmemmann, 1986: 10-13). It furthermore recognizes that liturgical celebration is an experiential practice where the worshipping activities contribute to a transmission of truths be them divine or otherwise, divine or humanistic, brought on by the participation of worshippers (Burkhart, 1982: 95-116). Lastly, on its most basic level, liturgy is defined both theologically and ecclesiologically as the "work of the people" from the Greek term *leitourgia* suggesting, in translation, a ministry of service (Day, 1993: 169).

From these very basic understanding of how the celebration of the liturgy can be defined, the reader should be able to ascertain how certain aspects of behaviors might be interpreted. In the first example, JO & JM discuss a certain interpretation of liturgical ritual drawing on the representation of tradition. Their commentary on appropriateness of music, preaching, costuming and comportment, scripture and other texts, all point to an expectation of worship which is grounded in its symbolism as it evolves and expresses established beliefs. In fact, the only slightly wavering weekly structure of the Sunday service (which we will see) contests that this is indeed an operative interpretation of what MCCers believe liturgy to be (full example, Figure 33, on page 299). In the second example of *Sacred Places*, the overwhelmingly static structure of the service is accompanied by priorities of style and intimacy which recognize more so the latter of our definitions maintaining the more human aspects of liturgical involvement.

All this stated, it is important to notice that the unique quality of MCC NOVA worship stems from the traditionalism apparent its structures but it also tests the symbolic relevance of these structures by interpreting them within a frame of gender appropriateness, ethnicity, and spiritual freedom. This is an important insight to maintain as we continue to interpret MCC NOVA musical and ritual activities. Ritual and music practices evolve from a sense of connectedness with the Christian *ordo* by their presence and the diligence that goes into preserving them. MCCers are not bound to these performances however. Through the stylization of the liturgical structures (and musical ones as we will see) to include anti-structures of interpretation they express their unique quality.

With this basic understanding of the function of liturgy we can understand what will be a constant struggle in interpreting the unique quality of MCC NOVA worship. As has already been stated, the focus of the work is not to highlight the flagrant *queer* qualities of MCC NOVA’s brand of worship. Rather it is to interpret their rituals in light of the LBGTQ condition. The tables below show how the basic comparison based on ritual structure and quality between MCC NOVA worship opportunities and other mainstream Christian constructions is both similar and different based on perception of its content. In the first (Table 1, below), comparison of the ritual structures are seen.

Table 1. Comparison with other mainstream Christian structures.

GENERAL OVERVIEW			
Mainstream Christian ritual STRUCTURES (i.e. Catholic, Episcopalian, Lutheran, etc.)		MCC NOVA STRUCTURES	
		Sunday Worship	<i>Sacred Places</i>
Gathering	Prelude	Prelude	Prelude and Gathering
	Gathering/Welcoming	Gathering/Welcoming	
Oration	Scripture	Scripture and Contemporary Reading	Contemporary Reading
	Preaching	Preaching	Sharing and Offering (communal reflection)
Sharing	Offering (food and money)	Offering (food and money)	
	Communion	Communion	
Exiting	Sending (Benedictions and Closing Prayers)	Sending (Benedictions and Closing Prayers)	Ending Prayer and Individual Departing (Meditation and exiting)
	Departing	Departing	

We can see that MCC NOVA rituals are similar to other Judeo-Christian worship structures quite profoundly. Even in the diversity between the two main services of

Sunday worship and *Sacred Places*, the basic four part ritual pattern of gathering, oration, sharing, and exiting is maintained. In this light, MCC NOVA preserves its relationship with the similar liturgical rituals in the Christian diaspora through similar structures. This has profound meaning with regards to MCC NOVA community polities which work to express MCC NOVA's own brand of religion as normative versus other Christians.

Normalcy from the insider's perspective does not rest on the similarities between Christian structures however, even though this is clearly evidenced above. Rather, to the MCCer, understanding one's own religious stance is based not only in the priorities associated with establishing a respected and recognizable worship tradition but rather on the priorities superimposed onto these structures. This will be unpacked in the third and fourth chapters in detail. But for now, it is worth highlighting (Table 2, below).

Table 2. Comparison with other mainstream Christian aesthetics.

GENERAL OVERVIEW			
Mainstream Christian ritual AESTHETICS (i.e. Catholic, Episcopalian, Lutheran, etc.)		MCC NOVA AESTHETICS	
		Sunday Worship	<i>Sacred Places</i>
Gathering	Prelude (Passive/Performative Musical experiences. <u>Often reflective and inviting interiority.</u> Preparation for ritual)	Prelude (Passive/Performative Musical experiences. <u>Often celebratory and inviting a shift to community.</u> Preparation for ritual)	Prelude and Gathering (Passive/Performative Musical experiences. <u>Reflective and context establishing.</u> Preparation for ritual)
	Gathering/Welcoming (Communal sung musics and spoken invitations)	Gathering/Welcoming (Communal sung musics and spoken invitations)	
Oration	Scripture ( <u>Biblical</u> )	Scripture and Contemporary Reading ( <u>More pan-experiential. Inclusive of the “other”</u> )	Contemporary Reading ( <u>Non-Christian. Focusing on the “other”</u> )
	Preaching ( <u>Based on tradition-specific Biblical Interpretation</u> )	Preaching ( <u>Based on biblical rescripting and experience. Establishing the “other” as normative.</u> )	
Sharing	Offering (food and money)	Offering (food and money)	Sharing and Offering ( <u>individual reflection. Interiorizing the “other”</u> )
	Communion ( <u>divine/communal atonement</u> )	Communion ( <u>more communal atonement</u> )	
Exiting	Sending (Benedictions and Closing Prayers)	Sending (Benedictions and Closing Prayers)	Ending Prayer and Individual Departing (Meditation and exiting)
	Departing	Departing	

The unique quality of MCC NOVA worship events and their potential for describing a *gender-religiosity* rests on the ability of ritual to assimilate the gender specific qualities found this community into a tangible and viable worshipping life. It

strives to remind its members of its core values and speaks to a world about its own normality. In the first two main examples of this chapter I focused on some dynamics of culture and ritual through the thoughts and actions of MCC members representing two extremes of a spectrum of social and religious expectation. While both the interview with JO&JM and the *Sacred Places* ritual are different contexts, they both comment on the complexity within MCC NOVA religious lifestyle evidenced in its ritual structures. Both express an assimilation and tolerance of seemingly oppositional elements which affect *gender-religious* matters. The overarching goals of MCC NOVA are, at times, independent of the actions that members sometimes perform, the beliefs they sometimes hold dear. The goals are expressed in the actions and the beliefs through the chosen style of ritualizing however. The actions may or may not reflect overarching community goals at any one time overtly. Rather, they contribute to a description of the complexity found in the community at large, where a variety of interpretations and expectations with regard to the role of ritual action in the construction of identity are concerned.

This leads us to question the very relationship between the goals and core values of MCC NOVA and its performances. Does performance at MCC NOVA comply with values or do values develop from ritual actions? It is apparent that the experience of participation contains certain communicative properties which connect with deeply latent factors associated with the *gender-religious* equation.

## **Invention and Design as an Ecclesial Act of Freedom: InCluesion and Its Perception of Human Development**

The musical group, InCluesion<sup>9</sup>, the church band, serves as an important musical and social example of some of the principles discussed thus far. In their development as an ensemble with its clearly defined musical structures, they explain participation as a tension between religiosity and genderedness. This is played out differently however in their experiences. They focus less on LBGTQ politics of lifestyle and religious alteration. Music plays an important part in the process of individual becoming and self-concept construction.

*Q: I am very interested in knowing a little bit about what it is that you offer to the community that is different from the community's regular experience.*

*K: A different style of music.*

*Q: Style??*

*G: Different instruments. Different sets of people. I think that now that we are doing the closing hymn I think we are giving the congregation an opportunity to participate in a more upbeat level.*

*What ever it is they're liking it. I've had a couple of people comment that they like the new music that we have picked out.*

*Q: Why is that important? Why are all of these things important?*

*G: I think it's because "variety is the spice of life. I think it's because that things don't get stale. People have no idea what to expect when we pick up guitars.*

*Q: Anyone want to add to that?*

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<sup>9</sup> The naming of the group InCluesion has an interesting history worth mentioning. At the onset of the group's establishment, the musicians were interested in creating a 'garage band'. Their intent was not to create a musical ensemble for liturgical celebration focusing on sacred music. As this group of amateur musicians came together they quickly discovered their own musical shortcomings and named the band *Clueless*. As they began to develop as more capable musicians and they gravitated toward greater interest in church music styles, they renamed the group InCluesion. The change was partly due to a need to establish a name which reflected the group's commitment to church priorities. The italicized *Clue* in InCluesion is a residue of this transition. However, it may also be interpreted as an artifact of the changing dynamic in its members which base their own developing self awarenesses in the experience of music making in the group.



*D: I think the part about people not knowing what to expect is part of it.*

*Q: Would everyone agree that there is certain good quality to that? The expectation level?*

*D: From us or from them?*

*Q: Them...is this a good things? (Figure 1,below )*

Figure 1. Members of InCluesion at the Sunday Service.



*KL: I Hope so. I think some people have been pleasantly surprised at some of the things we do. I think they don't expect it and all of the sudden there it is. And there are two schools. Some people are going to come and they are going to go...ok...I heard that on the radio. If they listen to that sort of music on the radio. I never heard that before..where do I get it. It exposes people to different music that they never heard.*

*Q: This is a good thing?*

*K: Yes*

*Q: Why? Why is it a good thing in your estimation?*

*G: Whenever you go to any type of concert and its not what I expected, and it reached down and spoke to me and it was a very moving experience, it was beyond what my expectations are and if it's someone I haven't heard in a long time, I know that I can find some consistency, and that's always a good thing.*

*K: Because there are comments that we are doing a good thing. I think that the congregation is enjoying what we are providing. From the perspective that we started out small with things that they may know and now we are doing things that they don't know. It helps them become aware of things that are out there that they are not aware of. There might be something out there that they may go and buy. I know that I have never listened to Christian music on the radio. I never listed to the Christian station before. And then G turned me onto the music and that's all I listen to now. Now it's only the Christian stuff.*

*Q: Are those of you who are hearing comments from people out there? What specifically are they saying? Great Job? I like what you did? You are playing better than you used to?*

*G: I like the new music selections. I like the peppier stuff. I love the thing you did at closing. I liked the harmony. Speaking of expectation, When we did "Above All," X stood up, and could not believe that we did something that was peppier/new wave. She expected "There's Hope Today". And just seeing that is refreshing.*

*Q: Would you say that you are offering something more to the community than simply variety? You are offering something more than is just challenging their expectations?*

*DN: There is a spirituality there too.*

*Q: From what I am hearing thus far, it sounds to me that it's not just that "O I like the music and I can dance to it" It's "We're really proud of you that you can do this and maybe not explicitly, maybe people are saying to you "Wow, we never thought you could do that."*

*G: Wait until they see K pick up the bass.*

Expectation for InCluesion members is grounded in a willingness to provide the community with alternatives to the musical styles and structures usually employed from Sunday to Sunday. They strive to encapsulate a departure from the latent hegemonies of "traditional" church musics borrowed and inherited from mainstream sources. Their willingness to explore new territory is as much a self actuating activity as it is a service to a community wanting to expand beyond their own religious and music histories.

*Q: In fact you are offering more to the community than you even realize. How important is it to you and how important do you think it is to the community, that you can do something that you couldn't before?*

*K: I think it's really important. From my perspective, I am scared to death to be in front of anybody. I shake when I am up there but I am faithfully up there.*

*Q: Why?*

*K: I think I have something a little different than the others have because I'm always looking out. I don't know about InCluesion. I know definitively with the choir, I am always looking out to the congregation. And I am always making a one-to-one connection with the congregation. And I've had people tell me that when I am looking at them, when I am singing, I am singing to them. And it's weird.*

*Q: What makes it weird?*

*K: I've been told that I have extremely piercing eyes. That it is like I am looking into their souls. But that's how it is, I am just totally connecting to the people in the congregation, so I lose my place and then I fumble and then I find someone else to look at, but I think its really cool from my perspective because I am scared to death to get up there, but as soon as I connect with somebody's eyes and they are enjoying what they are doing and then I get a smile on my face and it makes it easier.*

*Q: Anyone wants to add to this?*

*KL: I think connection is a really important part of this which I haven't thought about it until now. But I already communicated with people and there is always a musical element....it's a way to connect with people.*

*Q: So you mentioned something very specific about eye contact and that this works for you at least and this gets you over your fear in a sense.*

*K: Maybe.*

*Q: Tell me if I am correct, but all that fear, nervousness, etc. leads to an end which overcomes it all.*

*K/KL/G: Right.*

*Q: Anything to add?*

*D: I was just saying that its almost a challenge.....Yes I've gotten over that fear of that one song..and then there is an expectation of how to continue so its almost like we feed of each other.*

*Q: Do you ever feel that yourself?*

*D: Oh yeah. Every time you throw me in there and d they say through more stuff in there. Because I was a little shy when I started.*

*Q: What's the stream of emotions you go through? The first is ...*

*D: My first feeling is not that I can't do it. My first is I don't think I can do it well enough.*

*Q: I'm hearing that it's not that I can't do it but I'm not always allowed to do it. Is that correct?*

*D: Allowed and experienced or prepared enough to do it.*

*Q: Two different things. Right?*

*KL: Not exactly, I can relate to K's fear. I've been doing music a long time and there is never a time that I don't have even one little twinge of fear and I just keep doing it because I am more selfish about it, I guess, because it gives something to me and if I can just feel the music and concentrate on that and let my fear go and try to look out too because I like the connection with people too. Unfortunately, I have a bad memory and can't remember my chords and I don't look out as much as I would like.*

*G: Its funny, I don't have that kind of fear, because I'm in the back. Even if I was up here, I still would be behind them. So they are taking the brunt of the fear but I know I have some sort of supporting role in what they do. You know what I'm saying. And that's my own expectations.*

*KT: I always allow myself to be imperfect. I always say that I will always make one mistake. And that's just the way it is. And that's fine.*

*G: Unlike me, I will never do "Face to Face" again because I fell on my face! One of the songs that I totally screwed up.*

The process of reinterpreting the constructs of liturgical music in this case is twofold. It strives to be a service to the community, expanding its horizons and allowing for a more diverse setting from which the liturgical archetype can draw expression. For the musicians themselves, it is also a recognition of their own growth rooted in musical development and the array of emotional experiences which this development brings about. In essence, *InCluesion* bridges the gap between historical expectations of worship and newfound awarenesses of the possibilities of musical worship as a self defining activity.

*Q: Fear or uncomfortability or unhappiness with making my own mistakes, are all part of the bruises that go along with making music. We have all experienced it. What's after that? Why would you continue to do something that makes your stomach turn? Week after week after week?*

*K: The practices are awesome, their fun, kinda like a jam session, to hang out with awesome people and I am learning about me and more types of music and even bought a bass guitar and tried to do that too. All of that is new to me. I think I was getting a little burnt out a little bit in the choir. It's church music. This is more like rock and roll type of stuff and that's more fun.*

*Q: What's beyond the work?*

*K: Everyone wants to be told you do a good job and if you know you did something well you're going to want to do it. There is a little bit of a selfishness and I know I sing that song well so I am going to sing it and I know I play it well so I am going to play it. You know. There is a little bit of that, but hopefully not too much and hopefully we are all doing it for the right reasons which is ultimately to give something to someone else.*

*G: I know that when we have a song that comes together, I can't wait to share it. It's a strange feeling. I don't know why.*

*Q: So there is a certain amount of "publicity" that you enjoy when a song really works well?*

*KT: Yeah!*

*Q: What about those that are not quite fully baked but you put in front of the community anyway?*

*K: We usually hate the music. You say, "I hate this song." But ok, let's do it and get it over with.*

*Q: One thing I've heard over and over again is that here at MCC NOVA is that here we have the opportunity to do something or be something that we may not have had the opportunity to do before. Is this statement true?*

*D/K: Yes.*

*Q: And what are those things?*

*D: I've been to other churches where they wouldn't let you sing in the choir unless you auditioned.*

*Q: Do these have anything to do with being gay?*

*D: No.*

*Q: What are some of the other brick walls?*

*KL: In music?*

*Q: Music or otherwise. What I've heard a lot is that MCC is creative and I've heard the word "allowed" a lot.*

*D: In a lot of churches that I've been to I don't think I've ever seen a woman serving communion and here the women get to serve communion and they get to consecrate the bread and juice. That is something else that I have not seen. (Figure 2, below)*

Figure 2. InCluesion's drummer (D).



*Q: What are you allowed to do?*

*D: I came from an area where even today I've had people say "She can't do that- she's a girl.". And here it doesn't matter. You can be a dog. There is a different confidence and a chance. Everyone is willing to give you a chance no matter what.*

*G: There is love and support. K doing the singing and D doing the drums thing and when we serve communion and Sacred Places, there is usually someone being you to help you out, to teach you.*

*Q: I have heard that MCC NOVA is either the first place or the only place where people feel that they are "allowed" to do things where in other places they might not be allowed.*

*KL: In general, MCC invites that openness. I've been to many MCCs. I think that it seems to me that MCC NOVA is more open to trying new things.*

*Q: Can you be more specific? What wowed you when you got here?*

*KL: Yeah. A couple of things. The vision/mission statement thing. That is more open and more inclusive than any other I've ever seen and that fits with my own personal theology better. Because I am a little bit wiggly and that this congregation seems to take so enthusiastically and readily to the drumming thing. I have drummed before, but no other congregation has embraced it like they have here.*

*Q: The chicken or the egg? Is the environment allowing you to do things that you would not normally do like take up the bass, or start your own group, or drum? Does that come first or does your performance allow for that to happen?*

*G: Can you clarify performance?...*

*Q: We are performing right now. Music and performance in church is another type of performance. What came first, the allowance to create OR does your performance allow for that to continue? Or is it a little of both?*

*G: I would say that the people and the environment here seem to invite that stretching that trying new things.*

*D: If the people definitely said, "We don't want you to do that," you wouldn't be so quick to do it. I think it's because of the people who want it and the pastor. Because I've been to other gay churches and its not been like this.*

*Q: It's been more like church for gay people?*

*KL: There are definitely unspoken rules. You had to "perform" within these criteria or else you would get looked at. You may be able to do that BUT not here.*

*G: I think it's actually twofold. I think that the environment here and the people who are very willing and supportive and stretch the people. Because of that you feel more comfortable...to ask questions...to bring it up...and things start to happen...you might have an idea to have a basket auction...or a band...maybe two or three years ago that would not be the case. I think in my personal opinion much of that had to do with the pastor not being very flexible. I think now we have a new pastor who is very flexible and willing to challenge people and to empower them which goes along with the church's core values. Even when KM was not here yet and E was the pastor she was very pro-member ministry. I think she is very into letting the people do what they do best. And if you don't see it, someone is going to ask you. It makes it easier for us to come up with new things.<sup>10</sup>*

The description of the musical process in light of ritual meaning by *InCluesion* highlights some of the issues raised in our first two examples. Like the first two, *InCluesion* members do not explicitly focus on an agenda of sexually charged criteria, nor do they provide an agenda of a religiously or spiritually directed forum for expression. Within this group, humanness develops from performance as a system of

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with members of *InCluesion* (06-01-03)

situations which are both personally and spiritually based, though neither is overtly stated. On a communal level, there is a connection which has as its venue musical expressiveness, and more descriptively, is based on self discovery and exploration of the role of skill and virtuosity as a means of conversion. These members find a cyclical connection between musical performance, communication with the larger group, and an empowerment which occurs through the entire process of music-making. Within the total experience of *InClusion* is the sense that musical performance is a major factor in attaining access, being given the allowance to participate and belong, and even having a relationship with the “other” not normally afforded because of personal experiences of gender confinement. These experiences ultimately relate to their own interpretation of themselves as defined by a shifting outlook on the other. This “otherness” may be performative as one’s own skill and expressiveness is instrumental in creating a self awareness. These experiences may be ideological, reshaping conceptions of sacredness and religious comportment. They may even be steeped in the awareness that previously defined interpretation of sexuality and gender, when reconsidered, are relative to religious beliefs.

### **Gender-Relative Aspects of Biblical Interpretation: The Role of Preaching in Establishing Gender Priorities**

Part of the MCC NOVA contribution to the *ethos* of the Judeo-Christian script focuses on the need to establish biblical interpretations of religiosity stylized for a LGBTQ condition. For many within LGBTQ religious environments, biblical interpretation includes both theological interpretations and historical recountings of

salvation history. Evidenced in all uttered texts (songs, prayers, contemporary readings, etc.), establishing a relevant story is of paramount importance. Preaching is a starting place for establishing this “storyline” which shapes religious intentionality. On the surface, and most noticeably, biblical interpretation may simply reorient the thematic prose of scripture to reflect LBGTQ religious tendencies. This may work itself out performatively to include a reordering of gender roles. It may even supply machinations of key figures in bible stories to take on *personas* more apparently relevant to LBGTQ community situations. Latent themes within bible stories may become more overtly applicable to modern life. These may even prove to reassess key theological threads of cohesion in the bible as a method to create more applicable interpretations.

Overall, the constant reorientation of biblical thought into relatively contemporary meaning produces inquiry on a deeper level into the queer response to the Bible and fosters a sense of queer reign over traditional biblical hegemonies which have proven to restrict access. This sometimes produces flagrant rejections of biblical and religious notions, while at other times, it draws out less celebrated texts and themes. It may provide solutions to more rigid theological interpretations of validity by providing more intuitive interpretations of the meanings embedded in writers’ storylines.

Ultimately, the aesthetics of MCC NOVA worship will provide for the unique interpretation of the mechanisms at play within reasonably recognizable ritual structures. In the end, the structures themselves will be less pertinent to the discussion. Rather, it is in the interpretations themselves where the important discourses about gender relative material will rest. Since this is the case, the themes prevalent in the worship events will



rely on greater context than the simple texts can provide. This is especially true of sung musics. Therefore, the exposition of more complex interpretations of an LGBTQ response to religion will rely on the detailed and thought-through contributions of elaborations within worship like preaching and other texts. These provide the background and perspective needed to comment on the more latent meanings evidenced in musical micro-events.

Preaching serves as one way to make these connections as it strives to validate a queer existence within a biblical framework. It provides new vocabularies which describe truths otherwise non-resonating with LGBTQ communities. At times, it focuses on systems of polity, thus providing an active performance of theological principles or a commentary on how previous interpretations of appropriateness have lacked in potency for a queer group. In essence, the performative act of preaching provides an intersection between the “stories” of history (recounted, interpreted, and scripted) and the LGBTQ response which fosters active reasoning for a normalizing of *gender-religious* traditional belief. The following example explains this transition from a universal script found in the Christian scripture and its relevance to a LGBTQ outlook.

Dare We Celebrate?<sup>11</sup>

As many of you know, we’ve designated this month at MCC NOVA as Keeping the Vision Month ... in an effort to draw our attention to the church’s newly clarified and articulated sense of vision ... and to ask ourselves the question of what it will mean for us, individually and communally, if we live out that vision. Our new Vision Statement, crafted by the members and leaders of this church community, is intended to be a pithy and memorable statement that helps us keep focused on who we believe God is calling this church to become. You’ll find that statement artistically rendered on the front of your bulletin ... say it with me, if you would: “Stretching, Connecting, Celebrating ... People on a Spiritual Journey.” We began this month talking about stretching ... being flexible enough to stretch and grow in the Spirit. Last week, we reflected on what it will mean for us to be intentionally “connecting” people in this world that is too fragmented. Well, today it’s party time ... as we explore with one another the question of what it means to be “celebrating” people.

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<sup>11</sup> Unpublished sermon Rev. Kharma Amos, pastor, MCC NOVA.

Let's begin with a moment of prayer:

Extravagant God, you have given us so many blessings.  
As we reflect on your abundance this day, help us understand anew  
the power of your forgiveness and mercy.  
Help us open our hearts up to the undeserved gift of your grace, always there for us,  
Ready to embrace us any time we wander away.  
And help us celebrate with one another the fact that, in you,  
We are found and we are home.  
Through your Spirit, we pray. Amen

Just before Jesus told the famous story contained in today's ancient reading, he'd received a bit of critical feedback about the company he kept. The Pharisees and Sadducees had taken exception to his practice of welcoming the tax collectors and sinners who came to him ... and not only that, but of having the gall to eat with them. They found it utterly distasteful and unbecoming conduct. So, Jesus shares with them a few stories ... first a story about a wayward sheep who wandered off on its own only to be found by the shepherd who left the remaining 99 to seek it out ... then about a woman who lost a precious coin, turned her house upside down, and then threw a party when she found it ... and finally he tells this little ditty that is often referred to as the Parable of the Prodigal Son, though it might more rightly be called the Parable of the Prodigal Father. All three stories are in answer to the religious leaders' criticism of Jesus ... all three tell the story of a Prodigal God who is too busy rejoicing and celebrating over lost sheep, lost coins, and lost children to care about what they did when they were lost (Brown Jordan 163). Prodigality, you see, is characterized by reckless extravagance ... by lavish or foolish expenditure ... and while that does appear to be a characteristic of the young son in part of this story ... it's a characteristic which we can tell he comes by honestly ... for this young fellow is a real chip off the old block.

When the young son in this tale insults his father by saying "drop dead" ... at least figuratively, by asking for the inheritance that would be his only when the father died ... the father graciously complies. He generously divides up his property ... his life ... between his two children. Days later, the younger son packs up all of his things and heads off to a distant country to find himself, at least that's how it turns out.

I can relate to this urge to pack up and move out, can you? ... I mean, I couldn't wait to get out of my mom's house and be on my own ... and as far away as possible. I know that's true for many folks ... For example, especially several decades ago, many young gay people from all over would pack up their things and head to San Francisco ... as far away from their small towns and rural villages as they could get ... to the big city where they could be themselves and have a gay old time. Armistead Maupin begins his book Tales of the City with a quote from Oscar Wilde who said ... "It's an odd thing, but anyone who disappears is said to be seen in San Francisco." For those of you who've read the book, you know that Maupin's story then chronicles the lives of many such pilgrims who travel West to claim their independence and adulthood ... and who find themselves.

The younger son in Jesus' story reminds me of many of those characters. Now, we generally have the idea that he's a real wild child, right? ... but the story Jesus told tells us only that he was a spendthrift ... he squandered his money in dissolute living – didn't have a savings plan or an IRA or anything like that ... he spent money like it was going out of style. So when a natural disaster occurred ... that famine he hadn't planned on, he began to be in need ... so much so, that he had to find a job ... he took the first one he could find and became a pig farmer. Now, the Jewish audience to which Jesus spoke was a group who, as matter of religious tradition, avoided anything to do with pigs. They must have winced when Jesus got to this point in the story and told them about how this young man became a swineherd and was so hungry that he wanted to stuff himself with the slop he fed the pigs. In the eyes of the Jewish audience that hears this story, this younger son has hit rock bottom—with a crash!

And then there's that lovely phrase ... "he came to himself" ... he experienced a personal epiphany ... a new depth of self-understanding. That moment of slopping the pigs while his stomach ached with hunger gave him an important perspective that helped him see himself and his situation more clearly ... gave him an appreciation for the blessings and the abundance of what he had left behind. So, he reasons with himself that he will return home and become one of his father's hired hands, whom he knows have plenty of bread to eat and are treated quite nicely. He even practices the speech he will give his father when he gets home ... painstakingly, he memorizes the words ... carefully crafted words that he hopes will demonstrate his contrition and persuade his father to forgive him and let him live as one of his servants. And he makes the long trip back home.

But before he even makes it to the door ... while he is still a long way off, his father sees him and is deeply moved with compassion. He doesn't know why the son has come home ... a good guess might be that he's there to ask for more money — that would certainly be true to character, but he doesn't know ... he doesn't know that his son has "come to himself" ... that he's grown up and come to understand how wrong his actions were and how blessed he was. And yet, this father takes off running ... something considered unbecoming conduct for a grown man in ancient Palestine ... something that would have shamed the father ... and when he reaches his son, he embraces him and gives him a kiss. He doesn't ask any questions ... in fact, he only lets his son get out the very first part of his prepared remarks ... before he instructs one of the workers to bring the son the finest robe, a ring for his finger, and sandals for his feet ... all of which are extravagant gifts that would symbolize both his full reunion with the family and the lavishness that would characterize the celebration the father had in mind.

This story of the prodigal son's joyful homecoming is one that Rev. Peter Helt uses to frame his own life story, part of which he calls "a side trip to the wilderness" ... it's the type of story I've heard untold number of times in MCC ... and a story with which many of us can probably relate on some level. Peter recalls the moment he turned away from God ... and that it was because he was gay and because his church believed and taught that his being gay meant he could not be in right relationship with God. So, he says he put God behind him and went off to explore what living as himself might be like. In the part of his story which wasn't read this morning, he describes himself as a naïve boy from Pennsylvania who was young enough and adventurous enough to pick up stakes and head to the Bay area of California, which seemed exotic ... one of the meccas of gays and lesbians worldwide. Just like the characters in Tales of the City, he talks about discovering a whole new world in San Francisco ... a world of gay culture ... a place where he could live riotously. He says it was fun sometimes ... discovering the freedom of living as an openly gay man. But, he also says it was lonely and desolate sometimes, when he felt the void in his soul ... when he did things of which he was ashamed ... when he felt isolated and cut off from God. The moment that Peter describes as a turning point in his journey through the wilderness occurred not in SF, but at Cathedral of Hope MCC in Dallas ... where he went to hear the evangelist, Rev. Jeri Ann Harvey, speak. I don't know how many of you have had the opportunity to meet and hear Rev. Jeri Ann, but she is a big woman with a big voice and a big message ... and her hallmark "Hallelujah" is enough to make anyone sit up and take notice. Peter says that because of her message that day, and the presence of God all around and within him, he was finally able to begin to allow his spirituality and sexuality to come together again ... and that began his journey back home from the wilderness.

Like MCC churches around the world, MCC NOVA is a church that was founded in order to allow such journeying sons and daughters ... people who have been wounded, who have, for whatever reason, realized their own need ... to come home to God. This a place where people can "come to themselves" ... like the younger son in Jesus' story, like Rev. Peter Helt, and like countless others who need to know that God accepts and loves them just as they are. That is the first and most basic piece of Good News that we must be committed to sharing with the world, who still desperately needs to hear it.

You know, I sometimes wish that the writers of scripture would have used stage directions when they wrote ... because sometimes I think we read too quickly and miss the big open places where there ought to be a

pause. For example, in today's scripture ... between the part where the father declares that the son has been found, and the part where it says the celebration began ... I think a whole lot that isn't narrated must have happened. Not only did they have to prepare for the party ... butcher the fatted calf, send out invitations, hire the band who would provide the music for dancing, decorate the place properly ... not only did they have to make all of those logistical arrangements, but the son also had to come a long way internally in order to truly celebrate ... he had to accept the love that his father lavished upon him ... and that's not always such an easy thing to do. Remember, he had to come from the place inside himself where he realized his deep need, where he honestly evaluated himself and came home humbly asking to be as a servant ... to the place where he was embraced, accepted, loved, and given an extravagant celebration where he was the guest of honor. He had to come a long way in order to be ready to join that party ... to celebrate for himself the undeserved gifts of his Prodigal Father. And, this isn't just an ordinary party for the younger son. I imagine his money afforded him quite a few parties when he was off in the far country spending money left and right ... but this party is not about superficial merry-making ... this party is not about simply letting his hair down and kicking back a few drinks ... this party is about genuine celebration of the fact that he is loved unconditionally ... and it is preceded by honest soul searching and self-acceptance on his part.

Sometimes, that space between self-understanding and the journey home, on the one hand, and genuine celebration of love and acceptance, on the other, can take a long time. For many of us in MCC, just being able to be present in worship as our truest selves is enough ... being welcomed is enough ... occasionally, it can even feel like it's too good to be true. But it isn't enough ... our God is a Prodigal God ... God is not content for us to simply be "welcomed" back home ... God wants us to celebrate our inclusion with extravagance ... to really celebrate the gifts of forgiveness and mercy that God longs to give us. To be a celebrating people, MCC NOVA, we will have to authentically celebrate for ourselves the unconditional love God has for us.

But, we cannot stop with that celebration for ourselves ... we cannot see ourselves only as blessed prodigals being welcomed back from our wilderness journeys with a celebration ... it can't only be about us.

There is another son in Jesus' story in whom we might also see ourselves.

I have to say, as much as I can relate to the younger son's journey and homecoming ... unfortunately, I also know all about this older brother. I was, after all, the eldest child in my family ... and, as I'm sure it won't surprise you, I was the one who did things right. I didn't go out drinking and partying, I got straight A's, I was an officer in the Student Council and the National Honor Society, I worked to earn my own money from the time I was 14, and to top it all off, I—alone in my family—went to church every week without fail. I was a real picture of righteousness, huh? My younger brother, however, was a completely different story ... he was among the most popular (not to mention arrogant) kids at school, he had an invitation to some party or another every weekend, he couldn't work because it would take time away from the sports at which he excelled, he couldn't care less about things like homework or social service, he wasn't even particularly nice unless there was some tangible benefit in it for him, and he never gave a thought to the extra bonuses and assorted gifts he was routinely given without merit. I know exactly how the older brother in the parable must have felt when he returned home from a grueling day of honest work to the sound of raucous partying ... I sure wouldn't have wanted to be the one who had to break the news to him that the cause for the celebration was the return of his brother, the very same one who had taken half of their father's property and headed for the hills. I'm embarrassed to say I can see myself in his shadow, arms crossed and blood boiling ... refusing, with indignation, to go into that party. And when the father came out to urge him to come in, I can understand the hubris with which he responded to his father, reminding him about all of the things that he had done to faithfully support the family and yet, he had never even been given a goat to celebrate with his friends ... and then shouting out accusatorily, "this son of yours has spent all of your money on prostitutes ... and yet, you killed the fatted calf for him. How could you?" Notice that it isn't necessarily the fact that his brother is back that so upset the older brother ... I

imagine he could forgive his father some degree of mercy ... but, it was the celebration that was too much! His brother should have come home in sackcloth, not to a fine robe, a ring, and new shoes ... he should have been given bread and water, not the fatted calf ... he should have learned his lesson and acted with appropriate penitence, not celebrative singing and dancing. It was, quite simply, not fair. It's not difficult to appreciate his point of view, is it? And yet, thank goodness, the father is not fair ... the father is prodigal ... not only with the younger son, but also with this angry and self-righteous older brother. The father claims this boy as his own ... "My child," he said, "you are always with me and everything I have is yours." And indeed, it was ... since he had prematurely divided up all of his property and everything that was left was the older brother's inheritance. "But," the father says, "we had to rejoice and celebrate, because this brother of yours ... (here the father redefines the relationship ... it's not "this son of mine", but "this brother of yours")... has come back to life ... he was lost and is now found."

If we are to be a celebrating people, we have to be able to celebrate for ourselves the love that God showers upon us so unconditionally and extravagantly ... and we also have to respond to the invitation to celebrate with others ... those we might not find as worthy of celebration ... those we welcome, sure, but for whom we're unlikely to throw a party.

This parable of Jesus comes full circle ... it illustrates for those who didn't approve of his eating with tax collectors and sinners, that those they would exclude are worthy of being embraced by God ... it illustrates for those of us who have been excluded or considered unworthy for some reason that God is ready to run out and embrace us ... AND from another angle of vision, it illustrates that once we're in the "in group" ... once we've become acceptable and gotten into the groove of being a respected and dedicated part of the family ... there are still others, those whose actions and behaviors are the sort of which we might disapprove, those whom we might forget are connected to us as our sisters and brothers ... and God is ready to celebrate them too.

I'm teaching a course right now on MCC Polity (the structure and governance of our denomination – it's fascinating material, I assure you) ... and one of the sessions in the class is about the dynamics of oppression. The ways in which oppressed groups of people can themselves become oppressors either within their own groups or to other groups. For MCC, as a church founded in and reaching beyond the queer community, we need to be particularly aware of these dynamics ... for instance, we have to be aware of the ways in which our own search for validation and security can easily turn into an unhealthy sense of superiority over others. In other words, it's not so uncommon for people and groups of people to morph from younger brother into older brother ... from the person who experiences a "coming to one's own" and eventually is able to truly celebrate the unconditional love of a prodigal God for him/herself ... to the person turning up his/her nose at the raucous celebration of others who are a little less respectable or too queer for our tastes. We must remember that the love of God is always a prodigal gift ... it is never the sort of thing that any one of us can merit.

As a community who wants to become a stretching, connecting, celebrating people on a spiritual journey, we must remember that the journey is ongoing ... and that at any given moment there are those of us at different places on the journey. The good news is that God is here to celebrate each little step towards wholeness that any one of us makes ... no matter how tiny the step is or at what point on our journey it takes place ... and we are invited to join the celebration.

Jesus' doesn't tell us what happens at the end of this Parable of the Prodigal Father ... the question remains, will the older son dare to celebrate with his younger brother. I think Jesus leaves it that way because it is up to each one of us to finish the story. As we consider all that it will mean for us to be a celebrating people, the question remains: Dare we celebrate?

This particular sermon strikes at the very core of uniqueness in MCC worship. It begs the question of what MCCers ultimate asked themselves—*Dare we celebrate?* It uses as a departure the well known biblical story of the prodigal son to describe a

translational stance from a traditional hegemony to a pertinent corporate perspective rooted in both a LGBT relevance and a *gender-religious* responsibility. It provides a structural plane providing evidence for a newfound interpretation and a priority for the MCC religious stance on a shared experience of biblical primacy. It further uses this biblical primacy to establish normalcy by arguing that the MCC journey is one in concert with biblical perspective although the politics and priorities of LGBTQ communities are unique requiring an alteration of how these perspectives affect the lives of its membership.

The descriptions of ritual idioms found at MCC NOVA have been offered as an introduction to the subject of the thesis. They have been chosen to anticipate a conversation of how communities of disparate individuals, who come together, construct an ever-changing and a seemingly unsown fabric of community life. Each example, within their own process of acknowledgement and self-actualization reflects what it means to be *in community*. The task of creating this community is directly related to the diversity which makes it up. In essence, the paradoxical environment found at MCC NOVA is formed as an openness to the “other” of newfound interpretation, and through this, MCCers are in perpetual social flux, constantly redesigning themselves through the re-interpretation of purpose as a community and its role in the assimilation of members to its mission. While one could agree that this is paradigm is evidenced in many mainstream church environments, here the focus is on the unique qualities of MCC NOVA ritual behaviors as they express a particular association between religious tendencies and gender relative questions operative in the community.

In each of our examples meaning is embedded in the process of assigning personal experiences to *gender-religious* priorities. Negotiation and tolerance is one way where the need and desire to belong to the social group supersedes any inconsistencies that may be present between community behaviors and personal ideologies. This was disclosed most specifically in the first interview. Transversely, shared belief is also a binding factor as seen in the interview with InCluesion who through shared discoveries about the outcomes of performance describe transformations inherent in personal development while performing. Such beliefs are less grounded in ideologies about religion or shared gender constructs but rather are rooted in the processes by which freedom is afforded and liberty is achieved. On the religious front, interpretation of the Christian script, either by the reinforcement of its meaning and/or structures or by the abandoning of the root ritual aesthetics of the Judeo-Christian hierarchy, provide for an opportunity to express corporate belief from a personal standpoint. This standpoint becomes that which is shared rather than a simple response to a predisposed belief system. In preaching or in the stylization of rituals in *Sacred Places*, personal (and corporate) awareness becomes the impetus for communal meaning, grounded in a gender priority and a religious assignment of group priorities.

Social discourse is based in the priorities that evolve out of human experience either predisposed or revealed through participation in the group. This constant process where *experience informs experience* allows the community of MCC NOVA to reinvent (or best stated, *establish*) a corpus of religious knowledge based on the *gender-religious* relationship. Though at times this self-awareness is related to sexual self-revelation and

the politics of LGBTQ lifestyle, by default it provides commentary on the impact of sexuality on the overall gendered condition as being only one of many factors for consideration in the conversion process.

### **Discourse in Socialization: Self-Concept, Conversion, and Motivation**

#### **Conversion (change) as a hallmark process within self becoming and the construction of self concept**

The process of conversion stands as a hallmark for constructing a corporate self-concept in LGBTQ communities. The process presumes a variety of gender interpretations and ever-shifting social surroundings which contribute to a unique social situation. Through its religious interpretations, maintaining a LGBTQ outlook challenges MCC NOVA with internal and social dialogues supporting and/or challenging LGBTQ lifestyle and priorities. At times, self-awareness is based in specific gender awarenesses discovered by introspection, while at other times it is a matter of establishing the relationship between perceived personhood and one's social situation in ritual performance. The dialogue between these two realms is the arena for the process of self-becoming in light of a constantly negotiated interpretation of the Christian *ethos*.

The task of describing LGBTQ performance aesthetics and their meaning and function is problematic. The search for normative modes of LGBTQ expression is an inquiry into a dialogue rather than an exercise in classifying aesthetics. This is largely due to the complexity of the larger questions associated with a religious- and gender-rich society in dynamic tension. Defining *how* members perform music, interpret scripture, or even *what* religious ideologies they share is a futile endeavor. By attempting to do so, we may find ourselves searching for tendencies which from an outsider's perspective, only



revealing stereotypical and preconceived attributes of LGBTQ behaviors the way researchers have chosen to recognize them in their most overt manifestations. Even contemporary researchers often mistake the surface value of performance to be a total and defining expression of the innate beliefs of people with little regard for a subtext beset with dichotomies of meaning. Searching stands as an indelible reality here as communities make “attempts” at defining their own complexity. An LGBTQ *gender-religiosity* is one which presumes an inherent relationship between developmental experiences and newfound awarenesses either discovered or performed in *process*. Categorizing performance aesthetics stands in the way of evaluating the *why* of gender performances by attempting to explain *how*.

LGBTQ social situations, especially in the context of religion, present an opportunity to focus on the often found discontinuity between authenticity and creativity as performed within the aesthetics of LGBTQ tendencies. While both operate concomitantly, the dialogue between religiosity and social authenticity depicts the expressions of toleration, alteration, and reinvention found therein. As we shall see, one cannot expect that behaviors and performances can simply carry the entire message of self-description in ritual, though in context, these performances contain a full spectrum of embedded meanings. Here lies the dilemma. The corporate context, the interplay of ever-changing and newly revealed realities as encountered by participants, each in various stages of exploration and discovery, makes for an intricate environment of corporate meaning. In this complex state of “shifting and churning” meaning-latent experiences, made up of altered states of religious expectations and personal politics, performance

finds its most potent commentary on the authentication of identity within LGBTQ religiosity.

For the MCC NOVA community, the contribution of LGBTQ life events varies in performing a deeply embedded and seemingly apparent religious tendency. Performances which span a spectrum from the religious mainstream to religious margins serve as concomitant contributors to a unique sense of LGBTQ religious expression. This is one which empowers and creates ritual sensibilities based in both mainstream aesthetics (those brought to MCC *via* individual's personal and corporate histories) and within newly formed events of meaning. In short, the blendability of old and new forms, traditional and radical interpretations, and familiar and newly introduced ritual acts, all contribute to the definition of a unique palette of religiosity which has as its core a construction of queer interpretation.

Defining authenticity in LGBTQ performance presents a quagmire of descriptions when one compares gendered performance acts and gender identity. In essence, identity is based on a complex of components that arguably may be the product of internal (specifically LGBTQ) as well as external (mainstream) factors. Identity is constructed by both internal and external means that inform behavior. It is a dialectic which may not always be noticeable in behaviors themselves which at any given time may not yet have taken on aesthetics with interior justifications. In developing a self identity, any factor may only be significant when one considers the *way* in which it interacts with others thus providing meaning for the individual who may more-or-less define their own personhood through internal or external realms. Practically speaking, one's core construct of

genderedness, and in this case, contextually homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, queer, etc. may be more so the result of a combination of factors which create an interplay of important facets of one's life; rather than a predominance of factors typically thought to be beyond one's control, *albeit* being ontologically LGBTQ or being Christian.

### **Identity Negotiation**

John Hart and Diane Richardson (1981) provide a structural model to understand the complexity of the interplay of this inward and outward dialogue which contributes to an identity negotiation. They recognize that life factors play an integral and collective part in establishing one's individuality, self-concept, and ultimate core construct. This interactive process between internal and external realms of discovery stems from the experience of constitutional factors which contribute at least initially to an awareness of one's individuality and eventually, through ascribed meanings, leading one to a concept of self. These meanings may be representative of known attributes about one's biology, the ways in which knowledge about them has been provided from internal feelings and emotions, and/or the consequences of personal politics.

This ongoing dialogic interchange between experience/meaning/experience/etc. affects greatly how one interprets the world and how an individual forms actions. One may find themselves behaving in certain ways because of the need to ascribe to a certain biological tendency or because of the need to explore untapped expressions. These in turn influence one's world view. Of course, this interplay is greatly influenced by the way one interprets him/herself in light of these experiences and the meanings which he/she

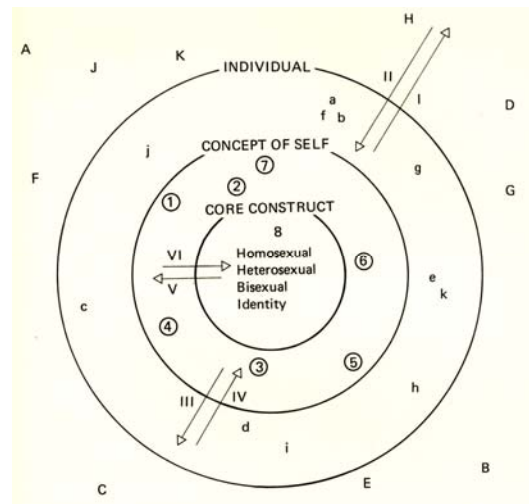
ascribes to them and this combination of factors gives way to a reinterpretation of the constructs which he/she holds and ultimately their relationship to each other.

Behavior is rooted in indelibility though it is affected by the consequences of behaving in a particular way socially. In turn, though internally grounded, the meaning one ascribes to behavior is a combination of both internal and external negotiations of appropriateness. Therefore, outside influences do not solely shape a person's core construct, but rather, the interpretation of one's core identity is ultimately based in the interplay between individual and social realities. In light of sexual orientation, one of many self constructs, an individual may affect the relationship between that and other self constructs. This interplay of self-construction in light of others will influence the way they construe their own sexual orientation. In the end, the sexual self, as performed through expressions of being gendered, is simply a description of the external forum after one has truly asserted their own internal discourse in dialogue with others. At times these discourses have similar agendas leading one to an association with their surroundings at times supporting inner tendencies and at other times affords the individual revelations about how different they really are from their world; thus providing for a self construct which is the negotiation between inner and outer influences .

The maintenance of a self construct as homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, etc. will be influenced by the individual's experience of this world (brought on by internal awareness and its relation to the external world), the way in which meaning of such experiences affect the individual's self constructs (authentication), and also the relationship of sexual identity to the other constructs the individual has of her or himself

(attributes of personhood not necessarily rooted in sexuality). Hart and Richardson provide a structural schematic which recognizes that a variety of factors contribute to a core construct. In the figure below, these factors are denoted as different integers which when viewed in isolation can be recognized as stemming from divergent domains of experience though clearly contributing to an integrated core construct. (Hart and Richardson, 1981:87-90, Figure 3, p.81).

Figure 3. Hart and Richardson's Model of Core Construct (The interplay of divergent factors)



Gender marginalism (homosexual, bisexual, transgendered, etc.) can not simply be relegated to a set of ontological descriptors. If this were the case, the only factors relevant to a discussion of performance would be those beyond one's control of motivations. Nor can analysis of seemingly related behaviors serve to identify genderedness based on behavioral aesthetics viewed as being shared between others of similar sexual orientations. This sort of observation and analysis proves to be incomplete

for it shows little regard for external factors at play. Therefore, the dynamic process of assimilating social and personal experiences into a core construct is descriptive of a variety of factors which may not all support what one believes about the world, or embodies their core beliefs at any given time. One's self construct may be the result of synchronic and diachronic factors leading one to self evaluate in a constant process of negotiation. In the process of negotiating which experiences contribute to a core identity and the meanings assigned to them, Hart and Richardson propose that arriving at important interpretations of self will be gathered from many different sorts of events. These events may not be easily attributable to a core construct (being homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, etc.) but may be integral to the dynamic tension experienced by persons who through a variety of events enter into dialogue with new experiences and in turn reinterprets them through newfound interpretations of their world and their self concept (Hart and Richardson, 1981:91-92).

***Example: The Evening of Lights and "The Journey with The Three Wise Persons"***

An example of the tension between the self concept and the behaviors which make up the dialogue between internal and external factors was seen in MCC NOVA's 4<sup>th</sup> annual Evening of Lights in December of 2004. This event is an opportunity for MCCers, outside of the regular worship events, to celebrate the Advent/Christmas season with a concert drawing from a variety of musical and dramatic sources. It highlights *personas* and musics not usually found in rituals. It involves all the musical ensembles of the church and is a performance which from year to year takes on a variety of styles. The 2004 event is of particular interest where members of the community strove to make a

concerted effort to identify with the Epiphany story through a drama which depicted the role of the wise men (“persons”) in light of queer perspective. The drama occurred amidst many musical selections from sacred origins, contemporary music, and seasonal carols (Figure 4, on page 84).

Figure 4. Excerpts from the Evening of Light's Program.

- ◆ Congregational Song: Lift Up Your Heads, O Mighty Gates

**PLEASE STAND**

Lift up your heads, O mighty gates behold the glorious Ruler waits!  
The Sovereign One is drawing near; the Savior of the world is here.

Fling wide the portals of your heart; make it a temple, set apart  
From earthly use for heaven's employ, adorned with prayer and love and joy.

Redeemer, come! I open wide my heart to you; here, Christ abide!  
Let me your inner presence feel; your grace and love in me reveal.

So come, my Sovereign; enter in! Let new and nobler life begin;  
Your Holy Spirit guide us on, until the glorious crown be won.

Tune: TRURO L.M., Thomas Williams' Psalmody Evangelica, 1789

- ◆ Jesu, Joy of Our Desiring, by J.S. Bach  
[redacted], violin; [redacted], guitar;  
[redacted], cello.

- ◆ Congregational Song: Soon and Very Soon, by Andre Crouch

**PLEASE STAND**

Soon and very soon, we are goin' to be renewed. (repeat 3X)  
Hallelujah, Hallelujah, we're goin' to be renewed.

No more cryin' there, we are goin' to be renewed. (repeat 3X)  
Hallelujah, Hallelujah, we're goin' to be renewed.

No more dyin' there, we are goin' to be renewed. (repeat 3X)  
Hallelujah, Hallelujah, we're goin' to be renewed.

*verse 1*

@1976, Bud John Songs, Inc./Crouch Music/ASCAP, distributed by GIA Publications, Inc.  
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- ◆ Child of Light, by [redacted]

- ◆ DRAMA: Journey with the Three Wise Men, SCENE 2

- ◆ Emmanuel, composer unknown



Intermission



- ◆ Ding Dong, Merrily on High, arr. by David Haas

- ◆ Congregational Song: Go Tell it on the Mountain,

African-American Spiritual

**PLEASE STAND**

Refrain: Go tell it on the Mountain, over the hill and everywhere.  
Go tell it on the Mountain, that Jesus Christ is Born!

While shepherd kept their watching o'er silent flocks by night,  
Behold throughout the heavens there shone a holy light. (to refrain)

The shepherds feared and trembled when lo! Above the earth  
Rang out the angel chorus that hailed our Savior's birth!  
(to refrain)

Down in a lowly manger the humble Christ was born,  
And God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn.  
(to refrain)



Through the tongue-and-cheek depiction of a *queer* interpretation of the well known Epiphany story, the drama provides for a glimpse into two important facets of the above stated theories—the statement of self concept and the multiplicity of behavioral factors which inform it. I should begin with a reflection on the event for background.

*As was usually the case, the weeks proceeding the EOL (Evening of Lights) were filled with energy. Musicians were sharpening up their individual pieces, the program was being set, performers scurried to schedule time in the sanctuary, and as was the case in the last three EOLs of years past, the drama was still being rehearsed. It was Sunday morning, and amidst the usual activity of getting Sunday worship off the ground I noticed the pastor and director of the drama in the fellowship room in an intense dialogue. The mood seemed dark as the pastor tried to convey to the director, what seemed from a distance to be a complicated and difficult explanation. As is usually the case, conversations between individual church members and the pastor were understood by all to be of private and potentially grave matter. With this, it was rare that anyone would intrude.*

*However, with a simple glance the pastor gave me the impression that something was afoot that might be of interest to me. As I questioned, “everything ok?” she reported that “yes, everything was ok..just some drama”. “Anything I can do?” I replied. And she invited me to discuss it further at a later time.*

*In reflecting on the conversation with the director of drama, she told me about how she needed to explain to the forlorned author why someone who was approached to be a part of the drama flatly refused, based on the fact that the role he/she (unknown) was asked to perform highlighted certain stereotypes about LBGTQ persons which they did not agree with. The person approached stated that their involvement would not rightfully depict what they thought church should be promoting, namely the overt and flamboyant depiction of a gay/lesbian person. In the end, the pastor’s attempts to describe why this response was one that might sometimes be expected, as the very young director strained to understand basing his interpretation of the situation as “out of the ordinary” and “unexpected”. In her estimation, this was “drama about the drama”. At the Evening of Lights that December, the drama was performed and the church member approached about the role did not attend, reportedly as he/she initially threatened (Fieldnotes).<sup>12</sup>*

Below is the short drama that was performed that night.

### **Journey with the Three Wise Persons – The Real Christmas Story**

#### **First Scene:**

**NARRATOR:** The Three Wise Persons came across several twists and turns throughout their journey to visit baby Jesus on that wonderful first Christmas night. And just as many of you and I have experienced during trips and vacations, these turns and twists can be quite challenging to say the least. You never know

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<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that this interchange was not one where I was gained true access to the persons involved. It came to me third hand through the pastor. This situation is an example of some of the sensitivities which have peppered the research, requiring a certain amount of nondisclosure about the participants.

where the next turn or twist will end up. Like taking that wrong road, even though your confident partner told you to take the right one. Or like not listening to the great co-pilot and navigator in the back seat. And we can't forget the wonderful joy that we have all received from trying to please everyone with the temperature in the car. Yeah, these are just a few minor set-backs that you and I have gone through and experience in these days and these times. But was it really that different back then? Of course, you didn't have an entire family traveling on a donkey or a camel, nor would the heat from the desert be a huge controllable temperature problem. But I'm sure that these guys had their own twists and turns, and I can almost imagine that they would have happened something like this:

**NARRATOR:** The Three Wise Persons are receiving the message of the birth of the new king. They are instructed to follow the brightest star, which will take them to the place where this miracle will happen.

**NARRATOR:** Of course the Three Wise Persons grab the bare necessities:  
The Wise Persons start running around grabbing items and putting them in bags. **GAY PRODUCTS:** Hair Products, Gay Sweaters and Clothing, and shoes (lots of shoes).

**NARRATOR:** And then like any GREAT Wise Person, they decided their travel plans:

**WISEPerson 2** (takes a scroll map to roll out (long scroll)..We should go this way!

**WISEPerson 3:** No, I really think that we should go this way..

**WISEPerson 1:** Guys?

**WISEPerson 2:** No, if we go that way, then we will be way out of the way.

**WISEPerson 1:** Guys?

**WISEPerson 3:** We will not! This will lead us right towards....

**WISEPerson 1:** Guys!.. We should go this way? That way? The wrong way the right way? And it will lead us towards.... Towards what? We were told to follow the brightest star, not to find an IKEA or a HOME DEPOT. Gees

**BOTH – WISEPerson's 2 and 3:** (mumbling under their voice) he's got a point, I didn't think about that

**NARRATOR:** So, the three amigos set off into the sunset. Wait, I think that I grabbed the wrong script. Ah, here we go. So, the three wise persons started their journey into the dark night, being lead by a beautiful bright star, shining brighter than any gay guy wearing new face products. This would be a journey, which unknown to these Three Wise Persons, would become a part of history to be remembered forever.

## ***SONGS/MUSIC***

### **Scene TWO**

**NARRATOR:** Set forth on their journey of following the brightest star. Did anyone ever think? How did these guys follow this star during the day time? Other than the sun, can you see stars during the daytime? Well, I don't think that these guys thought about that either, because now they find themselves stopping and asking for direction during the day. But could you even imagine how to ask for direction to a place that you didn't even know yourself. Well, imagine the how the people they asked felt. I recall the first place that they stopped. These four ladies were so helpful, and kind, especially Blanc.

### **Directions from -The Golden Girls**

(Knocking on the door)

**Blanc:** (A southern yell across the room) Just one minute, I'll be right there!

Well, to what honor does a beautiful sunflower like me, deserve a visit from three such charming and handsome men? Well, at least she looks like a man!

**WISEPERSON 1:** Pardon our interruption to your day, however, we have lost our way.

**Blanc:** Well, it's not often that three men lose their way all at one time.

**Dorothy:** Blanc, who are your friends.. Are you trying the mail order husband again?

**Rose:** We once tried to mail a chicken from St. Olaf, but before we knew it the poor chicken was gasping for air, it seems that Johnny Johnson, who was the brother of Sherry Johnson, who married Thomas Terry, so now she is Sherry Terry.

**Dorothy:** Rose! Would you please get to the point, if you even have one?

**Rose:** Well, all that I was going to say was that everything would have gone fine with the mail, if Johnny would not have placed stamps over the air holes of that poor little chicken.

**Sofia:** Here they are out looking for Bin Laden, when the whole time he and his brothers are hidden out in Blanc's bedroom..

**Dorothy:** Maaaa!

(The wisepersons start walking away)

**Blanc:** Yoo-hoo, where are yaw going? I thought that you needed directions. Shoot! I guess my night is turning out to be more like your nights Dorothy. (Takes a deep breath) How do you manage?

### *SONGS/MUSIC*

#### **Scene THREE**

**NARRATOR:** Another long night of travel, the three wise persons are tired and still questioning the direction of their travel. They find themselves asking questions like: Where will this journey lead us? What king is this that has been spoken of? How will I get these dirt stains out of my clothes? I wonder if they make these gowns in Plaid. What is this sun doing to my delicate skin? Oh, where is the nearest Outback Steak House? Suddenly, the three exhausted wise people strolled upon a fabulous little cottage. The cottage was decorated in the ancient times setting, it had kind of a Roman look going on. The three wise people crossed the wooden bridge, which was directly over a large gold fish pond, surrounded with palmettos and water lilies, which were evenly placed between rocks, which made patterns of sea shells. They continued to the door, which was painted in earth-tone colors, with a hint of yellow added to embrace the sunlight as it would rise above the horizon. The wise guy.. Woops did I say that.. One of the wise persons knocked on the door.... And a screech came from inside....

(The wise persons enter to the stage)

#### **Directions from -The Fab 5**

**Carson** - I hope that this is my date..... Kean? Does this shirt go with these pants?

**Kyan** - Carson, you are the fashion guy. I can only help you with your hair. (Looks at Carson's hair, touches it, crosses his arms and says) And then again maybe I can't????

**Jai** -Would you just answer the door.....? (Opens the door) HELLO????

**Thom** -Oh, we have guest. Please come in! (Points toward the furniture and art work) These are Our imported chairs, shipped from the one pier.. far, far away. And this lovely art design, was selected by the Roman artist, Sir open chaps. He was a free pants artist..

**Ted** -More like a member of the Eagle Club... Tea time!

**Carson** -So, you guys are not from around here huh?

**Kyan** -You know you should try this lotion, it has SPF 15, which will protect you skin from the sun..

**Jai** -Now, I hope that you are talking with each other; communication is the key to happiness.

**Thom** -Huh, Not always, honey.. Did I show you our dishware that matches the cloth napkins?

**Ted** -Hey, where are you guys going, I just put a leg of lamb in the oven, sautéed with olive oil and onion bits for flavor, a touch of white wine.

**Carson**- Well, if you ever need some camel grooming tips, just let me know.....

**All together...** (as they are waving and blowing kisses) **BYE!** (With Wine Glasses in there hands) Another flawless performance, **CHEERS!** (Cling wine glasses)

### **SONGS/MUSIC**

#### **Scene FOUR**

**NARRATOR:** Though their journey seems to never end. They can only bare the hot days, cold nights, and the many, many, many adventures. The three lead forward with hopes, dreams, and the thoughts of all of the yard work to catch-up on as they return. Seeking the unknown, seems to be the drive that continues to give them the added strength and desire to press forward on this rugged journey. Kind of like the excitement of meeting that new guy or girl for the first time. It's amazing how many times a gay guy will look in a mirror, and how many different colored plaid shirts a lesbian will try on before finally being ready for the date. Or should I say, "we are just meeting as friends", yeah, right! But you all know that excitement, until you meet the person and then they remind you of your EX, even the way that they hold their fork. Where were we, oh, yeah, the day is hot and the three wise persons are seeking food and water. Just then they noticed apple trees. Okay, so no-one told them about the forbidden fruit. They approached the trees quenching the taste of the juicy fruit.

#### **Directions from - The Wizard of Oz**

(The Three Wise persons enter to stage, Dorothy meets them on stage, holding a stuffed animal dog.)

**Dorothy**– Hello, you seem to be lost too. My dog Toto and I have been walking for days. We are on our way to visit the great wizard of Oz.

**WISEPerson 1**– We were told to follow the brightest star in the sky.

**Dorothy**– Oh, my! The brightest star, Look! That bright star seems to be coming right towards us. Well, I guess that your trip is almost over, huh?

**Glen The Good Witch**–(Big Guy, enters wearing a tutu over jeans, and carrying a scepter) Yeah, Yeah, stop with all the drama, It's like you haven't ever seen good witch before.

**Dorothy** –A good Witch! Oh my, I pictured you to be a bit different.

**Glen The Good Witch** –Yeah, my sister Glenda normally does this stuff, but her bubble popped while she was in flight, and now she's out on FMLA leave. So, she asked me to cover for her. My name is Glen, the good witch from the Northeast. Go! Red Socks, right!

**Dorothy** –Oh well, Mr. Glen.

**Glen The Good Witch** –Na, Just call me Glen, that's my dad's name. (Glen starts messing with the tutu) This thing is pretty darn itchy.

**Dorothy** –Well, as a good witch, you must have great powers to help these three find their way, and to help Toto and I get home to Ant-e-Em.

**Glen The Good Witch** –What? Powers? Who do you think I am some freaking super hero or something? Help you get home.. I suggest you get those pretty red slippers stepping little girl. Who do I look like Greyhound?

**Dorothy** –Well, Mr. Glen or Glen. You are not a very good witch at all. Why, someone should really drop a house on you! You know, you guys remind me of these three guys that I met before. Let's go this way!

*(Follow the yellow brick road starts playing, as the three skip off stage)*

**NARRATOR:** So, their quest continued for several days. However, it was an ordinary day quite like this day, on which the three wise persons found themselves confronted with the most powerful and rewarding adventure yet. The light from the star did lead them to a miracle; however, it was the miracle itself that provided the light. It was their faith and trust which brought them so far on that journey; however, it was their belief and their love that helped them continue. Seeing the newborn Christ child was truly a miracle in itself, but being loved by, as well as, loving the living Christ is a blessing that is ours as well.. On that day long ago, Jesus was born and the world received a gift. And for Christmas this year, we too are given a

gift, to be unwrapped and shared with all others, a gift to be placed as a conversation piece in everyone's home, a gift that never needs to be exchanged, a gift inside your heart, and a gift inside your soul, a gift that will keep on giving forevermore! I hope that you will open your heart up to this gift and allow Emmanuel, God with US, to be born once again on this day in your heart and in your soul. And may you also find that with faith, trust, belief, and love, no matter how far your journey or how many twists and turns you encounter, the light of God can also lead you to a miracle. May God bless you forevermore. Merry Christmas.

With regards to the above stated theories, one may draw some conclusions about the problem of associating performance with the network of factors contributing to a dialogic between human self concepts and the value placed on rituals and performance. First, we may highlight the tension described in the fieldnotes which illustrates a disparity in the interpretation of appropriateness and inappropriateness as expressed by different individuals involved in the short play. All value arguments aside, the interpretations of both the director and the intended player of one of the roles, shows how these interpretations differ greatly within the whole of MCC NOVA culture. Following the Hart and Richardson model, the performance of the drama seemed as an opportunity to view how the core constructs of two individual are subject to the negotiation of the aesthetics apparent in the shared performance experience.

The drama provides a place where a multitude of factors come together to inform how one describes themselves. For the uninterested actor it tests symbols of identity to the point of negation, serving as an antithesis to the individual's perception as his/her own personal makeup and the factors which inform it. For the director, the experiences which led to his questioning and reflection on his own interpretations of appropriateness, served as one more factor to be considered in his own perceptions and *how* individualism plays a part in a corporate consensus. Ultimately, it is questionable if the event actually established a performance arena where the perceptions of all could be easily represented.

But this is not in question. In all, the example serves to further illustrate the dynamic tension between how individuals understand themselves in light of corporate aesthetics, which when performed are, as Hart and Richardson shows, only part of the array of factors contributing to a core identity.

Interpretation of acceptable behaviors as expressed by the first interview with JO & JM may be at times in concert with, and at other times in opposition with community ritual behaviors. Shared affections between same sex partners, informality in attire, and excessive drumming are only marginally relative to their overall interpretation of other more gender sensitive issues like God-language. The former and the latter are only alien to each other as performance aesthetics because of a dissociation each has for the individuals who interpret their own self construct through the collective interpretation of the set of behaviors.

Experimentation may not always represent an interest in abolishing hegemonic elements, as in the example of *Sacred Places*. In this case, it may serve only as an addition to a generally lacking religious script experienced in other rituals. Ritual settings stemming from a traditional Christian *ordo* and others which expand sacredness both contribute to the dialogue between the one's world view and their own self construct. Both assist in an expansion of humanness rather than describing an appropriate or inappropriate set of aesthetics. Musical exploration may have little to do with the appropriateness of styles but rather it may provide for types of behavioral acts that more greatly enhance self-awareness. This is typified in the explanations of *InClusion* on how performance elements affect personal growth. These types of performance contribute to

the dialogic process of self discovery not because it describes any sort of specific sexual quality but rather because it allows for exploration to occur in ways not typically experienced otherwise. In essence, a holistic human development rests with a description of genderedness rather than with one that is preoccupied with sexual politics.

Hart and Richardson's model allows first for a repositioning of sexual orientation and its affects on the construction of identity by presuming that many factors, even seemingly non-"gender related" ones, may play a part in and be as influential as those more often associated with LGBTQ lifestyle. Second, since the dialogue affects itself through the association of experience and meaning, different factors may be more-or-less instrumental for different individuals, thus creating many valid corporate experiences each authentically "gender-assigning". The assignment may not always be the same among different participants. Third, the model emphasizes changeability as a hallmark of human genderedness. On this note, we might ask if the experience of "The Three Wise Persons" changed perceptions. Arguably, at least certain perceptions would have been altered from its public performance. Fourth, though typically expressed as a passive role in the process of self-awareness, causation focuses on the active role of the individual to create a spectrum of acceptability where meaning is described through its performative properties (Hart and Richardson, 1981: 92).

### **Socialization**

Understanding the interplay of the internal and external dialogues contributing to the construction of identity, and recognizing the reflexive quality of its outcome greatly informs the notion of socialization. Socialization and its affects on the development of

human corporate identity is greatly dependent on how one interprets identity construction. In essence, identity negotiation is a process which occurs within a realm of socialization, providing an observable arena for detecting internal dialogues even though its value may not be totally understood based on human behavior alone.

Socialization has had two historical meanings in the literature. The most accepted is a structural-functional approach that focuses on the individual's adaptation and conformity to societal norms, ethical consciousnesses, and normative performative behaviors. In this recognition of the socialization process, unlike the described concept of identity negotiation, the individual's dialogue with his/her ability to shape new world interpretations is shadowed by a process of contribution with regards to already established societal norms. For our purposes, this interpretation pales in comparison to an approach which recognizes that to adapt, the social scheme must be one that is clearly identifiable. Some of our examples have already shown that this is not always the case.

Viktor Gecas (1981) suggests that in a second historical meaning of socialization, identity negotiation plays a much more important part in the process of establishing one's place in a society while simultaneously contributing to the make up of the social system (Gecas, 1981: 165-166). In this approach it seems that analysis of performance aesthetics will supply greater understanding into *how* participation fosters change. Furthermore, the meaning of rituals will carry with them both the corporate and individual agendas of conversion as expressed through a process of assimilating self-awareness in the context of social authentication.



This interpretation of socialization presumes foremost an interactive mechanism in the process of developing the self-concept, negotiating identity, and ultimately promoting attitudes which contribute to a dynamic social system based in group-development. Stemming primarily from early symbolic interactionists (See the works of Mead, Cooley, James, and Thomas), socialization is viewed as a continuous negotiation interaction which creates and recreates societal norms allowing for a dynamic tension between the development of individual becoming and an ever-changing social forum. Contrary to the structural functional approach previously stated, individuals play an active part through their role as participants in the construction of an identifiable self/social *milieu* within different situations. The social situation is the result of individual revelations and interactions and not simply a place where one strives to understand the appropriate rules. Emphasis is placed on role-taking as a mechanism of self-knowledge and knowledge of others which enables social interaction to take place. Most importantly, socialization in this tradition places emphasis on the “entire enterprise” of self-awareness, the negotiation of identity interaction with others, and the reality of societal dynamism (Gecas, 1981: 166).

Gecas proposes that a major consideration when attempting to understand socialization is a concerted questioning of *why* individuals provide a variety of reflections to shared social norms. Firstly, he recognizes that identities, both those considered individualized and those found within a group, make up the identification of who one is and who others are and how that affects the individual’s total self-concept. In this case, identification *of* identities remains within this dynamic realm and contributes to defining

the reflexive nature of actors within a group. In the EOL drama, the dramatic depiction of persons and situations thought by some to be accurate and extensive reflections of LBGTQ *personas*, is in fact not shared by all. They may even be interpreted as antithetical, describing what some may feel is in direct opposition to what a self-concept *should* be.

Secondly, he recognizes that though the dialogue which occurs between persons is relevant to the construction of a corporate meaning, the social group possesses as a corporate body social norms, appropriate performances, ethics, beliefs, etc. which describe the process of identification *with* identities which all actors strive to embody to an extent (Gecas, 1981: 166). This consideration draws our attention to the fact that personal insights and perceptions are not in themselves independent from corporate beliefs. If this were the case, the drama would not have been performed publicly as an extension of MCC NOVA corporate polity, but rather its appropriateness (or inappropriateness) would have been subject to consensus.

Ritual actors may not have as their most potent expressions of authentication “proper” performance styles. Their actions may simply embody an all important approach which supersedes performance aesthetics of correctness. Their attitudes (inclusion and invitation), their willingness to break free from the mainstream (enlivening and interpreting), and their ability to communicate their own internal dialogue (embodying change) may be more aesthetically important than symbolic interpretations of particular performances themselves. Though this approach allows for the individual dynamic to assume a special place in the spectrum of socialization, the importance of the social

forum with its preconceived norms, attitudes, and right behaviors cannot be understated. This dynamic affects the processes which contribute to self-identity negotiation, and the construct of the group is constantly in concert with the processes which make up the construction of individuals' self-concept by the insertion of an appropriate approach to performance.

Recognizing that contexts of socialization are integral to the overall mechanism of assimilation compels one to question more deeply *how* and *where* socialization takes its cue in the development of individuals. In fact, no social setting is in isolation of the myriad of social contexts which have previously shaped individuals. "Just as individuals may become differently socialized because of differences in past experiences, motivations and capacities, so may they become differently socialized because of differences in the structure of the social settings in which they interact" (Wheeler, 1966:53). In the dimensions of these varying socialization contexts the mechanisms of the socialization process may be understood.

Since for the most part, this research focuses on mechanisms within new social systems (i.e. MCC NOVA) rather than on developmentally relevant social systems (traditional developmental groups, mainstream churches), it is only worth mentioning briefly the distinction Stanton Wheeler makes between two relevant camps of social contexts. The first, a "developmental socialization system", refers to those social systems where one is introduced to large-scale normativity associated with a larger world view. These would include the nuclear family, schooling, child peer interaction, occupational norms, etc. "Much of the socialization that takes place in our society occurs in the context

of social institutions or organizations, such as family, school, prison, and work setting. The explicit goal or mandate of many of these organizations is to change people” (Wheeler, 1966:53). In a second context, “re-socialization systems” (i.e. MCC NOVA), we find that three major thrusts within socialization are processes of i) identifying specific identities which may in part be counter to developmental social systems and ii) may be intentionally and radically different to the goals of other mainstream systems and/or iii) maintain a differing power orientation found in developmental systems.

In this re-socialization process, the claiming of specific identities may include a (re)configuration of social states, behavioral expectations, rights, and responsibilities which, by virtue of their recontextualized position, serve to reorient the individual within social environment. This may include the empowerment or freedom to perform. It may highlight the approach to performance and may also include a marked difference in one’s comportment having little to do with stylistic or musical changes. This may affect or be affected by a second re-socialization process which focuses on the redistribution of familial institutional roles. In this case, it is usually in reference to correcting deficiencies which may have occurred in earlier socialization.<sup>13</sup> Here musical style and performance quality may be more critical factors. Being allowed to change, create, or envision a new style of performance may prove to communicate the contribution one makes to the perceptions of the group. In both cases, the socialization process can reference either a bureaucratic or loose interpretation of radical socialization. For our purposes the tendency

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<sup>13</sup> Wheeler’s research here is predominantly the result of work involved in re-socializing deviants (i.e. prisons), though Gecas believes that this category can be applied to religious and political organizations with reference to missionary functions, to military organizations training recruits, and various rehabilitation groups.

will be to presume reorganization based on a tendency of liberation, but this does not rule out the possibility of newly created static hegemonies that might be at play which simply provide for a newly invented bureaucracy.

In light of considering the re-socialization of specific identities, Ralph Turner has proposed a process of salient convergence between individuals and roles within a social setting. He surmises that 1) individuals converge to roles which identify them with significant others thus working to bond individuals with other individuals within the social *milieu*. Here one might wonder if the connection with social characters like those presented in the EOL drama display a performance of connectivity even in their fictitiousness. The performances of *personas* in Blanc, Carlson, or those from the Wizard of Oz may be opportunities of inclusion and expressiveness complimenting a certain interiority. 2) The role/person relationship merges selectively so as to maximize autonomy and positive self evaluation. Choosing to participate in certain roles as “actors” either in the case of the EOL drama or even in certain performance roles in *InCluesion* is an act of deciding what is a positive (or negative) expression of personhood. In fact, the roles in which one is invited to participate in may support or negate a positive self evaluation. 3) Persons are more likely to merge with those roles in which investment has been the greatest (Turner, 1978: 13). In this latter statement, the choice which accompanies performance is one which is an extension of personal investments into what one has already defined (or partially defined) as a self-concept. Ultimately, the decision to perform or not to perform, as well as within what capacity, is ultimately connected to both the performance and the individual performing.

Performance techniques which afford individuals greater access to communal hegemonies like a certain comportment, license, and/or general sense of accomplishment would describe a willingness to gravitate towards these public roles. Gecas surmises that the redistribution of power is often a main mechanism in the toppling of previously learned role systems where, for example, traditional relationships like student/teacher, doctor/patient, child/parent, etc. models are reorganized. Biblical and theological interpretations, for instance, stylized after LBGTQ tendencies become politically charged entities which contribute to the re-organization and empowerment of the group. This may instill ownership of corporate myths or may allow for the authorship of new community scripts. Reorganization of power may result in a) an intensive and affective climate, b) a newfound degree of self sufficiency or isolation, c) a reconceived notion of the socializee/cohort relationship, d) new modes of entry for new socializees, e) the role of physical characteristics as differentiating role systems, and f) contexts emerging as part of the person's perception of their contribution to the social setting (Gecas, 1981: 169). In any of these cases, individual public performances become an affecting act in the process of constructing a corporate self-concept.

Though extreme, the re-socialization processes of Gecas and Wheeler do not presume that *entre* into a social group whose core goals and norms activate a reorganization of developmental socialization, need be severe though intensity may prove to be normative. Rather, identity negotiation remains paramount in the process and is preserved as an indelibly dynamic *modus* throughout. This preserves the notion that within re-socializing systems, the interplay of the individual with his/her surroundings is

paramount to the “success” of the process which disregards any expectation that the individual’s role in socialization is static.

In the case where individuals overtly disavow their connection with past developmental systems, and for our purposes this may include both religious and gendered ones, Gecas offers a far more extreme description. Within “radical re-socialization contexts,” the goal for the individual is to disassociate with past developmental experiences often through the employment of mechanisms he terms as “brainwashing”. Though descriptive of more deviant social groups, it is important to note that within these social systems there is a breach within the dynamic individualistic “contract” described. Here, the socialization process under consideration breaks down. Outcomes of this context focus more on pivotal identities (ideal roles), strong positive or negative identities, symbolically charged language with value connotations, a death and rebirth equation, “seeing the light” (reparation/reconciliation), and confession (Gecas, 1981: 191-193).

Classification of aesthetics therefore, defies the very notion of the individual’s dynamism in the socialization process. Behaviors are relegated as correct (supporting corporate values) or incorrect (inappropriate in the common forum) if considered in light of their ability to describe one’s success in attaining the “master status”. Behavior is superseded by agency in the discussion of the individual’s dynamic involvement. Therefore, it is in acts which show a familiarity with the community’s core values as well as an ability to describe one’s process of self awareness where the consideration of aesthetics is most valuable.

For religious organizations, which Gecas includes in this category, radical re-socialization shows similar properties though admittedly on a more temperate scale. In this case, the processes and outcomes are more relevant to this research. Discontinuity with the past is based on a voluntary scale where individuals reserve the ability to disregard re-socialization to a degree sometimes opting for a physical disassociation with a previously associated group. There is a generally lessened need to alienate the past, though the past goals, ethics, symbols, roles, etc. may be clearly that which is in need of re-organization. There may also be a wide variety of presumptions which are unique to religious social dynamics which include a predisposed alienation, a dissatisfaction with one's own perception of self, a lack of identity, burdens of guilt, discontent which draws one to a new creation of religious self, or an identifiable self which can be rebuilt from the rubble of the old (Gecas, 1981: 192-193).

Thus far, I have discussed the processes associated with negotiating identity in light of the socialization process. I have described the dynamic nature of the individual in the context of re-socializing into new social systems. Some of the examples we have seen express either toleration and alteration of known hegemonies, or an ability to maintain a personal active agency in the construction of corporate religiosity, or even processes of reorganizing religious truths through means afforded within the MCC NOVA template of exploration. They attest to a dynamic of change (or the potential for change) with regards to the person and their process of socialization. In the next section we will consider this attribute of change in light of its application to conversion.



## **Conversion**

As we have seen above, the status of individuals in light of their own agency to participate in identity building activities is highly dependant on an internal individualized negotiation as well as certain dynamics involved in socialization. Looking closer at the role of individuals in light of conversion draws us to consider the mechanisms employed within the individual's state which affects change. In their study of conversion processes, Brock Kilbourne and James T. Richardson (1988) present paradigmatic conflicts which lead to differing types of conversion. Two major perspectives on this research exist.

In the first perspective, agency in the process of conversion is assigned to the convert who acts actively or passively in the process of his/her own shifting from one awareness to another. This redefines notions about conversion as neither one interpretation of belief nor another but rather the result of the dynamic tension between states of self-awareness. These awarenesses are the product of both internal and external factors as we have already seen. With regards to analysis of these mechanisms, subparadigmatic and differentiation types of conversion exist within the two larger paradigmatic conditions (the passive and the active agent).

In a second perspective, the authors suggest that a) there is an appreciation of the underlying metatheoretical assumptions and conceptual priorities of contemporary conversion research, b) an integrated social psychological understanding of diverse conversion experiences, and c) a tension and conflict between paradigmatic conditions which tend to reflect and reproduce a larger tension and conflict between "master status" and "new society" groups in contemporary American society (Kilbourne and Richardson,

1988:1). This perspective allows for an acceptance that regardless of the state of an individual's self-awareness, one may continue to thrive within a social context which may not immediately or readily describe all that an individual desires to become. On the other hand, it points to the reasoning for one to continue to identify with a group even though the group may be less and less likened to their own core beliefs. In essence, conversion is a long term investment in a series of core values which may or may not ever fully (though possibly in part) become part of the core construct of the individual.

Historical conversion assumptions have traditionally opted for the first of the two paradigms. The first perspective or "old paradigm" has been typified by the Paul/Saul conversion of the Christian Testament where there is a direct correlation between identity construct and conversion in that the former is dependant on the latter. This passivist paradigm preconceives a sudden and dramatic, irrational, or magical conversion, involving a powerful force sometimes in the form of a single event. There is a negotiation of the old and an affirmation of the new. It presumes one static lifestyle's transition to another static existence and affirms an "adolescent" predisposition on the converted. Ultimately, in this perspective *behavior follows belief* in the spectrum of change.

The second perspective or "new paradigm", more appropriate to our discussion, is one of active agency and can be interpreted as more self-directed. In this instance, stress is on volition, autonomy, and the search for meaning. There may be multiple conversions, resulting in more rational interpretations of experiences. It is more gradual and continual or "career" oriented. Negotiation occurs between the individual and the group. In essence, *belief follows behavior* (Kilbourne and Richardson 1988: 1-2).

Mechanisms of conversion are observed by interpretations in the “old paradigm”- what the convert does to him/herself. Transversely, and seemingly more pertinent, is the disposition of the researcher who in the “new paradigm” is cognizant that the process of conversion is one which occurs within two realms of analysis, either an intraindividual or an interindividual interpretation of function. On the intraindividual level, conversion manifests itself through personal constructs, predisposition, and internal states of being which may be the result of biological or psychological changes. On the interindividual level, group influences, social networks, social stress, cultural milieu, organizational setting, social role alienation, anomie, etc. are more overtly comparable to the process of conversion.

The intersection of analytic types and paradigmatic agency allows for a typology that Kilbourne and Richardson propose as a model for mapping possible types of conversion. Though structurally derived, the model provides for a closer dissection of the role of the individual and the mechanisms at play in the conversion process and allows for a consideration of conversion in light of seemingly incongruent social situations. (Table 3, below).

Table 3. Kilbourne and Richardson’s model of subject agency in conversion descriptive of four metatheoretical families.

		Agency	
		Active	Passive
Level of Analysis	Intra-Ind.	1 Humanistic	2 Psychological Determinism
	Inter-Ind.	3 Interactionism	4 Social-Environmental Determinism

		Agency	
		Active	Passive
Level of Analysis	Intra-Ind.	1 Intellectual or Self	2 Mystical Belief Change Affectional Psychopathologic
	Inter-Ind.	3 Experimental Social Drift	4 Revivalist Socialization Deprivation Coercive

### ***The active-intraindividual***

This humanistic model allows for self-conversion or intellectual conversion where the cognitive agency of the individual is paramount in the process of converting themselves. The stress is on election and self help and those factors based in events which are primarily phenomenological. Lofland and Skonovd describe this type of religious conversion as one where “in the search for truth, community, identity, salvation, etc., members can calmly and privately elect to ‘go for it’” (Lofland and Skonovd 1981:377). “Privatized religious experiences can, moreover, be a convenience for fast-religion, like the more familiar concept of fast-food, for people always on the go and with little time to call their own” (Kilbourne and Richardson 1988: 4). This approach is challenged in the examples of *Sacred Places* where religion is personalized and humanized with its tendencies toward personal reflection and experiences. Here, experience is compartmentalized outside of the MCC mainstream in both performative and logistic ways.

### ***The passive-intraindividual***

The passive intraindividual model emphasizes the satisfaction of the psychological determinism of the individual. Conversion is a mystical process that affects being and transformation with seeming little social agency. It presumes a belief change which actuates a conversive stance. Change is effectual in that the passive convert has strong interpersonal attachments based on emotional needs leading to stronger religious affiliations. As the authors describe, such individuals often have unmet needs, frustrations, distresses, and conflicts which seem to be driven by other

psychopathologies. Some of these tendencies can be seen in the interview with JO & JM who in order to satisfy overarching conflicts, find themselves tolerating and accepting the goals of MCC NOVA regardless of their agreement with particular performance aesthetics. This is a passive stance allowing for the unfolding of church beliefs to be neither affecting nor non-affecting amidst a general willingness to be part of the group.

*The active-interindividual*

In the interview with InCluesion, it became apparent that the overarching goal in *becoming* a member of the group is based in the ability to explore the possibilities of involvement and development on both personal and corporate levels. These revelations point to a self awareness based in the external dynamics of the group's growing exploration of new means and outcomes. This dynamic allows for change to occur on the level of experience emphasizing their performances as a contribution to a general goal of acceptability and access. Conversion for them is based in the ability to experience freely the process of belonging through the experience of self-awareness.

This type of conversion also called the *Experimental Social Drift Model* (See Lofland and Stark, 1965) is characterized by an active agency of openness and interactionism. The individual approaches social factors as means to retrieve social truths, and practices a stance of willingness to try things out, a desire to be shown the way, receptive to rituals, activities, relationship and ceremonies, and acting the part of the convert though internal shifting may have yet to occur. This "seeker" strives to search out change both internally and externally often through role-play, and the need to "pass" as a member of the group to which he/she strives to become part of.

### *The passive-interindividual*

The passive-interindividual model is a social drift conversion where the individual creatively attempts to work out identities and constructs covert roles. Conversion in this model is one which searches out knowing through powerful socio-psychological and environmental forces. This is played out by a revivalist stance which searches out emotionally charged groups where continuity in socialization occurs promoting a change in life situation. Establishing religious truths in the context of LGBTQ culture, as we have seen in an example of preaching, depends greatly on the process of re-enlivening and recreating in the context of power and role disbursement, ultimately contributing to the process of ideologic conversion.

Though highly functionalized, Kilbourne and Richardson's models offer a glimpse into a more specifically behavioral approach to conversion that presumes the individual's role in the process as well as the dialogue between individual and social situations. It also provides a departure point for bridging the gap between individual agency and corporate performance by allowing for a type of analysis that can provide for the variability of factors found in LGBTQ worship arenas. Furthermore, as has been supported by Roger Strauss (1976), conversion is not only an individual's complex journey from one awareness to another through the reassignment of meanings to experiences and back again, but is it a negotiation on many levels providing for differing values and perspectives based on a variety of sources. "Because different groups may have different normative perspectives (i.e. different values, social standards, or ideologies), the same conversion experience can be interpreted differently. That latter

recognition sensitizes researchers to the important role of negotiation” (Straus, 1976 in Kilbourne and Richardson, 1988).

In this light we may surmise that the EOL drama serves as a conversion experience even though consensus about its value was never achieved. In effect, it solidifies a core construct of diversity by enticing choice and motivation to participate and/or not to participate. The diversity apparent in the perceptions of appropriateness serves to further enlighten the social construct of MCC’s diverse interpretations.

The conclusion of Kilbourne and Richardson is that within the consideration of variations of perspective with regards to conversion experiences, and the variety of factors which can entice such conversions, three social/psychological events for conversion can be arguably noticed. First, individuals claim for themselves and others, norms and symbols, special and unique experiences that are a benchmark for the conversion process and have the power to communicate desired truths. Second, individuals affect experience either through new worldviews, a new sense of self, or new meanings through the process of conversion. Third, a social audience reaction confirms individual claims and serves as a benchmark for the individual’s claims either internally or externally (Kilbourne and Richardson, 1988: 16-17).

### **Conversion-identity negotiation**

I have discussed above the interplay of inter- and intra-personal mechanisms in the process of conversion and have presented a model which highlights the role of both social and individual agents in shaping one’s self/world view. This viewpoint abandons a “master status” approach (Machalek and Snow, 1985) which assigns a self/world view as

belonging to a unified goal oriented and static social arena of truths. Though Kilbourne and Richardson's model serves as a relevant illustration for defining a platform of dialogue between the construction of the individual self-concept and its role in interpreting social involvement- a universal discourse, it fails to provide a mechanism for the process of conversion which focuses on a transformational result.

Clifford Staples and Armand Mauss (1987) stress that a major flaw in the "master status" concept is that language, often used as a watershed analytic medium for measuring conversion, wrongly highlights the experiences which are instrumental in the convert's process of change. They claim that the indicators which Machalek and Snow propose fail to distinguish religious converts from people who, though not "converted" by traditional definitions, are religiously committed. In other words, they do not identify those who have not completely abandoned their previous identity for the "master status," though both sets of authors are in agreement that conversion is a process of change. Staples and Mauss argue that two major factors in proposing a "master status" and its role in conversion are missing in the "master status" schema. They are a) that a definition of self-concept as it applies to a self-consciousness, and b) the transformative properties associated with personhood in light of self-transformation. Both are absent in the hypotheses of Machalek and Snow (Staples and Mauss 1987: 133-134).

Though we have discussed that external factors play a major part in the process of conversion, this is dependant on means which affect self-*consciousness*. By Staples and Mauss' definition, the self-concept is dependant on roles and life-cycle changes. These effect a person's interpretation of themselves allowing for a dynamic value to be assigned



to consciousness. These changes, though significant, are routine and may be genuinely shared with others who, at least from their conscious perspective, supply meaning to shared behaviors, beliefs, interpretations, etc.

In light of conversion, the stress is on *self-transformation* and not simply changes which occur as one journeys from one corporately derived set of values to another pointing to a redesign of the self-concept (Staples and Mauss, 1987:134). There is a change in the “real self” or as Ralph Turner explains, the person we really are when our social roles and self-presentation are stripped away (Turner, 1976). This is a distinction between what both authors admit is the “real self” and the “spurious self”. The former represents participants as independent of the roles and situations they find themselves contributing to, and the latter describes the product of their situations and internal/external factors which contribute to a self-concept.

It may be argued that although performances have a descriptive element, they are in fact bound to criteria of behavior grammar. Performative aesthetics and roles are communicated through a language common to both the instigator and the receiver. Instances of behavioral disclosure may at times provide information about the process of transformation, giving no information about the internal state of the individual. At other times, performance may point to a pattern of *processes* which converted individuals employ. In either case, performance may simply be an opportunity to explain an attitude toward a conversion “stance”. In this way, performance mechanisms are akin to linguistics. Language is often used as a vehicle for gathering information about internal awareness. It has only a limited ability however as it can not always depicts the full

breadth of the conversion experience. The examples below show how language can explain a subject's attitude about how they view conversion and explain the conversion process itself. Each is devoid of the other in its description however (Figure 5, below).

Figure 5. Comparison of two subjects' rhetorical methods of explaining conversion (Staples and Mauss, 1987).

Interviewer: Okay, we'll start out with the basic stuff, and I already know a little bit of this, but it will get us going anyway. When did you become a Christian?

Rod: It's difficult to say, since growing up in the church I never really had a conversion experience. I remember it...as early as I think five years old is when I remember making my first commitment. Since then, it's very much been a process.

Interviewer: You basically consider yourself a lifelong Christian?

Rod: So far, yes, and I expect that to carry on.

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Interviewer: First of all, when did you become Christian?

Jonathan: November 4, 1978. More of a theological reason, because in the way I believe and so forth there was a particular instant when you become a Christian, that you obey God's call. A lot of other people may think, "Well, somewhere along the line Jesus came into my life," and stuff. Well I know, because I obeyed, and so that's how come I can say, "Yes, I know the time and the hour."

The dynamic which both of these authors propose implies a functionalist approach to language in a similar way to that valued by a "master status" approach with a major reinvention. The "master status" approach presumes that language (rhetoric)<sup>14</sup> used by converts allows indirect access to consciousness thereby affording it the status of indicator in the analysis of conversion. From Staples and Mauss' perspective, language serves not as an indicator but rather as a mechanism that provides for a definition of the

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<sup>14</sup> The definition and use of rhetoric in this context through the research methods of the authors is exclusively relegated to verbiage retrieved in data collection (interviews). The notion of rhetoric as an indicator will be expanded through this research to include performances and ritual behaviors.

convert's location in a "map" of journeying (self-awareness). Figure 5 for instance shows how Rob and Jonathan each are differently engaged in the conversion process: Rob explains a conviction to a process of conversion with few details while Jonathan discloses details about conversion with little conviction to its process.

If we allow ourselves to interpret performances with this same model we may apply an analysis that presumes that performance maintains mechanisms of conversion that help one to shift perspective though without identifying what it is about the performance that is critical in this conversion. In an excerpt from an interview from the field we may be equally confused as to what constitutes for a conversion experience in one's description of a performance even though there is a slight allusion to a conversion process which is occurring.

*What we do with the passing of the peace. We are reinforcing the role of behavior of the warm, the open, how we care about everybody and our ritual reinforces that every Sunday. I value that. I think it's a good thing. But it's a particular type of behavior that is being reinforced.*

*And you can see as you go around, some people are like "Hold on. I'm not comfortable with it. "It feels more feminine to me. I think it is because it is because in our culture women may be comfortable with that kind of behavior—with strangers in particular. If you watch what is happening, people are hugging each other. Not too many guys hug each other. In the mainstream, they don't. They may be really good guys. Between heterosexual men it is not common. A very good friend of mine whom I go to the baseball game with, I don't think I've ever hugged him. I think the difference between men and women is that women are more apt to hug other women than men to other men."<sup>15</sup>*

Like the example from Staples and Mauss, this short statement provides two main perspectives on the processes involved in shared physicality in the Passing of Peace. First, the interviewee discloses his own conviction to the meaning behind the act. It reinforces "something" in his mind that is good and within the priorities of MCC worship which he admires. It is not necessarily the act itself but what opportunities the act

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<sup>15</sup> (Interview 062903.01.T)

provides for consciousness. This is likened to Rob who has a conviction to the process of conversion though has little to say about the performances which make it up. Here the interviewee is convicted to that which the performance achieves. Second, the interviewee is similar to Jonathan as he views the exchange between worshipping members as a shift from his own perceptions of mainstream culture and the way things “are”. He gives very few details about the performance. He makes no especially significant distinctions about the different *ways* in which men and women differ in this practice either. He does emphatically note that men and women perform different. The importance of these two perspectives is that the performance of the ritual act is interpreted by this person as having an outcome which is *different* than if the act was performed in another context. It is meaningful by the fact that it firstly provides value by its *doing* and secondly, is meaningful because it is *done*. The meanings are less specifically described. He further assigns the outcome of the act as affecting his own preconceived ideas about how men and women behave “normally”. It is important to note that the experience is one of participation and observation as the outcome of the event is based on both personal involvement and social expectations.

The vocabularies which make up music work in similar ways. They are not indicators of internal mechanisms at play but rather are a series of diverse events pointing to a *process* of transformation which will have both expected outcomes and point to countercultural expectations. Even in data retrieved through interviews about music in ritual, the descriptions about ritual music’s powers of conversion may only be able to describe either the details about *how* one participates or details about the experiences

themselves with little insight into the change which occurs in the experience, even though change is presumed. Communicating with audiences in the performances of *InClusion* through eye contact does present an outcome of change, *per se*, but the experience entices change because it is contextualized into a vocabulary of meaning based in internal awareness. Lighting candles and burning incense are not new experiences, but through the experience of recontextualizing their appropriateness they take on new meaning when performed in a context of the “other” as described by another MCCer about the rituals of *Sacred Places*. The differences implied are subtle; however they greatly shift the research approach by interpreting meaning through the analysis of performance outcomes.

In a strategy devised by Roger Strauss (1976) we see an alternative to the processes of conversion laid out by Machalek and Snow, and Staples and Mauss. In this depiction of the conversion process, the subject is involved in life changing activities which incite a transformative means of discovery leading to an agency of instrumental exploitation. In this interpretation, we may see a more workable process applicable to performance. Here, conversion is a process of *self-transformation* which contains both an internal negotiation process as well as an indelible interactive property with social situations effected by a “seeker” who searches to bridge the gap between internal self awareness and the appropriate means for communicating it publicly. In the third chapter we will see what “gaps” are particular to the MCC NOVA rituals and how they are bridged.

Through a process of “bumbling” amidst a series of social events, seekers strive to organize and maximize social contexts and at the same time inform a personal

transformation process. As a result of discovering means of intimacy with the group, the seeker is able to devise tactics which allow them to establish recognition within the group, thus allowing for an affecting process on the group's events by which recognition occurs (Strauss 1976: 252-258).

Amidst the process of random bombardment with seemingly recognizable social events and encounters, the seeker shifts his/her energies to explore the inner workings of the realms of transformation through a process of successful and unsuccessful attempts at passing as one of the social group. This engineered transformation is an interpersonal one where conversion depends on "doing" appropriate performances thus searching for a formal entrance into a converted realm. Transformation relies therefore on the process of belonging, motivated by a need to experience conversion from the "inside out". Consequently, the process of social performance is critical to the internalization of a personal transformation which may occur secondarily in relation to the motivations at play in becoming one of the many. Commitment to the ideologies and behaviors of the core group serves as a means for one to adopt roles where they may act as an ideal member, identifying themselves as transformed through rituals and symbolic behaviors that promote recognition, and disassociating themselves from a former existence (Strauss 1976: 259-271).

The three approaches to self-concept construction and conversion which have been identified here serve as an important commentary on possible methodologies in studying conversion. They allow for a multiplicity of transformative possibilities with respect to the means in which the conversion process may take place. Most important is

the interpretation of how mechanisms of identity construction and conversion may be isolated. Furthermore, and as we will explore in the third chapter, these approaches to conversion provide for a method of performance analysis that can compare a wide variety of behaviors describing many possibilities of involvement in the transformation process which though seemingly incongruent describe a coherent whole. (Table 4, below).

Table 4. Comparison of Approaches by (Snow and Machalek), (Staples and Mauss), and Strauss.

	<u>Machalek and Snow</u>	<u>Staples and Mauss</u>	<u>Strauss</u>
Conversion	what happens <i>to</i> the person (Subject affected)	process of self-transformation (Subject involvement)	engineered transformation (Subject driven)
Self-Concept	irrelevant to determining whether or not the subject is converted  (Subjugated by the “master status”)	the subject is qualified to tell Who s/he is.  (Self-transformation story)	embodies process  (Behavioral exploration)
Rhetorical Indicators	identify converts	how subjects use them as methods to achieve self-transformation.	events and accounts
Rhetorical Ratio	(language: status)	(language: method)	(language: behavior)
Subject	audience	performer	participant
Conversion Status	Individual conversion	Intrapersonal conversion	Social conversion
Methods	Core belief descriptions Descriptions of meaning Critical observations	Personal relevance Developmental means Rational observations	Technological means Performative priorities Creative observations

### **Inconsistencies in constructing a core identity**

Within each of the theoretic tendencies described, structuralist and functionalist views of how individuals approach self awareness and how that awareness affects the societal situation in which they find themselves have been offered. Clearly, such positions are flawed in devising theories which take into account the complexity of

change in human personhood *via* performance. They place emphasis on interiority and while recognizing the dynamism of human existence, the relationship between that dynamism and changing human performance is not highlighted. This said, in light of the research at hand, we can only accept these theories as models which lead to more pliable means of analysis and research.

The problem is associating a relationship between the construction of the self-concept and a self-consistency on the part of the individual as he/she socializes into unique performative situations. One must allow that individuals do not always strive for a strong core identity based on a “master status” and that self-consistency throughout the process may be an expectation of the researcher that is ultimately and grossly idealistic. Rather, one must be comfortable with the assumption that a definition of “master status” may be a collective body of achievable and desirable states of being that are based in plurality and possibly incongruence rather than consistency.

What then can be truly identifiable as authentic indicators of transformation? Some of the theories presented have placed rhetoric as a primary indicator of conversion status, focusing on language as a main communicator of transitional occurrences describing the process of conversion. Though language is helpful as a means for isolating certain paradigms within the individual’s matrix of self-identification, it fails to reveal fully an authentic set of internal meanings which may be less dependant on cognitive association. Conversely, if we look solely at behavioral indicators we lack the ability to find actions that fully express the ever-changing dialogue between meaning and definition which, as we have seen, is a hallmark in constructing a self-concept.



The central research problem calls for consistent indicators that divulge the complexity and ever-evolving mechanisms involved in conversion. What are the consistent indicators of conversion, performed ritually, that describe, both personally and corporately, an interlocking *gender-religious* experience of change? And how are these implemented in performances to describe continuity between interrelated religious and gendered self-concepts?

In the literature, gender marginalized individuals have been depicted as organizing their self-identity around their sexuality orientation. This is seen in such studies as those by Hart and Richardson (1981) who propose that the identification of one as homosexual/heterosexual/bisexual/etc. will in turn effect the kind of experiences he/she participates in and, in accord with the models which we have explored, will presume that any self identity construct will have at its heart socialization of a gender awareness based in the sexual orientation of an individual. This same approach taken by Erving Goffman (1963), identifying social identities within stigmatized individuals, asserts that “the individual’s problem in managing his social and personal identity varies greatly according to whether or not those in (his) presence know of him, and, if so, whether or not he knows they know of him” (1963: 66). This style of interpreting the problem at hand narrows the field on two fronts. First, it expects that within *gender-religious* situations, gender will not only define religious content, but validity of performances will depend on the subjects’ ability to make the connection between gender specifications and religious expectations. Second, it suggests that gender performance is a description of sexuality motivated by an internal need to describe and/or mask one’s

orientation through external commentary. Others have theorized that religious identity and personal identity are interwoven to create a *milieu* where the relationship supporting religious structure and personal structure as concomitant entities existing under one “sacred canopy” (See Ammerman, 1987, Peshkin, 1986, and Berger, 1967). These interpretations are similarly problematic as they presume that sexual orientation and religious identity, though stemming from different internal negotiations, are in fact concomitant entities working toward a common resolution.

**Motivation: the social setting of the self concept**

The underlying mechanisms for self awareness in light of socialization and the effect these have on the conversion process bring us to question the value of motivation. We have already noted that language can identify interpretations of conversion. We have also noted that as a descriptor, language can also lack the illustrative means necessary to understand *how* one interprets self transformation from a cognitive standpoint and with what vividness the consequences of transformation may be explained. We have also suggested that like language, other behavioral performances of a less rhetorical nature, when viewed as an ultimate description, express a flawed depiction of internal awarenesses. This imperfect mechanism attempting to communicate one’s knowledge about the internal and external factors at play is secondary to the *processes* one employs in the transformational process. This is because both language and performance employ a wide variety of aesthetic descriptors which at times are complimentary but more often are contradictory.

A model of analysis including the possibility that language and performance possess differing vocabularies of meanings is needed to assess the value of internal motivation. There is a transition process that occurs which links the internal self awarenesses of an individual with the external arena of performance. *Why* certain transitions occur between the personal-social equations is more in line with this inquiry. In fact, it is within a method of communication where the dialectic of knowledge is replaced with symbolic attributes of human beingness where the possibilities of expression about transformation is more likely. The problem is that while language presumes a coherency of thought, performance allows for a more symbolically latent construction of communication. An incremental performance model can be devised that satisfies the justification for seemingly unrelated occasions, steeped in apparent discontinuity and incoherency, to contribute to the construction of a cohesive social situation.

C. Wright Mills (1940) argues that “rather than expressing something which is prior and in the person, language is taken by other persons as an indicator of future action” (Mills 1940: 904). Mihail Bakhtin also stresses a persuasive aspect of discourse which emphasizes the importance of the listener, or the “other” (See McClellan, 1990: 235). Both authors associate motivation with attribution theory<sup>16</sup> in that language serves as a justification for a particular act or pattern of behavior. "Individuals come to know their own attitudes, emotions, and internal states by inferring them from observations of their own behavior and circumstances in which they occur. When internal cues are weak,

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<sup>16</sup> Theory about how people explain things (See Bem, 1972).

ambiguous, or uninterruptible, the individual is in the same position as the outside observer" (Bem, 1972). When the experimentation process is externalized and performed in light of others seeking similar clarity as in the process of public performance, internal ambiguous cues become more salient in an arena of shared belief. These cues serve as a social function of coordinating diverse actions supplying conditions in which motives seem to occur, and supplies situations for analyzing *why* certain motives are verbalized. Language acts as a mechanism for the linkage of vocabularies of motive to a system of actions (Mills 1940: 905). In a similar way, performance acts as a means for linking motives with more aesthetic qualities into a system of shared belief.

In arguing that self-concept and socialization lead to a process of conversion, one may interpret motives as the professed reasons or accounts of change. We may include musical and ritual performance in this process as having similar properties to language. The social conduit of language creates a reference to the actions and talk of others by associating like or differing *motifs* of meaning to convey messages of social awareness or social commentary. Performance provides a similar conduit as actions become in themselves a vocabulary of knowledge about self awareness. Language provides a medium for a social conversion based in certain elements that include shared knowledge used to integrate and promote diverse social actions. This conversation is one which provides a discourse between individuals. In language, the discourse is rhetorical. In performance, the discourse is based in an aesthetic conversation.

For Mills, the motives associated through verbalization supply conditional possibilities as awarenesses on the part of the actor for anticipated social consequences

and not solely elements of the individual in isolation. As Max Weber (1922) has shown, motives are complexes of meaning which appear to the actor or to the observer to be adequate grounds for his conduct (Weber 1922: 5). Motives therefore can be categorized into different types and means for explaining reasons for action which may be encapsulated in, for example, representations, technical vocabularies, and stable vocabularies which link anticipated consequences with specific actions, and the subvocal or overt naming of terminal phrases and/or social consequences of conduct (Mills). They may also supply satisfaction to questions of an act or program, whether to the actor or the other, justify efficacy, supply strategies of an action, or even become new acts (Weber). For both authors, motives and actions very often originate not from within, but are spawned by the social situation in which individuals find themselves within conversation. *Why* a certain action exists in the agency of a person is answerable here. In terms of *how*, this action is performed to supply a situation for a typical vocabulary for one's motives.

By these theories about motivation it may be argued that language may serve as a gateway to understanding the interplay between the social status of individuals and their ability to communicate motivation in light of socialization by use of social vocabularies. On the surface, this paradigm bridges the gap between the social experiences of individuals who strive to integrate their own self concept into a social situation of seemingly like individuals, communicating the *why* of their actions in light of their own dialogue with the social group.

Performance vocabularies in this sense are akin to rhetoric in that they describe internal occurrences. The mechanisms involved in describing motivation verbally are

similar to those of musical performances. As seen in our examples of MCC NOVA community life, meaning in ritual is disclosed through a *process* of performance, similar to the describing of an event through language. This *process* is paramount to discovery for individuals who search for meaning and belonging within the group. Musical utterances, theologies, and appropriate behaviors are only secondarily descriptors of the conversion that may be at play in participants. The *processes* by which individuals disclose their own self-identity in the context of the larger community's rituals are the medium by which transformation is disclosed. Within the context of a community whose priorities highlight the need to reinforce similarity through a spectrum of diversity, disclosure is critical to the maintenance of *gender-religious* criteria. The particular aesthetics of these performances are secondary to the *process* of disclosure which outlines the dialogue between internal awareness, its public declaration, and a social acceptance.

Defining motivations is relative to the individual's self concept addressing the internal mechanisms of change maintained through a dialogue with one's social surroundings. The self-concept is therefore the product of a matrix of culture, social structure, and institutional systems (Rosenberg 1981: 594) which the ritual performer embodies while asserting new material through their own commentary on the social realm. The dialogue within this matrix stems from two distinct camps which include biography (individual histories and experiences) and a situation (a context specific arena). In biography, self-concept is stable in as much as it is an enduring feature of personality which "is a set of meanings attached to the self as object" (Stryker 1981: 1-29). In

situation, the self-concept is considered to be more dynamic maintaining that the construction of a self-concept is a shifting and adjusting process of self-presentation. In this camp, one's individual self concept may vary from situation to situation having an "average tone of self-feeling". It may have many social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinion the individual cares (James 1950:294). More so, the social reality which the individual discloses is interaction behavior and is not the sole result of environmental pressure, stimuli, attitudes and ideas, but interpretations and commentaries performed in action which he/she is constructing within the situation. The individual defines self and the other through his/her own actions by taking on the role of the "other". The perspective of the "other" may include expectations, rules, codes, and may possess aesthetic values. The performer adjusts and aligns their own actions to include these as needed throughout the *process* (Blumer 1969).

### **A symbolic interactionist approach**

As a solution to the problem of defining motivation in the self-concept awareness, we may turn to the interactionists' stance which sheds light on the role of the individual as an active agent in the process of conversion in a social context. Unlike previously described theories, symbolic interaction presumes an awareness of control of self that affords individuals the license and ability to use their self-awarenesses to inform active participation in social dialogue. Individuals adjust to the self *of others* in an attempt to create an alternate view of the social situation rather than simply complying with it and hence describe their placement in the process of change through their choice of actions. In essence, this is the *process* of ritual performance.

Though actions or musical utterances are selected on the basis of appropriateness, their style and content is adjusted to effectively describe internal awareness about the performer as other might interpret them. This dynamic and shifting process cannot be understood by simply focusing on references to persistent and stable features of presentation (i.e. certain musical styles, performance techniques, biblical interpretations, social expectations), but rather has symbolic meaning in light of both the individual's internal state of awareness and the social dialogue in which the individual is participating. Role scripts are de-emphasized and at times realigned as individuals define and interpret their situation in response to the dynamics at hand (R. Turner, 1962). However, as Goffman has described (1955, 1959), the interaction in which one is involved still requires knowledge of the implicit rules and strategies that govern interaction with others. Social roles reflect a certain type of personhood which defines the *process* by internal assimilation. The actor describes social vocabularies through their performances in the context of the known.

Performances may require props, costumes, behaviors, sounds, etc. which all contribute to the vocabularies at hand in an attempt to disclose and design social context. Communication is essential in order to take on the role of the other, to put one's self in the other's shoes, to see things in light of other's perspective, thus employing a practice of adoption but actually altering one's perspective, allowing for an experience of identity construction rooted in a perpetual dialogue (Mead 1934). Therefore, language and other behavioral communicators, serve as a disclosure of known insights about the internal self and as a mechanism of both the experiences of the self and the individual's interpretation



of the other by use of vocabularies familiar to both the actor and the other. Attitudes, as described by these shared vocabularies affect the construction of self in that they contribute to shared meaning, thus affecting the whole through reinforcement and/or nuance. Mainstream structures like monogamy, metric hymnody, the Christian *ordo* itself, and even political attitudes are vehicles in this shared vocabulary. The motifs themselves are secondary to the reassigning of their meaning in the context of a *gender-religious* realm.

As a means of analysis, the interactionists' approach provides the researcher with the ability to reorient self-concept models within the social field to include the dynamic interplay of actor and society. Self-concept may be expanded to include *how* the individual interprets him/herself in light of the social situation as well as *why*. The social field becomes less an isolated "other" and more a font of how other people "actually" see the individual aside of their scripted roles. Performance in this context provides for this shared experience as it describes the individual's own self-awarenesses through a medium that is both role dependant (ascribing to appropriate and prescribed behaviors) and role independent (allowing for personal interpretations and alterations) simultaneously. This leads the individual to incorporate a "perceived self" into a construction of self-identity that is both an internal awareness and an informed awareness based in a social commentary (Rosenberg 1981: 595-596).

In this process of interaction between the self motivated self-concept and the "other", now pre-conceptualized, the individual progresses to a sense of belonging which is one's own self evaluation as recognized and validated by the corporate body expressed

through song, style, or interpretation. The group validates the appropriateness of one's abilities and recognizes and validates social status, shared belief, social labels, derived statuses, social types, personality identities, and behaviors through shared vocabularies of belonging. These vocabularies shape the self-concept in a number of ways. They define who he/she is and at times promote ambiguity and represent criteria for self-judgment. Role performance allows for an influence on social action, and leads to social evaluation on the basis of social interaction (Rosenberg 1981: 605-606). The roles of musicians, participants, and preachers alike are secondary to the contribution they make to a social self-awareness. By their own *processes* of transformation, embedded in musical and ritual performance, they inform the community's own transformation.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have chosen examples of ritual performance and perception to illustrate some of the more dominant themes in the question of transformation in MCC NOVA corporate performance. Diversity is the preamble of MCC NOVA performance and is operative by acceptance of a variety of stances inclusive of gender, tradition, ideology, and performance, and in the perception of how these diverse features of religiosity are at play in the corporate body. There are tensions and negotiations found within the interpretations of a self-proclaimed acceptable environment for LBGTQ individuals to experience religiosity on their own terms. The religious tradition which emerges provides for acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and assigns meaning to mainstream elements of worship in light of newfound awareness about MCC NOVA's unique contribution to church structure. These elements either support or negate the

highly gender-conscious lifestyle of church members and serve as the performative template from which new creative interpretations are negotiated and tested.

The LBGTQ social condition does not always presume shared belief on a variety of fronts. Individual beliefs are often the product of positive and negative developmental experiences that shape one's notion of important facets of life inclusive of political stances, operative opinions, interpretations of sexuality, sensitivity to belonging, license in performance, and the responsibility to reorient social perceptions. Some of these beliefs reside in intellectual rationalizations about community behavior providing reason and/or tolerance for LBGTQ rituals. For some individuals, performance itself becomes the arena where beliefs are defined as they strive to punctuate internal negotiations. Agency acts as a vehicle for establishing belief. Through the freedom afforded to performers, ritual structure, and environment contributes to the emergence of belief systems as mainstream hegemonies are abandoned, discarded, reinvented, or simply recontextualized. The ritual experience is a discovery of untapped beliefs and not simply a description of preordained values.

The relationship between genderedness and religiosity is rooted in ever-growing self-awarenesses with inclusion as a hallmark priority. Within this priority, ritual performance embodies the teetering reality of the relationship between normativity and innovation. Diversity becomes the palette by which descriptions of the scope of MCC NOVA religiosity and the construction of a self-concept are performed both individually and corporately.

Identity negotiation (becoming) contributes to the socialization and re-

socialization processes (becoming part of). Conversion and transformation are measurable by behavioral performances where the *processes* of transformation are made apparent. Conversion relies on the role of the subject and implies a model of performance that recognizes motivation as a primary function in the transformation process. Motivation embodies the transition between self-becoming and social awareness within a social setting where the need to become more wholly human is exercised in a public way. As we have seen in some of the work of symbolic interactionists, this activity allows for a dynamic tension between the self-concept and social behavior by a system of vocabularies which draw on both the internal awarenesses of self and meaning as represented by the group in performance.

This description of behaviors embodies the dualisms therein depicting a series of consonant and dissonant elements through which the interplay of tension, negotiation, and resolutions supply the elemental aesthetics to the unique religiosity at play at MCC NOVA (religiosity vs. genderness, individual awareness vs. corporate meaning, traditionalism vs. innovation, and experience vs. perception). In the gay worshipping environment of MCC NOVA, the traditional and innovative stylizations of performance describe deep and pertinent information about human self-awareness and behavioral outcomes. Highly descriptive or overtly performed tendencies commonly associated with LBGTQ sexual politics are often less flagrant. At other times, these behaviors are more overt pointing to the need to translate common behavior in a queer light. The mingling of both innovations and the maintenance of religious traditionalism both contribute to a descriptive process of contextualization. Realms of performance which depict traditional

attributes of worship as well as contemporary stylizations of worship contribute to a fashioning of aesthetics rooted in the transition from self-awareness to social acceptance. Both styles of religious performance contribute to a religious priority that is context specific.

In the third chapter we will explore the aesthetics of musical and ritual performance which are the descriptive indicators of more latent transformations. For now it has been important to outline the mechanisms of self-concept, conversion, and motivation so as to predispose the analysis of MCC NOVA music and ritual events with a lens of inquiry which focuses on the subtext of performance rather than the value of the performance aesthetics themselves. In essence, participation in the ritual and musical life of MCC NOVA is a constant partaking in the work of self and corporate identity. It uses a variety of sources to fashion an overarching milieu of existence which places value on the experience of worship rather than simply defining itself by the aesthetics which make it up. As has been recognized throughout the research, the combination of ritual and musical situations lends itself to a collage of meaning which only carries with it clarification about the community in context. The meanings and historical attributes which certain ritual activities express can never be measured in light of their own mainstream value. Only in the context of the ever-emerging establishment of its importance to the community's overall journey of discovery can they be considered.

Analysis of this religious environment is subject to dualisms which are held in concert and in tension with each other. The search for consonance and priority may only be successful through the observation of dissonance describing in greater detail the

nuances of cognitive meaning in a rainbow of subtle hues. As Leon Festinger (1957) and Robert Prus (1984) assert, dissonance can be a unification factor in the construction of religious and social groups as it often sustains factors which, though at times likely and at other times unlikely, contribute to consistency in group cognitive meaning. Transversely, dissonance may also serve as a mechanism for holding seemingly incongruent identities in a workable tension. It may serve as the impetus of “core identity” and be simultaneously descriptive of the *processes* involved in self-discovery. Rather than an either/or notion of religiosity and conversion, this supplies an alternative model which searches for definitive and complete descriptions of transformative elements.

The search for a *gender-religious* identity is a search for identity in transition. At times, this is rooted in the preconceived and/or newly discovered nuances of being a gendered individual. Similarly, religiously speaking, association with the experiential gendered self may be grossly unrelated to the religious tendencies at hand even if those tendencies are equally amenable to the individual. Describing the *gender-religious* elements of ritual behavior presumes isolating them from each other, and from other concomitant elements. Through blending, reorienting, and negotiating these elements in public performance, they create a collage of meaning, which reflects the internal and external transformative properties of the *gender-religious* stance.

This stance is an appreciation for the dialectic between individuals with motivations for self-awareness in a *gender-religious* social context where levels of transformation are not isolated from each other but simultaneously contrapuntal—at times consonant and at others dissonant. Therefore, the group, in its performative

environment provides a source of meaning where society is a blended product of beliefs with variable context specific tendencies. These tendencies may be the result of developmental factors or may be the inventions of self-revelation. In either case, one's internal and self-revelations are not restricted to the dialectics found in social functioning (i.e. rules, role, and mores). Rather, they provide for a template of inclusion where public ritual becomes a cathartic moment of self-awareness predisposed to social acceptance. Performance provides a myriad of outlets by which to display individual expressions of internal negotiations that emerge through a process of self-awareness. The group is informed by newfound interpretations of acceptability brought on by individual's willingness to experiment performatively as a whole individual. They are socialized into the group by their ability to translate innate tendencies *vis a vis* already socially established behaviors.

### **Chapter 3. The Mechanism of Music in the Construction of Local Identity in MCC NOVA Rituals**

One: We worship the God who inhabits our world  
And occupies our lives

**Many: We need not look up to find God.  
We need only look around,  
Within ourselves, beyond ourselves,  
Into the eyes of another.**

One: We need not listen for distant thunder to find God,  
We need only listen to the music of life,  
The words of children, the questions of the curious,  
The rhythm of a heartbeat.

**Many: We worship the God who inhabits our World  
And who occupies our lives.**

**All: Let us worship God together!**

(Call to Worship, July 11, 2004)

#### **The Role of Cognition and Change in Music and Ritual Research**

Cognition and change are processes that aid in understanding the connections between personal and social consciousness and performance. Musical performance is a vehicle that bridges understanding about one's self with stylized behaviors of expression to create a local identity based in shared means of communication as understood by those who perform and observe them. Performance is where internal notions about identity are worked out and negotiated in a public arena. For an expanded consideration of this phenomenon we will presume some fundamental functions of performance in ritual.

Firstly, ritual behavior operates from a domain of myth.<sup>17</sup> The figures and entities may be representative of fantastic and supernatural role models that in themselves represent gender in "super-human" ways (Tambiah, 1985: 29), beyond normative sexual capabilities but well within the creative imagination of the ritual performers. In this

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<sup>17</sup> Levi-Strauss' defines myth as "a social pattern that corresponds to something real and attributable to the past if, under direct scrutiny, the present fails to offer an equivalent" (Levi-Strauss 1963: 203-204). Victor Turner assigned agency to myth as something that "attempts to explain away logical contradictions, but puzzlement remains at the cognitive left-hemispherical level." (Turner 1987: 166).



regard we may interpret the construction of self through performance as if identity is something to be achieved under the guise of idealism. The “mythical” ideal self may be no more than a reflection of what one wishes to become. It may be an elaboration of innate feelings or desires about common life which until expressed within a nurturing environment have been in isolation and without a medium for expression. In either case, identity is a construction of behaviors as suggested by some innate and previously codified comportment based in personal or social experience. Within MCC NOVA performances, this comportment is energized by a core value system which drives the desire to construct religiosity from a framework of ideals believed to be innate to LGBTQ identity.

Identity is therefore based in a combination of factors related to religious belief as well as notions about LGBTQ lifestyle. When performed, both of these realms are enacted to create a unified construction reflective of known insights about one’s self and desires about who one may hope to be. In essence, ritually speaking, both make up the myth of overall identity.

Secondly, ritual is dependant on a systematic combination of languages including acts, words, behaviors, dialogues, sounds, colors, smells, and other sensibilities. Communication through these language(s) includes many more structures than just audible words. Gestures, costumes, and sounds, which in most cases co-exist within the context of music, are all part of the musical material in need of analysis if the association between perception and performance is to be truly realized. The ritual component of MCC NOVA life is one where the act of music-making is a cathartic event enveloping

notions about different *voce* of performance. As will be explained, these *voce* disclose a myriad of inherent beliefs which are the product of past, present, and hopeful experiences.

Lastly, performers within their socially relevant states make ritual practice effective. Though social drama includes past, present, future, and omnipotent performers, it is the musical “players” themselves who ultimately affect (and are affected transversely) personal or social change. The research question for ritual function here is “How does this performance affect changes in social identity?” and “ultimate social behavior?” Gender relationships within ritual are constructed through a variety of cultural modes and relationships which exist in both earthly and otherworldly domains that have as an outcome the performances themselves. Since in ritual, cognition and change incorporate the possibility of transcendence in so many different categories, there is an ontological relevance to participation in musical performance (Tambiah, 1985: 29). The descriptions of this ontology are behavioral, however beneath the surface of performative aesthetics is a system of ensuing personal and social awareness constantly at play. Musical behavior in this case enlivens the social consciousness when individual contexts become socially relevant and *vice versa*.

In this chapter we will explore some theories of musical behavior as understood from the perspectives of locality, ownership, cognition, and ultimately change as it applies to the condition of knowing about one’s social environment. Musical examples will be provided to explain consistencies and inconsistencies which exist in the process of establishing a local identity steeped in intentional music performances. In essence, we

will find that that performances which provide a clear and identifiable link between core beliefs and practice, those examples which seem to express dissonance and inconsistency, point to the unique role of music in the process of transformation by providing bridges between seemingly incongruent entities.

**Consciousness, location, and ownership as critical factors in considering authenticity.**

A social consciousness ultimately becomes shared among individuals and has collectivity as its product. This allows personal interpretations and inventiveness to find a place within a large group (Frith 1973: 207-208). Social consciousness is more importantly the sharing of corporate beliefs leading to a shared identity (Turner 1969: 131-132). Although the shift from personhood to socialization would seem naturally apparent, often the success of this shift is dependant on interpretations of latent vocabularies and codes. While a social group may strive to possess vocabularies as uniquely their own, by the lack of total expertise in managing these codes, a social consciousness may only be apparent to those in which the personal strata has been part of their experience (Durkheim, 1961).

Often there is an apparent lack of definition in the relationship between musical behavior and culture. No musical behavior, let alone change in music, occurs within a social vacuum. The cultural complex includes social behaviors as well as musical behaviors (See Herndon and McLeod, 1990: iii-ix). While some would assert that musical behavior has a special place amongst other cultural activities (McAllister, 1971), the contemporary ethnomusicologist must be prepared to handle and treat all social material as pertinent to musical behavior. All of a cultural situation may prove to be relevant to

the analysis of musical change. As John Blacking states, ultimately music acts as a symbol in the description of society and culture. If we are to expect that as a symbol music makes present the realities which are at play in a society, we must treat musical sounds as if they have both audible and cognitive properties, both contributing to a description of the complexity within a social situation.

Analysis of the social situation in which music is effective or not is crucial for understanding the properties of music symbols, because it is in these contexts that the non-musical elements of creation and appreciation can be separated from the essentially musical; and an adequate theory of music and music-making must be based on data that cannot not be reduced beyond the 'musical' (Blacking 1977:1).

The consideration of locality and proximity are paramount to the growth of an effective and comprehensible cultural vocabulary. Locality is the observer's and/or audience's ability to comprehend vocabularies of speech, movement, sound, or visual modes of performance (Goffman 1959a:73-74). It may have more relevance in issues concerning subject matter, meaning of behavior, or the ability to accept complex unfamiliar presentations. The ability to participate in a meaningful way presumes a common vocabulary which locates an individual or group in a "proximate" space for meaning to be communicated through the reception of the musical material.

The location and proximity one finds themselves to the musical subject is critical to issues of ownership and authenticity. Ownership, a constructed phenomenological identity within the music, is a particular function of performance which allows for the possibility that a shift in social consciousness may occur pending on the depth of participation (Cook 1990: 135-160). This is often defined by one's familiarity with the codes and markers (vocabularies) associated with a scape of knowledge, but does not

always depend on an understanding of the musical vocabularies for meaning to be transmitted (Budd, 1985: 151-174). This stance tests common interpretations of the relationship between vocabularies expressing knowledge about music and the interior meaning associated with musical performances (Seeger 1977:16). It repeats what was a major theme in the second chapter, namely that conversion may be evidenced through conviction to the process or the means of the process itself. In music, the lack of attention to both facets of this relationship between conviction and process is equally difficult to observe. In fact, it is this very gap between the two kinds of musical knowledge which test ethnomusicological inquiry (Herndon 1974:244).

Music as a creative and descriptive human experience is never void of authorship or association, though oftentimes ownership has nothing to do with a participant's direct involvement in the creation of music. This is often the case in popular styles of music in mainstream situations where musical involvement is based on one's willingness to listen, observe, or simply support the activities of musicians. But even passivity in musical participation contributes to the construction of meaning. Participation cannot be restricted to physical motion, the production of sound, or the creative process solely. Different degrees of proximity in participation are evidence of music's many modes of communication. Participation is less a matter of authenticity in itself, but rather is a measurement of the degree of skill and dexterity one accomplishes in managing vocabularies that musical performances embody. The "correct" or "skilled" management of vocabularies is a matter of subjectivity and is relative to the approximation and locality of one's self to internal emotions as well as external stimuli.

The process of developing a consciousness which incorporates root or “host” individual beliefs with social and political trends and policies is one which is constructed over time and is the product of a variety of contributing factors, though watershed episodes in the development of overall consciousness do exist.

We may argue that a congregation like MCC NOVA (or any other for that matter) is made up of “musicians” and “non-musicians”. Leaders of song, instrumentalists, choir members, etc. make up the former and congregants, observers, visitors, etc. make up the latter. This interpretation relegates music ownership to those who provide musical vocabularies in the form of audible sounds, style, genre, and content. Those who do not perform these roles in ritual do not. The problem with this interpretation is that it does not allow for the possibility that dexterity and skill in music-making may be equally germane to non-audible vocabularies which are operative in music as *symbol*. They may be interpretations or expectations, they may be modalities of acceptance and/or disagreement leading to choices about participating or not, or they can be attitudes which predefine what the musical content *should* be. These attributes of the musical utterance are often that which creates as differentiation between *the* music and *our* music in the perspective of the worshipper. They are both predetermined based on resultant histories or develop with time as the musical material shapes and informs individual and collective consciousnesses.

### **Social Cognition**

At the heart of the problem of studying change in musical behavior is the question of cognition. On the one hand, music does not simply change without some sort of

impetus, either through 'external' or 'internal' means. This may be through musical material or social 'non-musical' material. On the other hand, the very nature of changeability rests on the presumption that with change comes cognitional shifts in understanding and perception. "Cognitions can regulate behavior, but they are not identical with it. Since customary behavior is governed by rules, the proper performance of customs requires that the actors be capable of evaluating and regulating their own behavior in terms of these rules" (Spiro 1972: 105). The efficacy of music is peculiar in this respect for the performance of music depends greatly on the cognitive variables which shape institutions of understanding through feelings and expressiveness (Ferguson 1960: 88).

The very process of music-making involves consequences of individual decision-making while facilitating subsequent actions. If the communal expectation placed on a particular musical genre or occasion is that similarity between events be maintained, social expectations will affect meaning by searching for the similarity and familiarity with the musical phenomena, thus pointing to some shared societal belief system. However, supposing that music events could be static (rarely the case), then change in social cognition may well continue to define the music happenings as alternative (or outside of a belief system) even though no indication of musical change may be audibly detectable. The music fails to change, at least dramatically, but rather the societal expectation shifts for reasons not necessarily rooted in the music phenomena (Blacking 1977:4-5).

As we will see throughout the chapter, changes in musical genres and styles, though variable and representative of diverse sources, serve as means to test and negotiate communal expectations. They do not do so intentionally, but are a progression of vocabularies which developmentally inform the participations about their own societal expectations. These expectations, if viewed comparatively, point to the uniqueness of MCC NOVA worship in light of mainstream traditions. Mainstream forms are flagrant in MCC worship, though their meaning is altered. To MCCers, these “old forms” or those from pre-MCC history do not always carry with them notions of pre-consciousness about one’s gendered state. Rather they often further qualify the gender condition of the community by their presence as newly perceived expressions. Transversely, “new forms” or those not normally entertained in mainstream worshipping environments represent an expansion of the religious experience which at times is invited and at other time challenges perceptions of appropriateness. The aesthetics embedded in both these categories carry less of the pertinent information about appropriateness as does the combination of social expectations and music forms in combination.

We can say then that the musical experience is one which depends on cognitive interaction pointing to society and their ‘knowing’ about their environment. The very amount of change and its quality may not be great. In fact, micro-changes in musical expression may be the only detectable features. Greater insight into musical change will depend on the human subjective experience which will shape and be shaped through cognitive connections. For it is within this realm of cognition that music expression provides human meaning pertaining to changes in society.



### **Multiple categories in considering change**

Musical change and its priority in the study of ethnomusicology is illustrated by Alan Merriam who in 1964 wrote “the importance of observation and analysis of change in process is substantial because of the opportunity it gives for understanding not only changing forms but the processes and reasons for change” (Merriam 1964:318). While this reference had been made fairly early in the theoretical body of works, it is fitting that we begin in the early years of ethnomusicological studies for insight into interests in musical change.

The very vantage point in which a researcher approaches the notion of change depends on how one poises himself or herself to observe change. Change may be viewed from a historical perspective, comparing the music of one time period to another either over a break in time or referenced as “cultural transmission in progress” (Hertskovits 1948:525). However, there also exists the perspective of viewing change as an ‘internal’ or ‘external’ manifestation (Merriam 1964: 303). The internal perspective that change is innovation and it is the product of decision making about one’s own behaviors as performed socially. External forces causing change within a society have been termed acculturation. In this case, change is either the result of borrowing or forces which enter into a culture’s local tradition requiring them to comply. Murdock has broken down this phenomenon of change into four sub-categories identifying cultural/musical innovation as being variation, invention, tentation, or cultural borrowing (Murdock, 1956).

Merriam contends that the degree in which ‘internal’ change may occur will depend greatly on society’s conceptualization of music, that is, how it views music itself,

the processes of learning music, composition, the musician's role, etc. Also, he postulates that some types of music are more apt to change than others. Those of a greater affinity for innovation would be recreational musics; while ritual musics, presumably, would stand to be more inflexible requiring greater impetus constitutive of change. He draws our attention to the reality that in all cultures there exist cultural variation, or maybe better put, cultural deviation which will test the "norms" of cultural understanding. In other words, musical changes which are accepted by a group (as Merriam conceives it) show that the musical innovator is properly enculturated. He adds that in few cases does musical culture exist without these expectations (Merriam, 1964:307-308).

Outside of these few ethnomusicologists, most of the theoretical work concerning change has been done with regards to 'external' infusion of musical material or acculturation. Hertskovitz calls this syncretism, a type of reinterpretation which refers to the "process by which old meanings are ascribed to new elements or by which new values change the cultural significance of old forms" (Hertskovitz 1948: 553). The blending of cultural material naturally facilitates changes in value and in form.

The notion of syncretism and its effects on musical change has been taken up by scholars in their work within specific cultural settings. Richard Waterman proposed that among "New World [Negroes]" enough similar musical material exists between African derived and European musics that assimilation between the two musics could actually occur (Waterman, 1952). Merriam stated that "when two human groups which are in sustained contact have a number of characteristics in common in a particular aspect of culture, exchange of ideas therein will be much more frequent than if the characteristics

of those aspects differ markedly from one another” (Merriam, 1955:28). This hypothesis rose out of material which pointed to the generally similar characteristics between Flathead Indians and African derived musics making them more apt to acculturation than European derived styles which for lack of enough similar characteristics did not become acculturated. Lastly, Bruno Nettl offered that “the amount of change, and the nature of it in folk song is not determined by individual tempers, moods, etc. but rather that it is determined by the musical style itself as well as of the repertory which it is entering” (Nettl, 1953: 216). The ramifications are that the amount of change a song will undergo will have much to do with the amount of difference between it and the repertory it is entering.

From these early writers we can gather some preliminary thoughts on musical change. First, there exist two perspectives for observing change. One may analyze change by comparing two synchronic points in historical time; the other may be to observe change over an isolated period of time viewing changes as they occur in a more diachronic fashion. Second, change may occur as the result of ‘internal’ or ‘external’ manifestations. Innovation occurs as the result of some internal change. Acculturation occurs when outside forces act upon a cultural reality. In this case, degrees of changes may be investigated pending on the style or impetus of outside forces. Third, with regards at least to song samples, similar styles will blend more easily than those lacking stylistic similarities. In this research, the concern is more with the amount or degree of possible change.

The human experience of music illuminates awareness by cognitive processes of understanding or *gnosis*. As Charles Seeger has pointed out, both the ‘intrinsic’ music-rationale known by the musician and the ‘extrinsic’ speech-rationale used to describe it operate on different cognitive sensory planes of awareness (Seeger 1960: 225). Each is the product of cultural expectation and selectivity in awareness. The expectations of a culture may therefore define what a person actually hears, identifying it as having meaning (or not) to the culture. At times this cognitive understanding will transcend a culture’s accepted speech-rationale representing a problem in qualification through linguo-cognitive means (Herndon and McLeod 1979:196).

Social cognition and musical change are linked by a presumption that with musical change cognitive shifts can also be expected. This may not however depend greatly on “contact among peoples and cultures or the movement of populations” (Nettl 1964:232). A shift in cognition, the events or the properties of behaviors which seem to afford in reassessment of meaning, may be less associated with new experiences but with new perceptions about familiar experiences. *Why* this shift occurs, and to some extent *how*, leads to the problems of deciphering music’s noticeable change (Blacking 1977:13). Furthermore, since the study of musical change often times requires retrospection, focusing on synchronic episodes within a possible diachronic continuum, changes within music’s style or comportment may be easily detected with no insight into a cognitive shift. The reverse would be the noting of dramatically shifting understandings with little evidence of audible sound changes. The result of this problem has generated a myriad of

works which are either highly musical, documenting the change in sound phenomena and relating little to the cognitive variables, or the opposite (See Blacking 1977: 15).

### **John Blacking's Approach to Musical Change as Applied to MCC NOVA Aesthetics**

Finding the place in which musical change occurs in light of its cognitive shifts within sound evolutions is what John Blacking has shown is the challenge of mapping the implications and ramifications of change. Like others before him, he suggests that the study of change is synchronic for even when a musical phenomena is being studied over a period of time, or at one period of time, each 'step' of the evolution process is captured in a social continuum of a musical culture. Simultaneously, musical change requires a diachronic perspective which reorients one cognitive-musical shift to the next within the social situation (Blacking, 1977: 18-19).

Blacking takes his theory of musical change one step further, offering a rationale for distinguishing the difference between innovation and acculturation, and actual music change. Innovation proposes some degree of blending or hybridization. Acculturation does likewise to some degree. Musical change points to actual changes in the musical system which includes the cognitive properties associated with music's meaning. This will be testable foremost in people's understanding and definition of music systems which, pending one's knowledge of the system, may be deemed as innovation, acculturation, or actual musical change (Blacking 1977: 19).

The gauge of musical phenomena is in fact musical change and not simply alteration of musical patterns (Blacking 1977:19-21). This major premise is where an

approach to musical alteration in MCC NOVA performance can be considered. As a departure for analyzing these performances we may adopt Blacking's seven criteria for change that may provide helpful in moving closer to elucidating this problem.

- a) "There is an audible change in the norms of performance and audiences". Change within MCC NOVA ritual music performances is a shift in the expectations placed on the Christian musical corpus. This change is textual, performative, and cognitive as musics are stylized to represent an ever growing and changing LBGTQ priority applicable to the Christian archetype. This value has two main outcomes. First, music serves as a vehicle for describing the cognitive shifts either from the perspective of the individual or the belief systems of the community. Beliefs in this case are not solely relegated to preconceived meanings "about" music but are relative to musical expectations and ultimately performance aesthetics. *How* music is performed audibly and/or visually as a phenomenon with cognitive value is the second more elusive outcome which will carry with it meaning about latent beliefs and as well as social normalities.
- b) "Change exists when audible change is observed from an outsider, and not necessarily by the performers or the audiences themselves. This change is presumably measured by objective means". Musical events at MCC NOVA are altered and musical sound is dependant on meanings imbedded in the community. Musical audibility plays only a small part in establishing the *gender-religious* expectations of the community in that familiar and historical sounds are not simply developmental recollections. Known musics are recast into a body of

knowledge which includes the present corporate climate though may have little newly inserted audible characteristics as experienced from the insider's point of view. The effect this climate has on performative outcomes from an outsider's view may be more overt as seemingly minute details of performance are amplified. This climate is a culmination of belief systems where musical sound is one of many operative facets. To those who participate with an outsider's perspective audibility may be the greatest alteration, though to the internal participant this may be less intrinsic than the underlying meanings associated with its performances.

- c) "Technical developments in musical instruments or musical devices, the voice included, may have more to do with the production of music and less to do with the actual music consequence of sound phenomena". A cognitive approach to musical technology is one that alters traditional considerations of the musical *voce* as simply audible to one which is multivocal. Other *voce* of musical meanings exist which stylize the musical content by their presence as other ritual anomalies. These may be rooted in beliefs whose presence affects sound production (i.e. newly inspired texts). These may be social priorities which favor unity over setting individuals apart (in the form of musical form or performance requirements). They may prescribe a certain approach to textual sentiments which require changes, or they may dictate certain genres as more suitable to the age and gender demographics of the group. The musical *voce* is both audible (derived from musical sounds, texts, instrumentation, and ensemble development) and non-

audible (bespeaking internal dialogues of self-awareness on the personal and social levels).

- d) "Changes in techniques used for the production of music, although they may not change the musical sound phenomena, will eventually play a part in the alteration of music production". The techniques of musical production in MCC NOVA performances are both audible and cognitive. They strive to incorporate known and unknown aspects of culture and personal awareness. Belief is viewed as the vocabulary which guides the musical performances and directs decision-making about its appropriateness. These criteria stem from the triangulation of three main components of the overall belief system: musical sound expectations, gender priorities, and religious beliefs rooted in a core value system. These components drive the musical process of change interdependently and interdependently.
- e) "Change in conceptualization of existing musics may reinterpret already existing understandings of the sound phenomena". Critical to the interpretation of music's role in MCC rituals is the intentionality of musicians and participants as they travel from one dynamic awareness to another. This dynamism affects participant's self-awareness while it is affected by their own interior dialogues. From the audible standpoint, artifacts of religious experience are reinterpreted by refashioning them into suitable expressions of a community searching for its own identity. The musical components are performed with a *gender-religious* priority in mind and the particular aesthetics which they embody are an extension of this awareness. From the cognitive standpoint, even unchanged sounds, bespeak



change as they are recapitulated into a new social setting. In essence, meaning in traditional church musics may be reassigned to fit a new conceptualization. New musics may at times achieve this outcome in more pronounced ways as they reshape the religious environment.

- f) “A change in the societal use, but not necessarily in the technical performance, may or may not be accompanied by changes in attitudes about the music”. The cognitive element of MCC NOVA ritual musics is an operative force in interpreting appropriateness and meaning in LBGTQ public performance. Even seemingly similar musical elements, when displaced in the arena of a *gender-religious* environment, are transformed by their inclusion stressing ownership, freedom, and an evolution from previous situation of marginalization and suppression. Therefore, musical styles and styles of performance which previously may have been deemed inappropriate due to their symbolic meaning or by their aesthetics become appropriate based on their contribution to recasting a *gender-religious* sentiment. The difference in interpretation is based on the ownership what may surface from the use of musics in this new context.
- g) “Transformation of the music making process may include biological and physical ramification, some of which may not be fully understood”. Within this expectation, we may consider functions of LBGTQ lifestyle and world view which change and test expectations of music-making. Social structure, musical structure, meaning, and their relationship to the question of gender affect the decision-making process. Musical expressiveness and agency prescribe

appropriateness in values and beliefs about music structures and the performer's roles. More specifically, gendered performances of music are within themselves personally and socially diachronic, based on transitional elements in people's awareness about themselves and their gendered status as performers.

Blacking's seven criteria for musical change offer an expanded viewpoint on the dynamic nature of music and an approach for analysis of transformation as evidenced through a variety of musical possibilities. They serve to expand the method of the research question to include audible as well as non-audible descriptions of the musical experience. This stated, Blacking's criteria also allow for a consideration of the human experience of music-making as critical to the musical outcome. The discussion of change in ritual musics of MCC NOVA will be an inquiry into the discreet and overtly stated aesthetics of music as they apply to the creation of a public performance of identity. In some cases the musical material is altered and change is a matter of stylizing the sound media. At other times, established and traditional church musics are contextualized to fit an inventive *gender-religious* priority.

### **Familiarity and Growth in the Ritual Music Context**

#### **Constructing a lens for considering appropriateness in light of MCC NOVA community belief**

Negotiating historical hegemonies and newly constructed aesthetics in the context of musical performance is a process of defining musical parameters. Assessing the ability of music at MCC NOVA to construct local identity is a matter of evaluating the function

music plays in shaping and expressing the complexity of MCC's community life. The musical elements of MCC NOVA afford participants the opportunity to fashion an enterprise of becoming more authentically LGBTQ within a Christian context. Music is a vehicle for expansion of horizons, allowing for a drum, a song, a dance, a CD, etc. to become the muse from which freedom to express selfhood occurs. Musical performance is a binding entity in worship which provides for inspiration, emotivity, participation, movement, excitement, motivation, etc. "Musicians" and "non-musicians" contribute to the leavening of the worship experience where all participate unilaterally; though functioning differently and with differing effectual causes. The processes by which this worship experience is constructed and the means by which musical elements are manipulated are subject to complex decision-making supported by the church's core values, performance politics, abilities, ritual practice, preferences, traditions, and desires. To this end, the aesthetics of music rely on a number of factors relative to the contextualization of music's place in the overall social structure.

The question of appropriateness with regards to music and the decision-making process of constructing a LGBTQ musical tradition is a complex one. As has already been mentioned, the outsider's interpretation of MCC NOVA may assess little difference between musical choices and performances compared to other mainstream churches. In the details and in the micro-occurrences the intentionality and contextual validity of the musical product - the essentials of communal self identity - is constructed. Musical performance at MCC NOVA occurs within the realm of diverse and contributing settings where differences in context all strive to compliment the overarching conceptual

aesthetics of what it means to be a religious community within an identity-oriented process of becoming more unique. The many musical occurrences provide for a wide spectrum of meaning and serve to articulate the complexity of the community in terms of their diverse beliefs and states of becoming. As we shall see, choral anthems, electric guitars, African drumming, and other ritual music activities, are complementary entities within one musical whole which strives to express the ever-emerging self-awareness of the community in light of a gender specific priority to be accepted and empowered.

**The Singing Environment: The establishment of familiarity and growth (The MCC NOVA Choir)**

The MCC NOVA choir provides for a variety of traditional and non-traditional expressions which represent the community's corpus of known, newly-created, and learned musical traditions. The 12-15 members of the group serve as a social stabilizer whose musical performances lead corporate prayer in the Sunday service and other events. Through inspirational anthems, hymnody, and service music they provide a presence that establishes a musical priority in worship while also shaping and disclosing the developing ideological tendencies of the community (See Figure 6, below).

Figure 6. The Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia Choir.



The choral experience is an arena where ideological and traditional expressions are explored and tested. The MCC NOVA Choir allows for a negotiation of an acceptable corpus of tradition which is rooted in both mainstream church experiences and in newly discovered applications.

Their support of general congregational participation serves to establish musical norms and simultaneously triggers musical change through its interjection of a variety of musical styles over time. In the time period in which this research was conducted (2001-2004), this group music's landscape included prerecorded MIDI accompaniments of known hymns found in the church's music source-The New Century Hymnal (1995)<sup>18</sup> with little emphasis on stylizing service oriented musics. Over time they explored new choral genres from major Christian traditions with piano accompaniment. Instrumental additions of various sorts became commonplace and experimentation with non-Anglo/European musics became more desirous, inclusive of Native American, Caribbean, and African instrumentations. They have also entertained new musical styles in the context of newly created and non-traditional worship services.

For several years, the MCC NOVA Choir has marked the changing landscape of musical appropriateness within corporate worship at MCC while simultaneously attempting to respond to the stylistic tendencies which seem to match the growing and diverse community. The choir provides musics with its roots in Baptist, Catholic,

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<sup>18</sup> This communal resource is the pew book used for congregational singing. The book is the result of a project by the United Church of Christ which compiled what the editors call "the metaphor of centuries of hymnody" expressing a variety of Christian and International songs and service musics. A major thrust of the compilers was to create a hymn source which offered traditional hymnody in the context of modern awareness. The use of this book by many MCC's is mainly due to its inclusion of gender language in its theologies.

Methodist, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and other Christian traditions as well as the myriad of ideological tendencies found therein.

The famous pan-Christian hymn, “Shall We Gather at the River” proved to be an amazing example of the diversity found in the choir. Not only was it a well known hymn, it represented for many of them a perfect intersection between church histories and the politics of hope embedded in the MCC outlook. Interestingly, its meaning was equally dependant on the style of performance as it was on the text of the piece.

One Sunday, as an experiment, I thought I would lead the group in a more sympathetic and legato rendition of the piece—much like that of a Coplandean interpretation of *Simple Gifts*. Their willingness to perform the piece in this new style was admirable; however after about ten minutes of rehearsal, the question was emphatically asked “why are we singing this so slowly?” In response I added my own admissions about the loveliness of the text and the beauty of the harmonies when done in a more sentimental fashion. As I learned, the traditional interpretation of the hymn as a rally song was a strong and important aesthetic in the minds of the choir almost unilaterally. They felt that it wasn’t “Baptist” enough the other way and quickly convinced me that it wasn’t within the expectations of how the piece should be performed. The piece was coincidentally sung as they had known it from past experience on that Sunday (Field Diary).

It serves to reinforce appropriate examples of these traditions while excripting the tendencies which do not coincide with the core values of the Metropolitan Community Church’s politics, spiritual beliefs, and gender sensibilities.

The challenge of language is a constant at MCC NOVA. “How shall we call our God” from an old tune from childhood often comes to mind. For these folks, it’s a way of life. I not really ever sure what will come next. What words will entice a sense of frustration or disillusionment. The natural tendency is to change the “he’s” and “his” to “God.” But every once in a while I’m surprised at the creativity which surfaces. Part of the problem with much of the hymnody which appears in the New Century Hymnal is that its stylized by editors who try as they might, tend to change text to fit priorities of inclusion, gender diversity, or to expand theological meaning to include less celebrated attributes of Christianity, world religions, or nature. Song tunes sometimes get bruised in the process when happens as the singer forces the foreign text to fit the tune. Since the NCH is the common hymnal these edited texts are rarely challenged because it would require changing the text for the entire community which would be logistically impossible.

What always astounds me is that the very issue of text changing is something which brings out the internal dialogue from the group. For some, it’s a matter-of-fact, and the responsibility of us all to support inclusivity. For others it’s a very intellectual act which, against better judgment, they go ahead with it, knowing that its what they ‘should’ do. For others, it brings out the very basics of religious exploration in a simple “why don’t we just do it the way its written?!” For these members, frustration and complacency seem to go together as they find that adhering to the historical artifact of hymn texts is much less work. In all, the process seems to illustrate the very core of music making at MCC NOVA which is one of constant searching and questioning about what one is handed down and the choices one has to make to make music meaningful (Fieldnotes).

In short, the MCC NOVA choir provides a template for change where over time, a map of communal sensibilities is performed, both musically and ideologically.

### **Sung Genres: The act of cultural interpretation and alteration**

The expressions of corporate identity are often intrinsically linked to the musical environment performed. As a liturgical community, much of the musical element in MCC worship is rooted in sung forms and many of these are used as congregational songs. As with most other churches, materials for this enterprise are determined by the selection of hymnals and resources available for communities that employ metric structures requiring the use of printed music as a vehicle for mass availability. This is no different from other North American liturgical singing churches. Congregational singing is something which serves as a complex and critical interpretation of the ideological mind of the corporate community. This stated, the selection of congregational songs is directly related to the interpretation of the community's stance on who they are and want to be in the overall picture of religious interpretation. Establishing this stance is achieved through a variety of methods. Each provides for a different interpretation of musical change and how music serves as an identifier of beliefs.

Alterations of known musics may take different forms. The most noticeable alteration of traditional musical examples is found in textual change which reorients hymnic language to express more palatable sentiments (partly through the NCH edition and at other times through a more organic process of rescripting).<sup>19</sup> *Amazing Grace*,

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<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that the following analyses of the NCH are meant to provide the reader with an introduction to the research question of alteration on its most elemental scale. The choices and methods of

found in the common hymnal is presented in its traditional form including its traditional text and for the most part is unaltered from its historical religious source (Figure 7, below).

Figure 7. *Amazing Grace*, (tune: AMAZING GRACE, text: John Newton, 1779 vs. 1-4, A Collection of Sacred Ballads, 1790, vs. 5) NCH#547

1. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see.
2. Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believe!
3. Through many dangers, toils and snare, I have already come;  
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.
4. My God has promised good to me, whose word my hope secured;  
God will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.
5. When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun.

From a musical standpoint the popularity of the hymn tune acts symbolically to draw the participants into a traditional musical experience where the piece serves to recollect the developmental church experiences. The text, though seemingly relevant to the LBGQT condition, with its allusions to reparation, hope, promise, and protection, draws more cognitive information from historical importance than it does through its textual meaning. This may be partly due to the fact that as an archetype, it is only one of many options available for this historic tune. It provides for a bridge between individuals who embrace MCC NOVA priorities while simultaneously maintain affinity with their religious history.

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compiling the NCH and not within the decision-making processes of MCC NOVA, however, the adoption of its use is intentional. It provides the community with an alternative to the hymn tradition as it provides a more modern and accessible translation of many hymns of the Christian corpus.



A reorienting of the text can be seen the alteration of *Unite and Join Your Cheerful Songs*. In this version of the same hymn tune, the subscript of MCC NOVA's propensity for inclusion and religious/gendered freedom is more pronounced. Textual meaning is reoriented to express a more palatable sentiment as it de-emphasizes brokenness and incompleteness and emphasizes unity in light of praise. It focuses on ecclesial freedom to choose right praxis in light of historical theological interpretation (Figure 8, below).

Figure 8. *Unite and Join Your Cheerful Songs*, (tune: AMAZING GRACE, text: Revelations 5:9-14, James O'Kelly, 1816) NCH#617

1. Unite and join your cheerful songs, with angels 'round the throne;  
Ten thousand thousand are their tongues, yet all their joys are one.
2. This is the way the church should strive, in harmony below;  
As members of one body live, one Sovereign shall you know.
3. Worthy the Lamb, the angels say, to be exalted thus;  
Amen, amen the saints reply, the Lamb was slain for us.
4. Assist us, all above the sky, on earth, and on the seas;  
Unite and raise God's honors high, in hymns of endless praise.

These examples serve as a subtle example of alterations which are commonplace in MCC NOVA hymnody. In comparison to the *Amazing Grace* (Figure 7, p.155), the language in the second example (Figure 8, above) suggests a more positive interpretation of the relationship between God's role in salvation and human agency. In the first example, the text provides for a depiction of salvation rooted in a focus on human brokenness, the second example describes the relationship between God and humanity on the plane of divinization and ultimate joy. Though neither provides for a blatant description of a gendered consciousness, it does provide for an important and subtle shift

in the understanding of a *gender-religiosity* which values the building up of the human state, rather than a focus on human brokenness. This tendency is a hallmark in alteration of hegemonies on many levels of MCC worship.

Finally, the same hymn tune appears in another form to include an interpretation beyond the Western music tradition. Stephen W. Holmes' edition of *Onuniyan tehanl waun (Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound)*, translated into Lakota, allows for a furthering of a symbolism in melody, harmony, and text to include one which acculturates the tune into a more non-European-oriented interpretation. As in many examples in the NCH, the use of non-English language expands the historical *ordo* of songs to include non-European symbolism thus widening the experience of church structure, ideology, and society. In some cases, language is more familiar to American sensibilities (*Holy, Holy, Holy/ Santo, Santo, Santo*, text and music, Anon. Argentina, NCH#793). In other cases, language is more foreign to North American congregations (i.e. Hawaiian, Swahili, and Zulu). In this case, the Lakota language provides a break from tradition of developmental churches and allows for the known tune to embody a more expanded interpretation of church even though the language is not understood by the participants (Figure 9, below).

Figure 9. *Onuniyan tehanl waun (Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound)*,(stanza 1-4, John Newton, 1779; alt.; st. 5 A Collection of Sacred Ballads, 1790, Lakota translation, Stephen W. Holmes, 1987)

1. O-nu-ni-yan te-hal wa-un, Ma-shi-cha tke wan-ni, Wo-wash-te kin I-ye-wa-ye, wi-cho-ni wan-bla-ke.
2. Wo-wash-te he chan-te ma-hel, wash-ag-ma-ya-yin kte, Wo-wi cha-ke kin un le-hanl, o-a-pe kin wan-na.
3. O-ta kig-le te-ke wan el, eg-na I-ma-cha-ge, Wo-wash-te kin hel ma-wa-ni, Wash-te o-ma-ju-la.
4. O-to-ka-he-ya chi-ya-tan, o-hinm-ni-yan ya-un, Wa-kan-tan-ka wo-wi-tan kin, yu-ha ma-wa-ni kte.
5. Wa-kan-tan-ka ya-tan un-we, Wa-kan-tan-ka ya-tan, Wa-kan-tan-ka ya-tan un-we, wa-kan-tan-ka a-men.

The alteration of texts to serve the needs of ideologies operative in the community is one method of supplying an alternative to the traditional structures of musical performance. By their mere inclusion they embody an association and solidarity with other marginalized peoples as one member has testified (see p.45) when referring to African American spirituals. Within this tactic, language is superimposed to provide alteration of identifiable hegemonies. In fact, of the examples shown above, the musical style and contour of the tunes are static allowing for a known style and timbre to give way to an expanded interpretation through altered text.

In a final example of hymn alteration, *Faith of Our Fathers (the Martyrs)* is a fitting example of a style of alteration which most commonly supplies a developed sense of theology more fitting to the MCC NOVA sensibility. The second verse of the hymn is shown from different sources to prove the point. Each is meant to represent a different religious tradition and its treatment of the historical text (Figure 10, below).

Figure 10. ST. CATHERINE L.M. with refrain (88 88 88), Various sources.

- 1        2. Faith of our Fathers! God’s great power shall win all nations unto to thee;  
 2        And through the truth that comes from God mankind shall then be truly free:  
 3        Rf: Faith of our fathers, holy faith! We will be true to thee till death.  
        (The Hymnal H Presbyterian Church in the United States, 1946, 1952)
- 4        2. Faith of our Fathers! We will strive to win all nations unto thee;  
 5        And through the truth that comes from God. Mankind shall then be truly free.  
 6        Rf: Faith of our fathers, holy faith! We will be true to thee till death.  
        (The Methodist Hymnal MH The Methodist Publishing House, 1964,1966)
- 7        2. The martyrs, chained in prisons dark, Were still in heart and conscience free;  
 8        And blest would be their children’s fate, If they, like them, should die for thee.  
 9        Rf: Faith of our fathers, holy faith! We will be true to thee till death.  
        (The Lutheran Book of Worship LBW Augsburg Publishing House, 1979)
- 10       2. Our fathers, chained in prisons dark, Were still in heart and conscience free:  
 11       And truly blest would be our fate, If we like them, should die for thee.  
 12       Rf: Faith of our fathers, holy faith! We will be true to thee till death.  
        (Worship W [Roman Catholic Resource] GIA Publications, 1986)
- 13       2. Martyrs confined in prisons bleak were still in heart and conscience free;  
 14       and no less blessed will be our fate if we, like them, live faithfully.  
 15       Rf: Faith of our martyrs, living faith! We would be true in life and death.  
        (New Century Hymnal NCH [MCC Resource], 1995)

There are several important aspects of the NCH treatment of the hymn and its effect on the interpretation of the song’s theological impact in comparison to the others. It should be noted that *Faith of the Martyrs* as in the NCH, appears as an appropriate addition to the historical corpus of material due to its popularity and interfaith importance as a commonly found congregational hymn. It is not however commonly used in worship at MCC NOVA, although much of the male language referencing human beings is rectified in the NCH. Thus, we can presume that as a Christian artifact, the hymn in the MCC NOVA context does not provide for a connection with the mainstream Christian faith tradition by its presence in the NCH. The alteration of its title suggests less of a historical allusion to tradition and the “founding” quality of historical Christendom.

Rather, the allusion lends itself to a historical consciousness which includes “all” who face imprisonment or “confinement”. This sentiment is stylized in the first line of both the (Lutheran Book of Worship) LBW and NCH (7, 13) though in the NCH it is broadened to enhance the notion of confinement over imprisonment thus making it more a symbolic sharing of human oppression than a historical recollection. A more important point is the decentralization of God as an active agent in the overall salvation script. In the first two examples (The Hymnal, H and The Methodist Hymnal MH, lines 2, 5) God’s role in “mankind’s” destiny is paramount. In examples 3 and 4 (The Lutheran Book of Worship, LBH and Worship, W), this similar sentiment is carried less specifically through God’s design. It is in the NCH where God’s role is replaced by a notion of “faithfulness” allowing for an expansion of the idea of spiritual faith to be more inclusive of other types of loyalty, possibly interpretative of human loyalty to self as well as other. This example, though not part of the regular worship hymnody of MCC NOVA, is important as it shows an evolution of theological sentiment over time and through different traditions. It also highlights an ever growing and increasingly important facet of MCC NOVA religious priorities which strive to create an image of God that is approachable, a partner in human awareness, and is symbolic of the a wide variety of gender inclusions. This stance is one which becomes even more pertinent in the analysis of music and changing sensibilities for it provides insight into the diachronic transition from one aspect of theological interpretation to another as evidenced in changing ritual musics.

In other ways, altering of the historical hymn traditions found in the NCH is more dependent on performative style. Known styles of song are altered to express a more palatable technique of musical interpretation to the community. Less of the cognitive information rests with the text or its theological appropriateness (more often the tactic), but rather the songs are re-newed by a fresher, more contemporary interpretation of the singing style. This type of alteration may be one which focuses on rhythmic syncopation, increased tempo, improvisation in accompaniment, or even changes in the meter. Though text, theology, and sentiment may be directly taken from a developmental context, the reestablished cadence of the piece, physical involvement, overall punctuation of the rhythmic contours, an altered tempo, or instrumental additions serve as a vehicle for stylizing the known tune to include appropriateness to the community's sensibilities.

The purpose of providing the examples above is to highlight the nuances of musical alteration which are the product of an intentional recasting of the familiar. At times, as in Figure 7 ( p.155), the presence of a sung tune serves as a connection with past experiences. Though not unilaterally appreciated for its symbolism by all members, it contributes to a spectrum of diversity which allows for a variety of religious pieties. As in the latter group of examples (*Amazing Grace* and in *Faith of Our Martyrs* (Figs. 8 [p.155], 9 [p.157], & 10, [p.158]), textual alteration allows for a broadening of the human experience to include either a theology more appropriate to MCC NOVA priorities or an expansion of the scope of humanness inclusive of non-familiar cultures. Both seem to strive for a leavening of the human state which by many members' personal histories is a

departure from an interpretation of human existence possibly riddled with memories of oppression and marginalism. As one member states in an interview:

*What I like about the music in worship here is that I'm never really sure what to expect. On day we were going to do "I Want Jesus to Walk with Me" which is a song I know from childhood. It was at the end of the service so I was waiting for it. When we got to the closing song, I was surprised and glad to here the song done in an upbeat way. It was kinda bluesy. People were clapping and swaying. It wasn't what I expected but it was nice. That's what I've grown to expect at MCC NOVA. To be surprised.<sup>20</sup>*

### **Musical forms and changing sensibilities**

Ritual music presents far more complexity as a system of communication than do other forms of ordinary language when we consider that the transfer of information is dependant on many dialects of performance. However, certain linguistic theories can be applied in the analysis of music, in particular are the phenomenological insights about the function of metaphors in language. Jean-Jacques Nattiez has already breached this subject by noting similarities between language and musical structures on the basis of their metaphoric similarities (Nattiez, 1973). Raymond Firth has stated that symbolic activity ascribes to a series of categories that have at their root metaphorical structures (Firth 1973: 74-75). By definition, metaphors embody a dual reference of object and symbolic representation. The mechanism of metaphor is important in all ritual contexts for it allows for chosen human behaviors to incite a depth of meaning beyond their apparent "surface" value. Metaphoric systems incite a type of "symbolic chain" of descriptive attributes. When viewed as contributing to a whole symbolic system performers and non-performers are affected in the way they may interpret meaning of any symbol or metaphor in the entire system. This suggests that participants may be in a transformational place where

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<sup>20</sup> (Interview: 60103.01)

the meanings of a particular metaphor are changed because of a reaction to another metaphor in the system. This social embodiment of awareness allows for this state of liminality, the “betwixted and between” transition from one field of awareness and being to another (See Turner, 1982: 24-27). Considering the symbolic value of performance is an analytical approach which deciphers the human condition as an object through which deeper meaning about the human status (for our purposes, genderedness) may be obtained.

Such analytical mechanisms allow for a deepening of the macro-meaning of musical systems *via* the description of micro-characteristics of human behavior. Analysis is, after all, concerned “with the sorting out of structures of significance, establishing codes, and somewhat misleading expressions” (Geertz, 1973: 9). To justify an outcome of greater importance, symbolic sound actions within ritual allow for a description of gender as surface material (as having an immediate outcome) as well as point to a “thick description” of its importance to the cultural system (future consequences) (Geertz, 1973: 6, Feld, 1984: 383-409). In other words, for example, if we consider the inclusification of texts in hymnody as representative of MCCer’s interpretations of themselves and a god whom they construct to be gender “neutral”, we are considering firstly its surface value as pointing to an immediate interpretation *vis a vis* the metaphorical language. In this case, as shown in Figures 7 and 8, the shifting theological sentiments may describe the persons who utter them as well as the ways in which God acts. A “thicker” description may interpret these alterations as descriptions of a world view and a way of being which are unique fostering consequences (i.e. how one acts, performs their own identity, and



strives for to interpret the world with a particular gendered stance). These are phenomenological insights. They occur most uniquely within the musical setting where there is transference from historically meaningful musical material (historical texts and the cognitive properties of familiar sounds) tempered by a repositioning of these metaphors within the entire system.

A method of describing the significance of the micro-events of ritual and in understanding their effects on gender construction is uncharted territory within ethnomusicological method and analysis. This is due in part on the focus of ethnomusicologists who have placed sound performances in relations to other non-audible performative behaviors as a primary subject of study. In fact, it would seem that sound reproduction and stylization has been of critical concern when describing gender possibilities while ‘non-musical’ (using the term lightly) aesthetics have received a secondary treatment. In keeping with the notion of a ‘musical gender,’ other more descriptive techniques may be in need of closer consideration if we are to provide more congruent and deep descriptions of the place of gender in identity construction.

Though the alteration of musics to fit sensibilities of MCC NOVA is commonplace, it is important to note that a person’s transition from historical and developmental church experiences (with which we may include texts and sounds) to this more intentional stylized one does not represent the translation of one static experience into another. No church tradition, regardless of its approach to ritual, remains static in the interpretation of its own rituals. This is greatly due to what has already been shown. The cognitive elements involved in interpreting meaning in ritual musics are highly dependant

on the changing sensibilities of the community. These sensibilities may be at odds with other religious factions or theo-ecclesial interpretations. They may be reactionary or in other cases restorationist in approach. In fact, to interpret any tradition statically would not accurately describe change which occurs either over time or in the context of local church innovations. The translation of developmental hegemonies to MCC sensibilities are only one aspect of change. More important to this discussion is a change in sensibilities within MCC NOVA even over the short period of time during this research.

**Alteration over time: a diachronic of changing sensibilities**

In the latter part of 2001, amidst a growing trend to expand the musical nature of all aspects of Sunday worship (not just hymn singing), a reoccurring congregational anthem became placed at the time of offering where elements for the communion table are prepared and the weekly collection is taken. This sung music replaced instrumental music (mainly piano playing) which typically accompanied the actions in an attempt to create a more active role on the part of the congregation. *As the Grains of Wheat* (1990) [NCH#783] by Marty Haugen was chosen to amplify the Eucharistic nature of the communion table. In the estimation of the MCC NOVA Worship Committee, this sentiment had been slightly lacking in the regular ritual *ordo*. By including the piece, they hoped to preface the communion table prayer which followed within a more intentional theological context. It would also serve as a vehicle for greater involvement of the community through active singing in the preparation rites.

The refrain/verse piece (text seen below) draws on the unity of all people through the metaphorical relationship between “gathered grains of wheat” and “people from all

the ends of the earth” situating the communion about to be shared as a unifying ritual action much like that typical to the process of bread making (Figure 11, below).

Figure 11. *As the Grains of Wheat*, by Marty Haugen, NCH#783.

Refrain: As the grains of wheat once scattered on the hill were gathered into one to become our bread; so may all your people from all the ends of earth be gathered into one in you.

1. As this cup of blessing is shared within our midst, may we share the presence of your love
2. Let this be a foretaste of all that is to come when all creation shares this feast with you.

It should be noted that when this piece was inserted into the regular worship of the community, the priority was on theological contextualization. As a community made up of several diverse and ideologically different developmental churches, arriving at unanimity on theological matter is not only rare, it cuts across the core values of MCC NOVA supporting and empowering theological diversity. The interests were to define without restricting, a theological imperative. The text makes no mention of salvation and/or the role of Christ in the process of church communion. Rather, symbolically speaking, the text offers a myriad of concomitant elements directly related to MCC NOVA sensibilities of inclusion, love, unity, ministry, and future hope. An even deeper metaphorical analysis could show that diversity is a major theme of the song. However, within the time that this piece was used it was clear that these elements were secondary to its originally intended meaning as a corporate reinforcement of an otherwise lacking theological scope in ritual.

Over time, and with a change in the chosen piece for this portion of the Sunday service, an opportunity to observe a more intentional alteration of the theological sentiment became apparent. In the change from *As a Grains of Wheat* to another Marty

Haugen piece, *We Remember*, a more intentional theological interpretation of the offering was put forth shifting the emphasis on the memorial of Eucharistic celebration. Though less spiritually elastic than the former piece, *We Remember* gave way to a more melodic singing style and a reorienting of the offering experience to a more intentionally inclusive theological sentiment. This relevance focused on an offering-sacrifice-celebration overtone embodying greater ownership over the Eucharistic rite (Figure 12, below).

Figure 12. *We Remember*, by Marty Haugen, Gather Comprehensive GC#593.<sup>21</sup>

593 We Remember

Refrain

us to your

We re - mem - ber how you loved us to your death.

you are with us

and still we cel - e - brate, for you are here;

you when you come

and we be - lieve that we will see you when you come

in your glo - ry. We re - mem - ber, we

Last time to coda

cel - e - brate, we be - lieve.

Verses

1. Here, a mil - lion wound - ed souls are  
2. Now we re - cre - ate your love, we  
3. Christ, the face of great "A - men" we  
4. See the face of Christ re - vealed in

year - ing just to touch you and be healed,  
bring the bread and wine to share a meal,  
all the hopes and dreams of ev - 'ry heart,  
ev - 'ry per - son stand - ing by your side.

Gath - er all your peo - ple, and  
Sign of grace and mer - cy, the  
Peace be - yond all tell - ing, and  
Gift to one an - oth - er, and

D.C. # Coda

hold them to your heart,  
pres - ence of the Lord, Gc D  
free - dom from all fear,  
tem - ples of your love.

© 1980, Marty Haugen, N 1850  
Text: Marty Haugen, G 1471  
© 1980, GIA Publications, Inc.

<sup>21</sup> The alteration of language which de-emphasizes patriarchal interpretations of God is seen here in several places. 1) "When you com in your glory, Lord" is changed to leave off the final "Lord". The music remains unchanged as the word "glory" is carried over the tied rhythm leading to the next measure (system 4). 2) In the third verse of the song, "Christ, the Father's great 'Amen' is changed and replaced with "Church's" (system 6). 3) The final words of the second verse "presence of the Lord" are changed to "the presence of our God". In all these examples, language is changed to inclusify the experience of God as being neither male or female, having gender attributes of either, but rather to neutralize a gender quality about God. In the second two examples, this tactic also changes the relationship with God to be one which is more possessive and collective to the church experience, rather than separate from it.

*We Remember* illustrates two noticeable shifts in the conscious application of MCC NOVA priorities to musical stylization. First, performatively, the piece allowed for a more contemporary<sup>22</sup> musical style which capitalizes on a syncopated and improvisational rhythmic piano accompaniment giving a more modern “feel” to the ritual act. By the alteration of verses, defined by the time needed to complete the ritual act, textual sentiment becomes secondary to the musical properties of style. Guitar and instrument playing is more achievable as is the ability for singers to switch vocal parts and to perform solos and duets during the verses. In essence, though theologically more static than in the first piece, the musical properties became a cognitive and progressive movement from a more metrically defined participation (in *As the Grains of Wheat*) into a more melodic and expressive one with a contemporary sound.

The second important observation is that with the adoption of this piece into the repertoire came the opportunity for musicians to directly affect the theological interpretation brought on by the stylization of language to fit MCC NOVA gender sensitive theological priorities. As seen in Figure 8 p.155, changes to the text proved to express the musicians’ need for a more inclusive interpretation of the politics of theological order. This was done in the very common act of deemphasizing the masculine and patriarchic language to describe God and Jesus Christ.

Both of these examples draw on two distinct but related realities. Musical style and genre can be intrinsically linked and/or independent from textual sentiment when

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<sup>22</sup> We may interpret contemporary here as an alternative to the traditional hymns and songs found both within the standard repertoire of MCC NOVA musics as well in comparison to the corpus of historical hymn inherited from mainstream traditions.

considered metaphorically. Style and text, as in the first example (Figure 11, p.166) can operate independently to provide suitable musical-ritual meaning. Though stylistically more metric and static, the text in this case provides the appropriateness, while the musical style remains secondary to achieving meaningful placement within the service. On the other hand, even when textual symbolism is more descriptive and less palatable in general, as in the second example (Figure 12, p.167), the opportunity to stylize textual thought is directly connected to the music's ability to handle textual change without harming the melodic contour, for instance. In short, the musical style operates almost independently as a metaphorical conveyor of appropriateness which bespeak a more contemporary musical sound in comparison.

Within the last year of this research another piece had been inserted in this ritual place. Here, the mechanisms described above occur in a theological elasticity that is operative within a musical frame of contemporary soundings. *There is Acceptance for You*, by Janine Price, reminiscent of a pop-Christian style, embodies a musical sound which draws on musical aesthetics less used in mainstream liturgical churches. Its complicated rhythm and meter coupled with a progressive bridge to a +m2 modulation in the final refrain allows for a singing style which departs from the somewhat straightforward congregational type found in the first two examples. The voices provide both a ballad quality as well as an almost gospel-feel in the course of the song. Furthermore, the ability to reorient the language to depict sentiments more acceptable to marginalized persons shows how in this example priorities for both a relevant theo-

ecclesial sentiment and an authentic musical style act in concert with each other (meas. 6, 9, 13, 31-32, 34, 37, 41, 43, & 46) (Figure 13, below).

Figure 13. Excerpt from *Acceptance for You*, by Janine Price, PraiseCharts.com.

The image displays a musical score for the song "Acceptance For You" by Janine Price, arranged by Mark Cole. The score is presented in two pages, labeled "Pg. 1 of 2" and "Pg. 2 of 2".

**Page 1 (Measures 1-25):**

- Tempo:**  $\text{♩} = 66$
- Instrumentation:** Rhythm and Vocals (Rhy/Vcl), Flute Cue.
- Lyrics:**

There is ac-  
 cep-tance for you at the ta-ble There is ac-  
 cep-tance for you no mat-ter who you are the mer-cy of are  
 great-er than your sin- There is ac-cep-tance for you at the ta-  
 ble There is ac- No
- Chords:** E, A/E, E, A/B, B/E, E, A<sup>2</sup>, A/B, B, C<sup>#</sup>, C<sup>#</sup>m<sup>7</sup>, C<sup>#</sup>m<sup>7</sup>/B, A<sup>2</sup>, A/D, D, B/E, E, C, D, E, R/C<sup>#</sup>, C<sup>#</sup>m.
- Annotations:** "unison 1st x", "3rd x to CODA", "Rhy in 1x", "1. 2. E", "set for all", "There Is Acceptance For You..", "Em'".

**Page 2 (Measures 26-46):**

- Lyrics:**

Reach out (reach out) reach out (reach out) reach out (reach out)  
 Reach out (reach out) to All to God There is ac-  
 cep-tance for you at the ta-ble There is ac-  
 cep-tance for you no mat-ter who you are the
- Chords:** E, E, Build (Choir), F/E, Em', A/E, C/F, F, F/A, B<sup>2</sup>, B<sup>2</sup>, B<sup>2</sup>/C, C/F, F, F/A, B<sup>2</sup>, C, C<sup>#</sup>m.
- Annotations:** "CODA", "Build (Choir)", "F/E", "Em'", "C/F", "F", "F/A", "B<sup>2</sup>", "B<sup>2</sup>/C", "C/F", "F", "F/A", "B<sup>2</sup>", "C", "C<sup>#</sup>m".

The themes found within these examples all provide for a description of the many religious aesthetics operative within this community. Though a progression of themes is noticeable, it would be incorrect to presume that alterations of the offering music over time express a development of changing thought. Rather, these act in concert with each other, building onto one another and producing a more complete description over time.

Communal gather expressed in *As the Grains of Wheat*, a theological imperative for celebration in *We Remember*, to a proclamation of acceptance in *Acceptance for You*, all describe a pan-theology based in an awareness of the LGBTQ social situation rooted in a religious realm. In the latter days of this research a final sung piece was introduced which further developed the parallels between social reality and religious reality. Ironically, *We are an Offering*, by Dwight Liles seem to push the combined theologies of a gathered community, rooted in the traditional religious stance of celebration accepting of all people, to an ontology which equates the *gender-religious* reality of MCCers with sacrificial offering (Figure 14, below).

Figure 14. *We Are An Offering*, by Dwight Liles.

We lift our voices, we lift our hands, we lift our lives up to You, we are an offering.  
God use our voices, God use our hands, God, use our lives, they are Yours, we are an offering.  
All that we have, all that we are, all that we hope to be, we give to You, we give to You.  
We lift our voices, we lift our hands, we lift our lives up to You, we are an offering, we are an offering.

The examples above suggest that MCC NOVA worship requires a certain flexibility and license. Members alter their ritual and musical behaviors into relative and meaningful extensions of the beliefs which they hold dear by allowing the musical properties of ritual to speak of the priorities they hold and *hope* to fashion. This is for the most part a conscious choosing of appropriate styles of music-making which coincides with shifts and changes in sensibility. It suggests a dynamism in the growing self awareness of the community.

Music's ability to frame these MCC NOVA sensibilities is also the product of borrowing. While these previous examples show a progression, they are fleeting



reminders of the dynamism which is MCC NOVA social consciousness. Meaning is sometimes assigned to musical utterances, not because of their descriptions of MCC common life, but because of their meaning as showing the similarities MCC NOVA has with other ethnic and religious contexts. In these cases the emphasis is more so on the context of performance than it is the content which musical performances disclose.

**Some comments on musical decision-making in MCC NOVA musics.**

Some important features of the process of decision-making in MCC NOVA musics are worth mentioning. The examples above describe a progression only when viewed within a particular analytic lens. The movement from one song or set of musics to another is not part of a program or intentional evolution. They are the result of many factors ranging from the prescriptions of worship committees, thematic similarities with sermons and liturgical seasons, or simply the need for new service musics when some are overused. Their chronologic progression is based on a series of factors, some common place to all church musics and some particular to MCC NOVA polities. Let us consider this from two opposite poles.

First, in light of similarities with other mainstream churches, many musical decisions are based on the availability of music and bodies of music shared. The New Century hymnal, to use one example, is a favorite among many MCC churches because of its attempt at maintaining inclusive language. It compiles musics of many traditions into a usable pew resource. It facilitates group singing by the access it provides for both musicians and “non-musicians”. In essence, it is a body of music generally accepted as *the* musical source (at least fro MCCers). The Gather Comprehensive hymnal, used

mainly by the choir for anthems, preludes, and service musics would similarly fit into this category. This restriction brought on by the need for printed musics is found in many churches whose musics are published and depend on congregational access to texts, melodies, and harmonies. It also satisfies another seemingly non-musical priority found in many mainstream churches, namely that of copyright licensure. Within the last 20 years, mainstream churches have become keenly aware of the legal ramifications of unauthorized reproduction of copyrighted material for public use. This steers much of the decision-making process in that it regulates the use of musics based on availability of the published form for mass use to be shared between musicians and congregants. Churches who possess either the purchased sources or copyright licensures to use such musics are free to choose how the music is used.<sup>23</sup>

Setting these musical restrictions aside for a moment, we may ask, “how are decisions about the ritual appropriateness of music made?” In an unrestricted environment the answer to this question may be strikingly different especially if the local musicians themselves were the composers or if texts came freely composed from community members. But this is not the case. The musical traditions of MCC NOVA are borrowed traditions which come to the ritual plane from previously experienced or newly discovered situations. Their presence in MCC NOVA rituals is haphazardly adopted and somewhat prescribed by the sources and means available for obtaining music. This does not preclude obtaining music from other sources where copyright legalities are less of an

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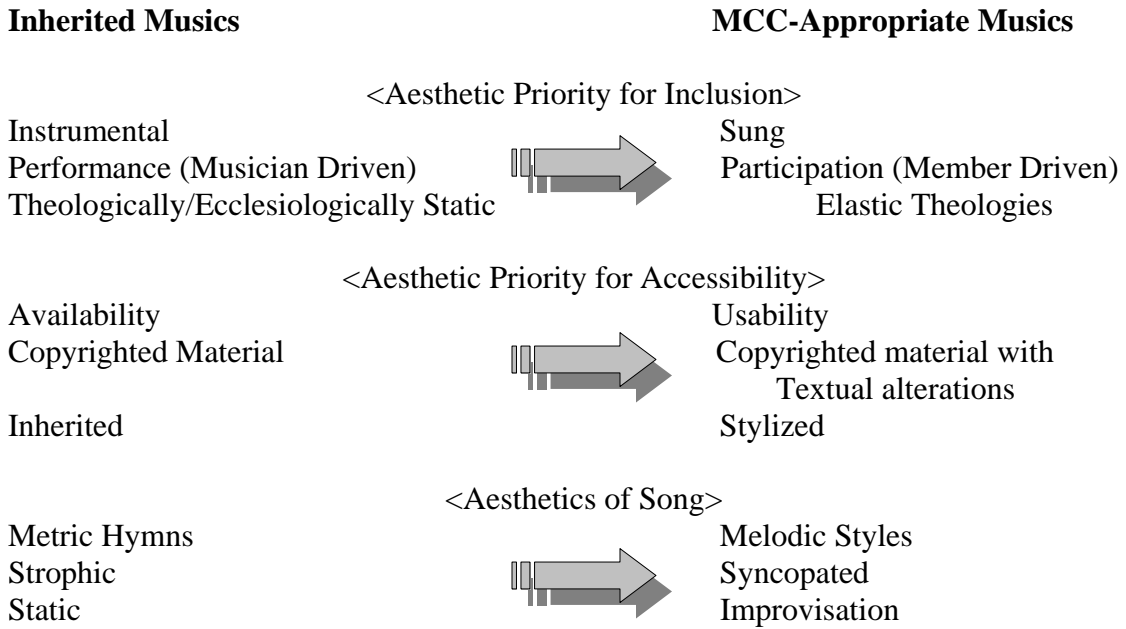
<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that although the liturgical music industry takes seriously copyright infringement. Most all publishers of Church music allow for the alteration of texts as an exception to the copyright regulations. This trend came out of the 1980s and 90s when a growing number of churches began the practice of inclusifying texts to suit their own particular religious aesthetics.

issue (i.e. free sharing of musics). But even in these cases, the process of obtaining these musics are still defined by composers and entities which govern copyrights. This said, it may be more suitable to ask “what are the aesthetics of alteration at play in these inherited bodies of music?”

This brings us to the opposite pole of the discussion. Decisions made about musical choices are the reasonable and stylized interpretations of what alterations need to be made to the musical traditions which the community embraces (with its restrictions) into its own ritual life. I have already mentioned some of these aesthetics: the alteration of language, introduction of alternative (or underscored) theological sentiments, and a gravitation toward modernity in the form of contemporary soundings.

Embedded in these root aesthetics are the decisions being made which are more germane to our discussion. They swing from one pole of musical traditions to another more appropriate one within the guise of a myriad of restrictions embedded in the musical systems which are adopted (Table 5, below).

Table 5. Aesthetic progress from inherited musics to MCC-appropriate musics.



The shifting from one pole to the other is a necessary preoccupation for MCCers for it satisfies four main mechanisms for MCC NOVA musics. First, it allows for the transitioning from one set of priorities embedded in traditional musical systems to be transposed to one which authenticates them into a MCC context. Second, it encapsulates the shared musical histories of its membership into a stylized product of its own making. Third, it enacts ownership through stylization. Fourth, the transition from inherited musics to musics made more appropriate for MCC NOVA rituals is an exposition of their core values.

Decision-making about music therefore encompasses many mechanisms of awareness that have little to do with choosing musical pieces or sentiments. Decision-making is about the process of alteration and stylization and the musical consequences of

making tradition relevant to the greater community. How one title or style of music finds its way into the rituals of MCC NOVA is not a mysterious question. These come from the traditions which feed MCC ritual musics and the bodies of musics this church has acquired. Often decisions are based on the availability of music from a body which is somewhat predefined. How these musics are made to embody MCC NOVA core values is the more illusive question to which the research is devoted and the answer is found in the processes associated with choosing appropriate alterations.

### **The context of performance**

The performance of the standard African-American spiritual, *I Want Jesus to Go with Me*, usually interpreted as a “sorrow song”, is one which has been traditionally performed by soloists and congregations alike to depict a sentiment of abandonment in the context of Negro slavery. Even within African American contexts, the performative style is often one of somberness and solitude. The slow even 4/4 meter, mm=80-84 (often broken by “sighs” of reprieve in the melodic line) has traditionally depicted the plight of one who through solidarity with Jesus’ suffering might survive struggle and oppression. The sentiments in this interpretation may be one of depression, despair, or even helplessness. Meaning in the piece is highly dependent on the performance quality which strives to describe the weightiness of the singer’s oppression or the eventual dependence on Jesus’ aid through shared suffering (Figure 15, p.177).

Figure 15. *I Want Jesus to God with Me*, African American Spiritual, NCH#490

490 *I Want Jesus to Go with Me*  
*African-American spiritual; alt.*

*Unison*

1 I want Je - sus to go with me;  
 2 In my tri - als, O com - fort me;  
 3 When I'm in trou - ble, O stay with me;

I want Je - sus to go with me;  
 In my tri - als, O com - fort me;  
 When I'm in trou - ble, O stay with me;

All a - long my pil - grim jour - ney,  
 When my heart is al - most break - ing,  
 When my head is bowed in sor - row,

O I want Je - sus to go with me.  
 O I want Je - sus to com - fort me.  
 O I want Je - sus to stay with me.

Most spirituals were congregational songs, but such "sorrow songs" as this convey the image of a lone person singing prayerfully to God. The solemnity of this particular spiritual reminds us of the oppression and tragedy with which slavery afflicted so many lives.

Tune: African-American spiritual 888.9.  
 Harv. J. Jefferson Cleveland  
 and Verolga Nix, 1981

*I Want Jesus to Go With Me* is transformed from a “sorrow song” to an anthem of courage and strength by an alteration in the music style. Rather than adopting an even 4/4 meter, the accompaniment is altered to a common meter with weight on the second and fourth beat stressing a break in the melodic contour between shorter textual phrases. Coupled with an increase in the tempo of the piece, mm=132-144, and an improvisational accompaniment which transforms the piece from its somber and tempered spiritual style to one more reminiscent of a jazz riff, the hymn is altered into a congregational song more in line with the community propensity to encourage and support physical awareness

and a modern interpretation of known traditional musics. The importance here is that the transformation of the song is not text-oriented, though the text may clearly be interpreted as having less than a complimentary sentiment to the group. More importantly, the musical style plays an equal part in the establishment of appropriateness.

Part of the interpretation of the corporate self comes from the use of texts and the altering of texts to satisfy certain identity aesthetics operative in the community. At other times, interpretation of self is directly related to styles of music which appropriate either a connection with other parallel cultural conditions or provide for an interpretive stance of worship which is more in line with the LBGTQ social condition. As seen above, this mechanism is one which reorients theological and contextual realities to be more in line with LBGTQ tendencies inherent to the histories of individuals as they have moved from developmental church situations to this more intentional one. Symbolically, music serves as a descriptor where style provides meaning to the performance by association and allows for a subscript of connectedness with a world of oppression and/or a sense of empathy with members of other culture. This reminds that part of the uniqueness of this church experience is one which recognizes solidarity with other marginalized people through a priority for social connectedness between the affluent and the poor as in Figure 16, below.

Figure 16. *Pues si vivimos (In All our Living)* st. 1 Mexican folk hymn, st. 2 Elise S Eslinger, 1983. NCH#499<sup>24</sup>

499

**Pues si vivimos**  
(In All Our Living)

*St. 1, Mexican folk hymn; transl. anon.*  
*St. 2, Elise S. Eslinger, 1983*

*Unison*

1 *Pues si vi - vi - mos, pa-ra Dios vi - vi - mos*  
1 *In all our liv - ing, we be-long to God;*  
2 *God sent Christ Je - sus to be our sha-lom,*

*y si mo - ri - mos, pa-ra Dios mo - ri - mos.*  
*and in our dy - ing, we are still with God;*  
*to show us mer - cy and heal - ing love;*

*Se - a que vi - va - mos o que mu - ra - mos,*  
*So, wheth-er liv - ing, or wheth-er dy - ing,*  
*So in our liv - ing, and in our dy - ing,*

*so - mos del buen Dios, so - mos del buen Dios.*  
*we be-long to God; we be-long to God.*  
*Christ is our sha - lom; Christ is our sha - lom.*

*This anonymous Mexican folk hymn was transcribed by hymnologist Gertrude Sappie after she first heard it sung by two church women visiting California from Mexico. It was published in Celebramos II (1983).*

Tune: PUES SI VIVIMOS *tr.* Anon.; arr. B. C. M., 1988

This connectedness may be simply one which associates the MCC NOVA suburban experience with the multiethnic reality of the North American experience (Figure 17, p.179).

<sup>24</sup> This piece is part of a small but growing bilingual corpus of music used at MCC NOVA. It provides for little new theological interpretation but allows for a connection with third world churches. This piece is often performed with guitars. The prevalent 3<sup>rd</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> harmonic structure creates a sense of Latino musical expression.



Figure 17. *This Little light / This Joy I Have*. African American Spiritual, Arr. Jeffrey Radford, 1993. NCH#524.<sup>25</sup>

524 **This Little Light/This Joy I Have**  
*Mat. 5:14-16* *African-American spiritual*

I This lit-tle light of mine, I'm gon-na let it shine. . . . .  
 I This . . . joy I have, the world did-n't give to me. . . . .  
 I am gon-na let it, let it shine,  
 oh, the world did not give to me.

This lit-tle light of mine, I'm gon-na let it shine.  
 This joy . . . . I have, the world did-n't give to me.

This lit-tle light of mine, I'm gon-na let it shine.  
 This . . . joy I have, the world did-n't give to me.

Hal - le - lu - jah.  
 Hal - le - lu - the

let it shine. . . . let it shine. . . . let it shine. (oh let it shine.)  
 No, the world did-n't give it, the world can't take it a - way.

The texts of these two spirituals may be used interchangeably with the tune This Joy. For an alternate version, this melody may be sung with the accompaniment of "Glory, Glory Hallelujah." A more traditional setting of "This Little Light" is provided with the tune LATTIMER.

Tune: THIS JOY Arr. African-American spiritual Arr. Jeffrey Radford, 1993 See also LATTIMER

It may also have a greater and more political subtext resulting in a reminder of the parallels between LGBTQ social history and other culture's struggles (Figure 18, on page 181).

<sup>25</sup> The gospel standard, performed in traditional style with piano, drums and clapping stands as a standard gospel piece for use at worship. Worshipers are reminded of the African American experience in this easily performed song.



### **Reinforcing and refashioning tradition**

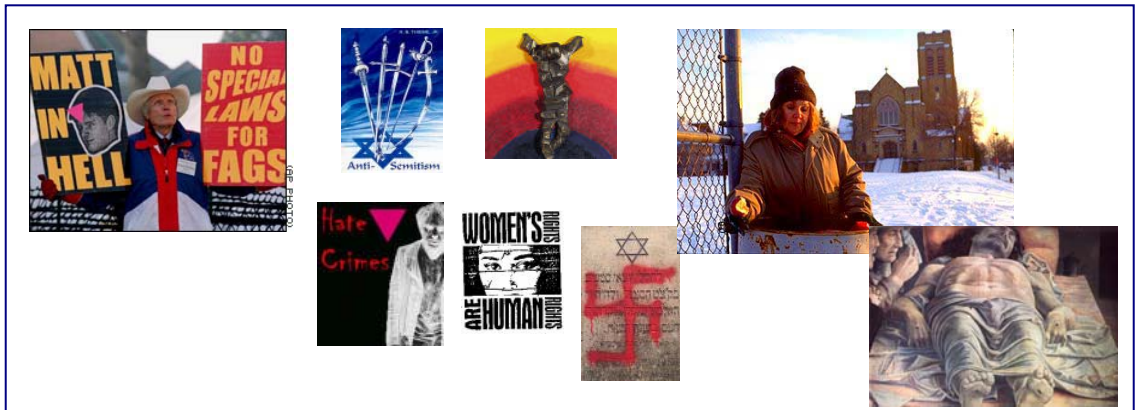
The task of refashioning musical traditions is a function which is not without its own complexities. Providing a traditional music environment for worship carries with it the novelty of innovation as well as the responsibility to provide for a theological platform which reinforces the Christian *ordo* and at times allows for assimilation of culturally defined priorities. Within the Christian tradition there exist aspects of liberation and empathy with other cultural entities that provide for a paralleling of LGBTQ conditions with other global situations having little to do with LGBTQ gender priorities. Thus, Christian theological aesthetics, when interpreted in an open and pliable fashion, do in fact contextualize the LGBTQ social situation especially when they are placed within the framework of a community who strives to associate religiosity with social conditions. This being said, musical style may at times be completely disassociated with a social reality as it is presented in the context of certain theologically relevant religious stances. Therefore, some musical traditions though seemingly unrelated to the LGBTQ *ordo* of worship and not fitting into a progression of aesthetics, may in fact serve as a platform for linking the socially specific context to other more global and mainstreamed religious tendencies.

#### ***Example: Good Friday 2003***

In 2003, the MCC NOVA Choir presented a collage of global awareness in the context of their Good Friday service. The ritual was centered on a modern cantata by Lani Smith called A Service of Shadows (1971) emphasizing the brokenness of humankind in light of the crucifixion. The musical composition, originally designed as a

traditional tenebrae service,<sup>27</sup> was stylized into a multi-media event relating brokenness and suffering in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ into a translation of the world’s suffering and tragedy. The organizers of the service strove to relate the indiscretions of world politics, oppression, poverty, hate, and the like into a statement on the purpose and context of the crucifixion for a modern world. Images from the MCC media portion of the service are shown below (Figure 19, below).

Figure 19. Multi-media images from Good Friday Service (2003).



The composer’s notes include:

It is interesting to note the abundant presence of examples of the elements of human nature and human weakness in the events immediately preceding the crucifixion. Consider, for instance, the betrayal by Judas for a few coins, the failure of the disciplines to stay awake while Jesus prayed in the garden, Peter’s loss of temper in striking out at the high priest’s slave with his sword, Peter’s denial of Jesus, the jealousy on the part of the chief priests that caused them to take action against Jesus in the first place, Pilate’s apparent lack of courage to stand up for a man he felt to be innocent, and finally, the very human desire of Jesus himself to escape the crucifixion.

<sup>27</sup> *tenebrae* (TEN-a-bray; Latin, shadows)- A service of “shadows” is traditionally celebrated on Good Friday which draws on the sorrowful nature of the Crucifixion. “Holy Week service of Morning Prayer (Matins) sung by anticipation the evening before, during which fourteen psalms are sung. As each psalm is sung, another of fifteen candles on a hearse is extinguished until one remains. The remaining light is carried out of the church or hidden from view behind the altar during the singing of the Gospel Cantic and Psalm 51. Then a loud noise is made, and the single candle is brought back into view to signify the resurrection. All leave in silence” (Philip H. Pfatteicher, 1991, *A Dictionary of Liturgical Terms*, Philadelphia, Trinity Press International, 121-122).

And even today, it is not our own human weakness that causes us to betray, deny, convict and crucify Christ, in effect if not in fact?

In our efforts to be better Christians we should all be made aware of this factor in our relationship with Christ so that we might learn to recognize it when it appears. This *Tenebrae* service offers us an opportunity to do so. The text and the music are designed to draw the listener into the action and events that led to the actual crucifixion, and to relate them to the events and action in [his] own life (Lani Smith, *A Service of Shadows*, 1971).

This stylized event focused on a theological interpretation of salvation which recognized the brokenness of human existence to a degree where crucifixion is symbolized as a broken moment in the life of Christ. In essence, the composer relates the human condition at its worst to an interpretation of Jesus' own humanity.

From a musical standpoint, the cantata offered a modern interpretation rarely experienced by this MCC community. This dark and haunting musical situation was a departure from other types of musical forms and texts which more usually had served to lift up a community who traditionally had been torn down by religious conservatism and right-wing theological interpretations. As a musical score, the piece is symbolic of one composer's somewhat marginal, but religiously popular, interpretation of the crucifixion as a salvific event based in the dark reality of subjugation. The composer stresses the human and broken aspects of Jesus' death by references loneliness and sorrow. This not only reorients a depiction of Christ's role in the establishment of salvation but it furthermore underscores an aspect of the Christian experience which is devoid of the deep sense of community and inclusion found in MCC NOVA rituals. The dark and heavy soundscape further highlights this sentiment. This is seen in an excerpt of the cantata in the sixth and final movement (Figure 20, p.185).

Figure 20. VI. *Christ Crucified*, *A Service of Shadows: A Choral Meditation on the Passion*, by Lani Smith (1971).

The image displays four pages of a musical score for the piece "VI. Christ Crucified" by Lani Smith. The score is arranged in two columns and two rows. Each page contains vocal staves (Soprano and Bass) and piano accompaniment (Right and Left Hand). The lyrics are written below the vocal staves. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (e.g., *pp*, *mf*, *ppp*), tempo markings (e.g., *allegro*, *rit.*), and performance instructions (e.g., "expressively", "with increasing intensity"). The lyrics describe the suffering of Christ, mentioning "scathing stings of whip or club", "nagging thirst", "taunts of jeering mob", and "vi-cious, rack-ing pain of nails and cross". The score concludes with the text "He lived for us... He died for us... And now he knows the lone-li-ness of his death Was no great-er than the lone-li-ness of his life." The pages are numbered 29, 30, 31, and 32.

The importance this Good Friday liturgy offers is in its representation of both a theological culture and a musical style. In a sentiment rarely supported by the

community in general, the piece acted as an opportunity to acculturate text, musical style, and projected media into an interrelated experience pertinent to the social condition of LBGTQ members while drawing the events of the crucifixion into a relevant experience for a modern social consciousness inclusive of LBGTQ and world politics. It provided for a bridge between the two by its fashioning of media and sound to represent distant realities into one coherent whole. In addition to the cantata, the MCC choir offered two other anthems, *Into the Woods My Master (Savior) Went*, by Gordon Young (1976)<sup>28</sup> and *Jesus, Our Lord (God) is Crucified* by Maxcine W. Posegate (1980)<sup>29</sup>. Each further punctuated the darkness of death and the tragedy of Christ's crucifixion and each similarly introduced styles of music less in concert with a progression of aesthetics normally found. The dissonant and shadowy style of this music provided for a contextualization of shared experiences of the LBGTQ social condition with other situations of world oppression, fear, destruction, and war, symbolic through the musical soundings. The projected media images were a focal point in the service and served to provide the connection between the seeming discontinuity between religious conservatism, identity validation, and shared experience with the world of the "other" while simultaneously allowing for a reinforcement of the normality of LBGTQ

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<sup>28</sup> Text: Into the woods my Master (Savior) went, Clean for spent, for spent; Into the woods my Savior came, For spent with love and shame, But the olives they were not blind to Him, The little gray leaves were kind to Him, The thorn tree had a mind to Him, When into the woods he came. Out of the woods my Savior went, And He was well content; Out of the woods my Savior came, Content with death and shame. When death and shame would woo Him last, From under the trees they drew him last, 'Twas on a tree they slew him last, When out of the woods He came. When out of the woods, he came.

<sup>29</sup> Text: Jesus our Lord (God) is crucified! Jesus our God id crucified! Oh, come and mourn with me awhile; Oh, come ye to the Savior's side, Oh, come together let us mourn; Jesus, our Lord, is crucified! Have we no tears to shed for Him, while soldiers scoff and foes deride? Ah, look how patiently He hangs; Jesus, our God, is crucified! Oh, love of God, O sin of man (sin and shame). In this dread act Your strength is tried, and victory remains with love. Jesus our God is crucified!

oppression and marginalism in light of a mainstreamed world view. In this event, musical tradition, traditional/marginal interpretations, and social context converge and provide social contextualization through ritual music.

***Example: Ash Wednesday (2004)***

Nearly a year after the Good Friday liturgy, planners of the Ash Wednesday service chose a similar tactic of bridging the gap between local LGBTQ social concerns and a global world view which exercised empathy with oppressed and underrepresented people. Though this ritual was designed more as a sharing of histories than one which relied greatly on the musical input, the music served to bridge the gap between two main ritual themes—“testimonies of injustice” and “testimonies of hope”. Tom Conry’s piece, *Ashes*, served as the backdrop of the service and was used as an opening and closing song to the service (Figure 21, below).



Figure 21. *Ashes*, by Tom Conry, GC#883.

883 Ashes

1. We rise a gain from ash - es, from the  
 2. We of - fer you our fail - ures, we  
 3. Then rise a gain from ash - es, let  
 4. ‡ Thanks be to the Fa - ther, who

good we've failed to do. We rise a - gain from  
 of - fer you at - tempts, The gifts not ful - ly  
 heal - ing come to pain. Though spring has turned to  
 made us like him - self. Thanks be to the

ash - es, to cre - ate our - selves a - new. If  
 giv - en, the dreams not ful - ly dreamt. Give our  
 win - ter, and sun - shine turned to rain. The  
 Son, who saved us by his death.

all our world is ash - es, then must our lives be  
 stum - bl - ings di - rec - tion, give our vi - sions wid - er  
 rain we'll use for grow - ing, and cre - ate the world a -  
 Thanks be to the Spir - it, who cre - ates the world a -

true, An of - fer - ing of ash - es, an  
 view, An of - fer - ing of ash - es, an  
 new From an of - fer - ing of ash - es, an  
 new From an of - fer - ing of ash - es, an

of - fer - ing to you. 1. 3. 4.  
 of - fer - ing to you. of - fer - ing to you. of - fer - ing to you.

The service was split into two main parts with injustice and hope being the two halves of one whole. Rather than focusing on each testimony's contribution to these themes, as a whole, they provide a display of the transition from local and personal self awareness to the impact self awareness has on the interpreting of world order and the LBGTQ stance of embracing social consciousness as a cultural trait. The testimonies below from the service are only a few of these. However, in each example, personal awareness is a vehicle in the transition from self-interiority to public and social responsibility (A full version of the testimonies is found in Appendix E, on page 399).

A. I don't want to know what I know. I don't want to know about Matthew Shepherd; I do not want to know about James Byrd and Jasper, Texas; I don't want to know about honor killings, about Haiti, about rocket-propelled grenade launchers.

But I know. My knowledge makes me physically and spiritually aware of the immensity of the suffering of this world, and I grieve for it. Its breadth overwhelms me with both desire to fix it all and despair in thinking of the weight of all this injustice against my small power, my single voice...

Is it so hard to know where and how to begin to fight back—it seems hopeless, and in my sorrow, it becomes enough to close my eyes and be thankful for my life. It is enough to learn a lesson of the scales of injustice and to appreciate that, in this life, they are weighted heavily in my favor. I get caught up in my own struggles—to get through a consuming workday, to take care of my family, to pay a rent, to overcome the things of my past that work against my present peace of mind. There is a strong temptation to take in the cruelties of the world, see them as a lesson for my own life, and move on. Because after all, I tell myself, if I live the best life I can for myself, I haven't ignored the suffering—I've mourned it, I've learned from it. But to settle myself into such a dispassionate compassion makes me complicit in violence, in injustice and in every event that overwhelms me...

So I could spend my time bemoaning the writing on the wall, or I could offer all I have to change the message. Because we are called to struggle against this wall of hate, of violence, and of poverty—to respond from a place of compassion, or faith, and of love.

It is through this action that God creates healing in our selves and in our community. In Isaiah, God calls us “to loose the bonds of injustice/to undo the thongs of the yoke/ to let the oppressed go free/ and to break every yoke.” This is a holy and pleasing effort, our commitment as people of faith not only to mourn injustice but to work against it with all we have been given—to ease suffering, to reject violence, to work towards peace in whatever capacity we can, with every capacity we have.

I want to tell you a story of Annalona Tonelli, an Italian woman who, 33 years ago, at the age of 27, left her affluent home and moved to Africa—first to Kenya and later to Somalia—to provide health care to impoverished people suffering from tuberculosis. She also raised awareness of HIV/AIDS and female circumcision, working to change beliefs and traditions dating back many centuries. Not affiliated with a religious order or a relief organization—in fact, nearly alone in her efforts—she established clinics in remote regions, raised the money to run them from the wealthy Italians she left behind. Living and working in an area where the culture is still nomadic, where the sick are believed a danger to the survival of the community and are often left to die, her efforts met with violent opposition. She was beaten, she was kidnapped, and, last October, she was murdered on the grounds of the hospital she built.

When asked about the difficulty of her chosen life, she replied, “I would believe that my life us a sacrifice. It is an idea that makes me laugh. I often felt that there was nobody on earth who had such privilege to be able to live like this.” Working endlessly for 33 years among the sick and the dying, often under the threat and actuality of violence, she saw herself not as someone offering blessing, but as someone blessed by the people she had been fortunate enough to help. She recognized that it was the people that are invisible to most of society, the poor and the sick, that gave her joy and filled her life with love.

But she also acknowledged that to commit to a life of good works is difficult, it is a process of evolving attitudes and responses. As she said: “The reason that more people don't feel this way is that they don't try hard enough. You have to give time, you have to be patient; and then year after year, you'll see that what matters is only love. But if you're impatient because people are not grateful or you were full of limits you will not be happy. You need time....”

While usually marked by somber themes, Lent is about change. It is no coincidence that the season of Lent falls during transition from winter to spring. During this time, our spiritual lives and actions mirror the awakening earth—the rebirthed plants; the reemerging animals; the longer, warmer days. As the earth breaks the cast of winter and begins the movement of spring, we are afforded the chance to reflect on the burdens we carry in our lives and in our communities and to find ways to relieve them. It is an opportunity to change our view of ourselves in this world, to see ourselves as an integral part of the global community, and to understanding how we can impact it through our commitment to justice—to being true to our selves and working toward it in our world.

Just as the phoenix rises anew from the ashes of its former self, we too can emerge from this season a new community fully committed to changing our world, and being changed by it, by putting our faith in action.

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B. In 2002, I traveled to Guatemala with a group of 12 women to be a witness to the injustices endured by the people of Guatemala during three decades of civil war. One particularly moving account of the trauma experienced by Mayan people at the hands of the government forces was told to me by a young woman named Feliciana.... This is Feliciana's story as I heard it.

"I was the youngest of four children born to a family of Mayan peasants in a small village in the Quiche region. My mother was very sickly following my birth, so I did not know the love and warmth of my mother. It was my sister, the oldest of my siblings, who took care of me and my brothers, while our father worked on the *fincas*, the plantations, in the southern part of the country. Together, we four children maintained the small plot of land, our *milpa*, that our father farms on which grew our (sacred) corn, and the beans and squashes on which we depended.

In 1982, when I was twelve years old, my sister disappeared. My mother was in despair, and I was in despair, and together we traveled to all the neighboring villages to ask "Has anyone seen my daughter, my sister?" We even walked the twelve miles down to the site of the army base in our region, to ask at the gate as to the welfare of the missing one. For two weeks we searched in vain, never finding any clue to my sister's whereabouts. Then, at 4 a.m. on August 23, 1982, the army came to my village as we slept. They came in their trucks and their helicopters, to a village of 72 people who were peaceful, who weren't organized, and who were farmers and weavers. They army gathered the people from their houses, then separated them, and the women were raped and the men were slaughtered. I hid with the animals while my mother and brothers were rounded up, and then fled into the mountains leading my 6 year-old nephew, the son of my beloved older sister, who had "disappeared" during a trip to the market in town to buy supplies. We fled without anything-no shoes, no food, no blankets, and no water. We ran high into the mountains all that day and through the night, through that week; up into the mountains, walking over thorns and prickly cactus, scrub and rocks, searching for water, for shelter, for food. And I watched as my beautiful nephew's feet bled and then festered, as he cried from hunger and thirst, then screamed in pain and died. I buried him on that mountain, under rocks so the animals wouldn't eat his body. The beautiful son of my sister.

Only months later was Feliciana able to make her way down from the mountains, back to her village. There, she found the evidence of the massacre, back at the village. There she found the evidence of the massacre, found the ravine where the bodies had been dumped, found the few other survivors from her village. She will never forget what happened on August 23, 1982. To this day, Feliciana believes that the army is intent on genocide, on eliminating the Maya, so that their land could be confiscated. Along with a monetary donation to Conavigua, we gave Feliciana a seedling tree, a token of our hope for the life and future of her people.

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C. In 1994, I decided that I needed to take a stand, to speak out, and to change my environment at work. I needed to be who I was; I needed full protection and full benefits like everyone else. So, I put a picture of my partner on my desk, I told my boss, and I gathered a few friends together to talk about the issues that we faced on the job. As my passion grew and my determination became stronger, so did the group and our focus. Within 6 months, we had formed an employee organization that asked to be heard, demanded change and formed a community that would not be quiet any longer.

The change would be monumental, and the impact broad. In the 5 years that followed,

- ❖ Our EEO policy was changed to include sexual orientation.
- ❖ The employee group was officially recognized to be the voice of the GLBT community.
- ❖ Pride events and AIDS walks were advertised and financially supported.
- ❖ Advertisements were placed in the BLADE.
- ❖ Programs and services were developed with the LGBT community in mind.
- ❖ AND in 1999, Bell Atlantic (now Verizon) instituted domestic partner benefits.

The group also did presentations throughout the company on what it meant to have a safe work environment. I can remember one face very clearly who came up to me afterwards and said how grateful she was for our work and how much of a difference it would make. She said, "Although I am not able to speak out, you have given me a voice."

One voice can make a difference, one act can change reality forever. God does work through us. God uses us to change ourselves, our community, and the world. Sometimes when we set out to correct an injustice for ourselves, we are paving the way for others.

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D. There is documented history of gays and lesbians fleeing to this country seeking asylum based on governmental persecution. While grants of asylum have grown in number, it is still extremely difficult for gays and lesbians to get an award of asylum. Perhaps the most important legal-setting precedent grant of asylum to gays and lesbians was the grant to Fidel Toboso-Alfonso on March 12, 1990. In its decision, the US Board of Immigration Appeals was faced with a gay Cuban who had been forced to leave the country during the Mariel boat lift. Toboso-Alfonso has been continually persecuted while in his native Cuba, merely for his orientation, not for any particular act relating to that orientation. After years of persecution involving unnecessary medical examinations and detentions, the chief of police informed him that he could spend four years in the penitentiary for being gay, or leave Cuba for the United States. However, the US Immigration and Naturalization Service had first refused to grant asylum because they did not consider homosexuals as a particular social group entitled to protection under the law. But the Board of Immigration Appeals overruled this and stated that homosexuals were protected under the law as a particular social group subject to persecution by the State. Four years after this decision, in 1994 Attorney General Janet Reno issued an order designating the Toboso-Alfonso case as precedent in all proceedings involving the same issue. This laid the foundation for finding persecution based on sexual orientation as a basis for asylum.

But the worldwide persecution continues. In Egypt, for examples, charges of debauchery and prostitution are being used to criminalize consensual homosexual relations. The latest arrests in 2003 were not a new phenomenon but a police witch-hunt of marginalized lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons. Countries they were fleeing from include Romania, Brazil, Columbia, Jordan, Guatemala, Iran, El Salvador, Peru, Pakistan, Russia, Chile, China, Yemen, Mexico, Turkey, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Singapore, Eritrea, Honduras, Lebanon, Albania, and the Togo-Ivory Coast. Many of these sexual orientation cases involve countries where police mistreatment of gays and lesbians is either officially sanctioned or openly accepted if not encouraged.

Several important mechanisms of alteration are noticed in this ritual. First, the desire to refashion overarching themes within the Christian *ordo* rescripts a tradition which has focused greatly on morality and penance as personal and innate qualities of the Christian journey toward salvation. As the song *Ashes* suggests, this element of Christian design is muted as this quality of human brokenness and sin is reoriented to include themes of personal wholeness, world consciousness, and hope from metaphorical death. Second, the music's placement within the ritual (as an opening and closing song) allows for the interpretation of the text to be both an introduction to the ritual acts which followed as well as a commentary on that which would become the main content of this service. Its presentational qualities allowed personal insights and experiences to become public testimonies of world consciousness.

Therefore we may for moment view the interplay of these sentiments in light of the ritual words being uttered. The composer's sentiments when intermingled with the testimonies of the individuals creates a collage of social and theological realities which relies on the tradition set forth in the music but is contextualized in the personal experiences of MCCers.

#### **Opening music**

1. We rise again like ashes, from the good we failed to do. We rise again like ashes, to create ourselves anew. If all our world is ashes, then let our lives be true. An offering of ashes, an offering to you.
2. We offer you our failures, we offer you attempts, The gifts not fully given, the dreams not fully dreamt. Give our stumblings discretion, give our visions wider view. An offering of ashes, an offering to you.
3. Then rise again from ashes, let healing come to pain. Though spring has turned to winter, and sunshine turned to rain. The rain we'll use for growing, and create the world anew. From an offering of ashes, an offering to you.
4. *verse 4 was not sung.*

### Testimonies

- A. My knowledge makes me physically and spiritually aware of the immensity of the suffering of this world, and I grieve for it... Is it so hard to know where and how to begin to fight back—it seems hopeless, and in my sorrow, it becomes enough to close my eyes and be thankful for my life. It is through this action that God creates healing in our selves and in our community.
- B. Only months later was Feliciana able to make her way down from the mountains, back to her village... To this day, Feliciana believes that the army is intent on genocide, on eliminating the Maya, so that their land could be confiscated. Along with a monetary donation to Conavigua, we gave Feliciana a seedling tree, a token of our hope for the life and future of her people.
- C. In 1994, I decided that I needed to take a stand, to speak out, and to change my environment at work... One voice can make a difference; one act can change reality forever. God does work through us. God uses us to change ourselves, our community, and the world. Sometimes when we set out to correct an injustice for ourselves, we are paving the way for others.
- D. Four years after this decision, in 1994 Attorney General Janet Reno issued an order designating the Toboso-Alfonso case as precedent in all proceedings involving the same issue. This laid the foundation for finding persecution based on sexual orientation as a basis for asylum.... But the worldwide persecution continues.

### Closing Music

1. We rise again like ashes, from the good we failed to do. We rise again like ashes, to (etc.)

The metaphors of the song become a translation of concrete social and personal experiences. They are transformative in that as an introduction, the music provides for a framework in which to hang these experiences and awarenesses. “Ashes” is a metaphor which highlights not only the brokenness of humanity, but that which is fodder for redemption. Death symbolizes “hopelessness, in sorrow” and is an agent in “giving our vision wider view”. These sentiments are a charge to “change our world” in light of personal “pains” and to recognize that in the “rain” comes renewal even though “persecution continues”. The entire ritual is transformational in that when the song returns, the metaphorical words take on new meaning by the information received in the testimonies.

### **Expanding the Musical Social Perspective**

The experiences associated with a continuously growing gender consciousness, the challenges of defining how to perform identity, and the abilities necessary to enliven these sensibilities in ritual and musical decision-making, are the core questions of how this institution defines and structures itself. The study of these questions in light of social and musical structure is a description of ordering through musical aesthetics. The acculturated and altered Christian tradition serves as a template for MCC NOVA where modifications and negotiations of its performance are constantly tested and reinvented.

For much of its lifecycle, MCC NOVA has existed within the template of major trends to the institutional Christian social, ritual, and musical structure. However, as shown through the various areas of focus above, contextualization plays a vital part in identifying the aesthetics at play in “chasing the rainbow” of becoming more authentically LGBTQ. Part of this paradox is rooted in the desire to enliven past experience, taking the material of developmental church experiences and refashioning them into palatable and socially relevant ritual acts striving for future goals. Through this form of experimentation a wide arena of possibilities is apparent. This experimentation leads to a recapitulation of known traditions, assuming the most appropriate parts of them, while at other times, excerpting those elements which have proven to agitate the very conundrum of being fully LGBTQ and fully Christian. At times, this process requires an expansion of Christian interpretation and the community’s concept of how it fits within the greater human dynamic. At times, fixing the tradition, while at other times creating it, the worshippers at MCC NOVA strive to “fix” their own world view in light

of what they have inherited, creating a new one, or even try to normalize the “known” in the context of their own “unknown” condition. All the while, in its varied and developing states, this process is negotiated publicly through a ritual life which “aims at a moving target” juxtaposed by a variety of cognitive and conceptual variations including issues of appropriateness, comfort, gender, sexuality, and intent, to name only a few.

The ecclesial and musical institutions which become fleshed out by this task fall victim to a shifting cognitive body of understanding and knowledge that threatens an ideal world view and at other times revitalizes it. Regardless of the aesthetic properties at play, be they the varied approaches to language, the appropriateness of sound, right ritual, shifting ethnicities, or even a developing self awarenesses associated with sexuality and gender, institutionalism in the MCC NOVA community is one which defies stasis and in fact, subsists in change. Ordinary space and time presume a suspended liminality, both in practice and cognitively speaking.

The process of becoming more authentic or “chasing the rainbow” has as its core the construction and deconstruction of institutions in a simultaneous cyclical pattern which in a very mindful way, simultaneously creates and borrows, models and deconstructs, and visions and recapitulates. Through this basic premise, music and ritual performance are the arenas for establishing a classification and definition for gender authenticity and appropriateness. Ritual patterns which reinforce and empower these and musical descriptions that convey the aesthetic processes which shape the institution and its systems of belief are the medium for this spiritual and social journey.



Musical meaning is reinforced on the performative front by allowing musical choices and performance aesthetics to carry the information of a collective understanding of expansion and greater awareness. In ways which may seem commonplace and ordinary, changes in the approach to ritual music offer a performative means to idiomatic priorities which are at times first conceived cognitively and reinforced musically, and at other times are birthed through the music-making process and henceforth become new idiomatic priorities.

### **Relying on a variety of “instruments” of empowerment**

The musical term “instrument” is often limited by a description of “mechanisms [which] produce musical sounds” and “all musical media with the exception of the voice” (Apel, 1969: 413). Within ethnomusicological thought, musical instrument research has been almost solely relegated by a preoccupation with collections of musical instruments and their importance as archives in cultural studies (See Dournon, Libin, and Sachs in Myers, 1992) even though for some, instrumental musics has been interpreted as having the same qualities of social discourse found in sung musics (See Qureshi, 1997 and Wade, 1973). The term instrumental may be expanded to include those “media” which contribute to the musical product or in the case of our discussion, discourses. In this sense, both traditional musical sound (vocal included) and the social activities of those contributing to the musical occasion (ritual activities) may be considered as media for analysis. This approach is critical to the analysis of behaviors which by virtue of their ritual role, may at times produce audible *voce* (like musical utterances), while at other times may produce a social *voce* deepening meaning in the musical product. Therefore,

we may be required to hold different human behaviors as different *instruments* in the collective score of behaviors.

Musical activity at MCC NOVA is above all an empowerment of relationships. On the macro ritual level, this is the common activity of shared musical expression and the freedom to perform by virtue of one's role. In the second chapter we focused on the experience of the individual who through the process of music-making discovered and established individual and social roles by being able to express their own self-image through performance. At times this affected their expectations and interpretations of rituals. For some, ritual is a medium for the process of self becoming. And for others, ritual is the culmination of both histories and hopes for a more credifying spiritual existence. These actions serve as a means of performing audibly experiences based in human behavior describe the "musician" as an empowered 'instrument' of social construction.

This empowerment is the result of a shift in the musician's consciousness and his/her shifting role in the community from a silent participant to one who shares in this phenomenon performatively. In tandem with this experience is the notion of abilities which normally are interpretive descriptors of an individual's musical prowess or power over the audible sound. However, we may also consider that certain types of audible activities are only measurable as descriptions of power based on consciousness about one's self rather than on knowledge or expertise about music (as seen in testimonies, prayers, and preaching). The musical experience is measurable by one's ability to move

from an interior awareness to one which is both publicly reflective of one's interior conversion state, simultaneously recognizable to the listener.

When we consider that guitarists, percussionists, and or pianists produce sounds that contribute to the musical experience, we must also be concerned with the musicians' interior condition which may or may not be immediately interpreted through their performance praxis or style. To the person whose abilities have been stifled in past ecclesial situations, the event of performing musically by means of a guitar, djembe, piano, singing, clapping, or even mixing sound is an event of personal self recapitulation as the individual reclaims a social function that has either been taken away from them or has not been offered as a possible public existence. These are moments of public musical participation. Within the specific and detailed occurrences we can also notice the relationship between interiority and playing style.

In a conversation I once had with members of *InCluesion*, I brought up the observation that the guitarists (all women) had a strong propensity to play their guitars low on the front of the body (over the pelvis), with the strap almost fully extended. When I questioned why, the answers ranged from an initial "don't know" to descriptions of other "professional" guitarists with whom some of the players wished to model. Not surprisingly, most of them were women- Melissa Ethridge and Traci Chapman were most recognizable on the list. Djembe playing and even the playing of other hand instruments like rain sticks, shakers, tambourines, and the like requiring a lessened knowledge of Western music praxis (presumably) serve as a means to this traveling experience from an interior self awareness and a publicly stated music ritual role. The

freedom to play these instruments represents an interior acknowledgment of one's abilities even though they may have little to do with didactic learning.

Musical behaviors, whether the product of a Western musical ability to create music from known archetypes, or elements of an interior desire to participate in the group, are rooted in the performer's interests to become part of the social whole, using whatever abilities he or she has. By this process we may also reinterpret the notion of virtuosity, traditionally coined as a mastery over demons such as musical media and sound requirements, to include a mastery over one's interior "demons" which previously have not afforded them the opportunity to emerge from the interior self to a more public musical role. These crutches sometimes include the lack of license, marginalization from ecclesial communities, or the lack of sexual acceptance as musicians within ecclesial bodies. Ownership of music is therefore one aspect of the performer's behavior where ability over musical praxis is secondary to the ability to participate as a gendered individual regardless of "musical" abilities.

Since music engagement is a critical value in the performance of ritual musics at MCC NOVA we may also include the possibility that non-audible musical activities work similarly to provide the bridge between interiorization and public agency. Movement and the freedom to engage through dance, clapping, swaying, *orans*,<sup>30</sup>

Sometimes I just don't know the music and that bothers me. I'm not a great singer so I sometimes get shy singing in church. And sometimes I just don't like the song. But if I can put up my hands

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<sup>30</sup> *Orans*, (OH-ranns; Latin, praying) The ancient posture for prayer: standing with arms outstretched and uplifted, palms upward, lifting the body and spirit upward to God and welcoming God's gifts as they descend. This term is synonymous with gesture employed in many liturgical traditions, inclusive of African-American and Hispanic one were this performance identifies one's spirited reception of God's grace (Pfatteicher, 91).

in prayer, or clap, or sometimes even get a feeling of thanks giving that I'm part of this really great community, I feel I am contributing something.<sup>31</sup>

or through supportive means (sound mixers, music librarians, and liturgical music researchers) all contribute to this musical product by strengthening the musical outcome which is one of empowerment over restrictions.

In 2004 when a large donation was given to the church to overhaul its sound system, they became a great need to 'create' a ministry of sound. This was much more than having people who could switch the system on but more so to bring people into the details of creating a sound for worship. This was critical for both spoken and musical occasions. Little by little, a few members came forward and painstakingly participated in training sessions which explained the ins-and-outs or the professional system which was a far cry from the previous *mish mosh* of components which made up the previous system.

They began to show up at rehearsals, regularly attend worship occasions (which before they might not been seen for weeks at a time). They became part of the musical and ritual infrastructure.

I've noticed recently that their involvement in ritual is not just technical, though their technical skill is greatly admired and needed. They have become part of the fabric of creative expression. They have become contributors to the sounds and owners of its particular contribution to the transformation of the congregation (Fieldnotes).

Sound management and musical supporters share in this core musical essence defined by an innate function which moves from interior marginalization into publicity and acceptance.

### **Participation as a means for establishing new order**

The musical product in the MCC NOVA environment is an engagement in an establishment of new order. Hegemonies in this order are often brought on by musical components themselves which include praxis in performance and ensemble structure. We have discussed earlier that alteration in language provides for a reordering of the theo-ecclesial sentiment in song to include (or excerpt) interpretations which are more befitting the LBGQTQ religious priorities. We have also seen how borrowed texts are made to have

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<sup>31</sup> (Interview: 60103.01)

new meaning through their contextualization in personal and corporate experience. Musical structure has within it the ability to maintain social structure by its performative structure. Through this consideration of music's role in establishing a worldview the structure of music and the ensembles which embody it create a parallel between reordering and negotiation. While alteration of text in song, with its refashioning of didactic meaning is critical to the assimilation of LBGTQ social priorities with a relevant religious script, musical structure also serves to establish a reinvention of social expectation within the worshipping and creative media of its participants.

***“A Drumming Workshop”*: alternatives to musical social hegemonies**

In the spring of 2002, MCC NOVA hosted a guided drumming workshop led by members of *Drumming for Peace* based in Pennsylvania. Participants explored such themes as redeeming the drum in ancient biblical interpretation, rhythm as a medium of worship, as well as the metaphorical, narrative, and pedagogical values inherent in a number of drumming styles. The drumming exercise was an opportunity for expert and novice drummers alike to experience the practice of drumming in the context of communal worship. From the standpoint of education, participants were introduced to both the context of drumming as a musico-spiritual exercise as well as rudimentary techniques that allowed for further exploration of rhythm as a critical aesthetic in contemporary worship. For many of the participants, this event embodied an expansion of the expectations of common and accepted worship techniques simultaneously challenging otherwise accepted structures within contemporary worship by its reexamination of the communal stance of worshippers in light of spiritual practice.

The some 45 drummers (most novices to the drum) sat in an elongated circle that at times seemed to press to the walls of the sanctuary which had now become a massive open space. It appeared as if some had been comfortable with the drum perched between their knees but for most, the anticipation of giving the instrument its first “voice” was much like that of wanting to try to lunge off of the diving board for the first time- anxious for the leap but somewhat afraid of the water. Instruction was basic at first, with a common beat. As the group became more confident, the beat grew more steady and the collective voice of the drum more intentional. As the droning resonated throughout the room, some explored the many voices of the drums head and the instructor as slowly managing a choral voice with a tight high pitch for some and a deep bass sound for others resonating below strongly cupped palms. Though strong, the communal voice was still stiff and rigid. As the instructor began to improvise over the steadiness of the group the grip of the sound became more likened to rising of the drone to support the one lone djembe embellishment.

The introduction of the traditional rhythm of the *Kaki Lambe*, the group slowly emerged from a unified voice to a contrapuntal statement of both the musical sounds required to create the musical statement and a social awareness of the relationship between individual creativity and communal unity (Figure 22, below). As expertise over the mechanics of the piece grew, a growing sense of experimentation evolved which enticed individuals to test their own knowledge of the music and share their own comfort with the community. By now 20 minutes had gone by and the circle became an essay in diversity as some remained steady and controlled by the beat, others abandoned their own reluctance to emerge from relative security, and others began to switch from the common *djundjuns* and *djembes* to incorporate bells, frame drums, and even dancing. 45 minutes elapsed and the journey of expressiveness and exploration ended as it began, though changed, with a final unified beat. (fieldnotes)

Figure 22. *Kaki Lambe*, Senegalese

**Kaki Lambe**

Full version includes: 3 sections. Djundjun pattern, Bell pattern.

How do I read the notations?  
What do the symbols mean?

What do the sounds refer to?  
How do I purchase the full version?

**Rhythm 1**

ke re - ke re - Dam - ke - re - Dam - Dam -

P L - L R - ? - P - L - R - ? -

**Rhythm 2**

Dam - ke re - ka - Dam - ke - re - ka -

P - P L - R - ? - P - L - ? -

With regards to social structure, traditional drumming embodies a break from the hegemonic and often didactic stance of Christian worship. This stance is one which favors an interpretation of ritual as a string of related rites which through either their

traditional importance in the Christian *ordo* or even through their reinterpretation to fit contemporary relevance, relies on patterns of familiarity and/or conveyance of didactic teaching through speech, text, or sung music. Even ritual movement and choreography within this interpretation relies on certain knowledge and cognitively established behavioral norms which are either reminiscent of developmental church experiences or are the stylization of other more palatable social behaviors. Music leadership, costuming, and even the reproduction of unilaterally performed musical pieces establishes a social ordering which is rooted in both liturgical and social structures valuing leadership, conformity, and power, within a worship style that has been purposefully altered to fit this more homogeneous group.

In the drumming circle these precursors of worship are expanded to include a communication of personal investment and a description of individual growth. Musically, sound provides a script devoid of speech communication, though it communicates a script of journeying from one place to another to both those who perform and those who participate. Simultaneously, cyclical aesthetics of beginning, exploring, and returning, as well as the physical dimensions of openness and expressiveness, supply a condition of performance allowing for a reinterpretation of the notion of shared belief. This belief is grounded in the musician and the musician's voice which, devoid of expectation, is free to state the relationship between the internal conversation and the external outcome.

Drumming in this context and style serves to reestablish social structure in ways which parallel some of the major priorities of MCC NOVA and LBGTQ lifestyle by allowing for individual creativity, license, diversity, and communal participation. In this



musical medium, preparation and prowess are minimal though some command over technique is required. The basics of musical composition give way to a variety of creative stances which include exploration of the drum's range of possibility, individual assertiveness through virtuosity, a communal priority of collective reasoning which supports the common good, and a diminished reliance on the intellectual properties involved in sharing spiritual matter. All of these are paralleled in the LGBTQ social aesthetics which value both individual and communal properties of freedom to express openly.

### **Social order in sung music**

In the case of singing, familiarity with known musics provides an establishment of the Christian *ordo* by its presence and usage. The metric hymn offers a static and socially recognizable social order where text, meter, and cadence are all predetermined. Within this musical structure, congregational singing supports a unified instrument of *voce* where melodic and harmonic elements remain relatively static and musical relationships are also predefined for piano, choir, and congregant.

Other forms of sung music provide a slightly different pattern of social ordering based on their performance practice. Call-and-response singing provides a known and often repeated refrain or acclamation supported and/or embellished by a musician's (choirs, soloists, instrumentalists) improvisational or ornamental material. This form establishes stronger and more unstable social relationships as unified *voce* is counteracted by often virtuosic allusions. Here the opportunity to embellish and negotiate the

developmental pattern more often forces musical decision-making to be based on social criteria.

Therefore, the matrix of sound production includes material that defines musical outcome which is seemingly non-audible in nature and depends more greatly on the cultural sentiments of the community. Social unification in song would seem to be completely achievable through the adoption or stasis of metric singing. On the other hand, call-response singing has the ability to conjure inherently non-palatable social ramifications of exclusion.

***Example: Our Father Debate (2001)***

With the new year came a shift in the service music that was a regular diet in the weekly Sunday worship. Music which accompanied prayers, the offering, the Lord's Prayer, is often changed on the basis that it may have become stale and unaffecting. It may be due to over usage or the noticeable complacency found in its performance by the congregation. This stated, the Worship Committee decided that a change was in order and in an attempt to capitalize on the growing interest to produce an indie sound<sup>32</sup>, *Our Father (Creator)* by Dan Mason was introduced into the Sunday mix replacing *The Prayer that Jesus Taught Us* by Byron LeRoy Dysart (on page 206).

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<sup>32</sup> The definition of "indie-like" music here is more a philosophical one rather than a stylistic one. "Indie music can best be described as independent or DIY (do it yourself), when the person making the making it has full control over there art, art that people work hard on, and they do it all for others to enjoy and listen to." The Sounds Of Today: Indie Music by xstephenx.  
[http://www.ultimate-guitar.com/columns/genres\\_battles/the\\_sounds\\_of\\_today\\_indie\\_music.html](http://www.ultimate-guitar.com/columns/genres_battles/the_sounds_of_today_indie_music.html)

***Our Father (Creator) by Dan Mason***

Congregation

(Creator)Our father in heaven, holy is your name  
your (peace) kingdom come  
you will be done, on earth as in heaven  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
Forgive our sins as we forgive others  
And lead us not to temptation but deliver us from evil.

Choir

Deliver us from every evil and grant us peace in our day.  
In your mercy keep us from sin, protect us from anxiety.  
As we wait in joyful hope for the coming of Jesus Christ

Congregation

For your s the (majesty) kingdom and the power and the glory, Forever and ever. Amen! Amen!

***The Prayer That Jesus Taught Us by Byron LeRoy Dysart***

Congregation

Our Creator, whom we are a part of,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy dominion come.  
Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread  
And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the dominion, and Thine is the power,  
And Thine is the glory, for every, and ever.  
Amen (Amen)!

The piece showcased future members of InCluesion who at the time were beginning to become more familiar and comfortable with their playing. They added a driving guitar-strumming sound to the usual pianistic service. On a Sunday very soon after its inception, a few of the women of the congregation privately voiced their dissatisfaction with the piece of music stating “It’s hard to sing”, “I don’t like it”, and “Why can’t we go back to the other?” Trying to understand their discontent, I further asked what they didn’t like about the piece. They stated that they did not like the fact that the choir sang a portion without the congregation and they felt excluded. They also added that they would rather sing the “‘traditional’ -Our Father” meaning The *Lord’s Prayer* by

Albert Hay Malotte like MCC DC (District of Columbia) did and emphatically added that there was nothing wrong with the old one (BRD).

At the time no solution seemed clear. From a musical perspective the DM piece seemed more along the lines of what the congregation was interested in doing, i.e. driving, instruments, lively etc. Even textually speaking, though the BRD version had intentionally taken out the male language, it did retain much of the more dated allusions to God in the “thine” pattern. I certainly didn’t understand the interest in the AHM version which seemed to cut across much of what this community thought music should say and sound like. In any case, the feelings about the music persisted to the point where from that time until recently when the piece was changed to a “spoken” prayer (and ultimately exscripted from the service all together), these women were drawn to sitting in their seats, determined not to participate in the singing (Fieldnotes).

Full and active participation is a priority for ritual appropriateness and rooted in the desire of members to participate in ways which allow for the relationship between interior self-awareness of ability to coincide with the more freeform invitation to participate in ways that are comfortable. Furthermore, part of coming to terms with an individual’s role in the public aspect of ritual performance involves a level of empowerment which either excludes or invites them to full participation as worshippers.

***Example: “Passing Peace”***

The Sharing of Peace which occurs at the beginning of the Sunday service is an opportunity for physicality, song, and improvisation. It is a time where congregants, musicians, presiders, all break free from the confines of order (i.e. rows of seating,

personal space confinement, ritual roles) and express individual involvement with the community. The piece *Thy Kingdom (Dominion) Come*, by Rory Cooney accompanies the activity with an improvisational beginning which grows in intensity until the singing of the memorized refrain by the congregation. The hugging, hand shaking, and clapping all occur with no set choreography with the music, as the choir begins to sing (dispersed through the community), the congregational clapping occurs as people return to their original seats. This break from physical order into a new social establishment allows members to participate musically in different ways with little criteria for uniformity, clapping together, or even sharing in a single physical gesture with one another. In actuality, all these things occur concomitantly and with a certain degree of diversity pending the individual's comfort level (Figure 23, below).

Figure 23. Refrain from *Thy Kingdom (Dominion) Come*, by Rory Cooney (left) and images from the communal PASSING OF PEACE (right).

Refrain

joy.  
We wait in joy, joy, joy, we wait in

joy.  
joy, joy, joy, we wait in joy, like

sun.  
flow-ers wait the sun, wait the sun. We wait in  
sun.

joy.  
joy, joy, joy, we wait in joy, joy, joy, we wait in

joy and the spir-it, Lord, thy king-dom come!  
joy. O



Physical participation breaks down isolating ecclesial structures by allowing for flexibility between performance and self-awareness. Ritual roles and musical abilities are disassociated in ways which allow for a dimension of communal disclosure. The musical form (inclusive of its style) supports the recontextualizing of the community to a more inclusive and egalitarian moment supported by a diversity of musical behaviors. On another plane, the relatively light and easily performed style of the piece offers a contemporary feel which communicates a sense of musical progressiveness while creating a traditional setting supporting the community's core values. This matrix of appropriation of music (establishing the proper music aesthetics), social order (freedom to communicate through dynamic means), and the establishment of an environment of empowerment (freedom) all contribute to a musical environment which supports and empowers and develops the core value structure of the community.

This process of creating a palatable ritual environment is aesthetically based but is contingent on the abilities of participants to enter into a place of neutrality. *Belief informs the ritual* and music surroundings and is not only the product of them. The reflections below describe this priority where an environment of acceptance and interior license gives way to a new social order.

“The room is bathed in a soft warm glow from the dimmed lights and burning candles. There is a distinct aroma that fills the room from the burning incense. It reminds me of a deep forest during fall. I find myself in a circle with 12 people surrounding an altar draped in a brown cloth with carefully placed objects both familiar and strange to me. For the next sixty minutes, I have stepped into another world.” (A participant's reflections on Slowing Down for winter, Sacred Places, December 2003).

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The music leant itself to the occasion. It was somewhat ethereal, as was the setting which comprised of a small circle of chairs around a small square table draped with a fabric cloth of limited quality. Several shapes and sizes of candles burned and the wall sconces in the space were dimmed to less than half. Amidst the mood latent environment a CD played music to fill the air

and present an ambiance of calm. The space was completely set up by the time I arrived it was as if it were on display. No distractions associated with moving of chairs or objects or testing of devices clouded the ritual space. In the common area of the church, as if one by one, the ritualizers appeared and bided their welcomes to each other. At this late hour on a Sunday which was busy with sights, sounds, faces, sign up sheets, food, laughter, and the like, this group appeared reminiscent of an after- hours spirit fest. As the hour drew closer and the anticipation of their numbers this month became more apparent, they entered the prepared space, one by one, and took their places in the circle. The music seemed to function as a calming force and had no real story to tell other than a few Christmas tune allusions. The ritual, aptly named “Christmas is over: Now What?” had no preconceived agenda, nothing would be taught at this service in ways that were didactic. The ritual content would come from the decorum, sights, sounds, and internal processing of the “subject” for contemplation. In essence, the aesthetical values inherent in the small circle would carry the form, the human experience would carry the content. For the most part after this opening prelude, and with exception to the singing of “Silent Night” at the end of the short service, the only managed sound would be silence which was as carefully engineered and collected as was the CD player that began the introspective ritual with its abrupt “click” of the player. (Fieldnotes, Reflections from Christmas is Over: Now What?, Sacred Places, January 2004)

***Example: Easter Sunday (2003/2004)***

After reflection and some comments from others, I realized that Easter Sunday proved to be a benchmark example of the problem and possible tensions between musical content, musical style, and performance.

The planners created an entrance rite to the service which was somewhat different than Easter Sundays preceding it. They planned to draw upon some of the core symbols associated with the Holy Week journey to Easter Sunday by having a “building of the sanctuary” with flowers, table linens, candles, other decorations, and a lighting of the space and the congregants<sup>33</sup> who each held small candles. The emphasis was on “light” and how Christ was the “risen light.” The movement from darkness into light accompanied by silence and a dimly lit sanctuary was slowly transformed as the choir began the anthem *The (My) Lord (God) is My Light*, by Lillian Bouknight. This gospel piece was sung by the choir while the seated congregation listened. The spatial

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<sup>33</sup> “lighting” of space, churches, and people is a term meaning to bath in light, usually through the use of real fire and candles but also through electrical means where applicable.

transformation was performed by other ministers. *My God is My Light* had been a favorite of the congregation and choir. With its gospel-like recitative and strong swelling dynamics, the piece seemed to symbolize a type of freedom of expression which other songs in the music ministry's repertoire did not have. The approval of the congregation and the enthusiasm of the pastor with respect to this piece seemed to express some special quality based on the style though little was ever stated about the text. On this day as with all other performances the applause of the congregation expressed its effectiveness in connecting with the group.

A.

1. (The Lord) God is my Light and my salvation  
(The Lord) God is my Light and my salvation  
(The Lord) God is my Light and my salvation  
Whom shall I fear?

Refrain

Whom shall I fear, Whom shall I fear?  
(God) is the strength of my life; whom shall I fear?

2. In the times of trouble, he shall hide me,  
O in the times of trouble, he shall hide me,  
In the times of trouble, he shall hide me.  
Whom shall I fear?

3. Wait on (the Lord) Jesus and be of good courage  
O wait on (the Lord) Jesus and be of good courage  
Wait on (the Lord) Jesus and be of good courage  
Whom shall I fear?

In keeping with the sermon title of the day and also with the relatively low Christology that *My God is My Light* added to this very high Christian celebration,<sup>34</sup> at the conclusion of the lighting of the church, *He is Not Here* by Derek Campbell was sung

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<sup>34</sup> “high” and “low” are often used as terms to describe the interpretation of Christology. A “high” Christology harps on Christ as a deity. This may allude to his Godliness, his victory over death, and his ultimate divinization. A “low” Christology focuses on his commonality with humanity and may have as a core description of Jesus his likeness to the human condition.



by the congregation harping the words of the angel to Mary Magdalene (“He is not Here”) and highlighting her role in the resurrection story.

B.

1. The angel spoke to the women: “Do not be Afraid, If you are looking for Jesus, He is risen from the dead!”

*Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!; Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*Refrain*

He is Not Here (Alleluia), He is Risen from the dead. He is Not Here (Alleluia), He is Risen from the dead. Alleluia! Alleluia!

2. “Go and tell the world Jesus lives again. In Galilee he promises to meet you once again!”  
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!  
(refrain)
3. “My peace be with you. You don’t have to be afraid, Go and tell the world I have risen from the grave!”  
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia  
(refrain)

Instrumental interlude (back to refrain)

This driving gospel number begins with a solo proclamation quickly developing into a descending gospel progression with a pedal bass broken up by a congregational refrain. The tune allows for a trap drum with intermittent cowbell and tambourine. This commercial sounding Gospel number, in contrast to the piece which preceded it, changed mood from a relatively important-sounding mass choir rendition into a celebratory sound full of contemporary rhythms and repeated patterns allowing musicians and congregation to let go of the music and participate with both voice and body. Clapping, swaying, and a general sense of joy accompanied the piece as musicians and congregations involved themselves in the driving joy which this piece mediated.

In the interlude and mantra, the drums and piano took the lead, controlling the flow and intensity of the interlude which slowly built up to the entrance of the altos (who

out number the other singers in the group). The low registration of their voices against the now built up intensity of the drums, piano, and cowbell seemed to embody for this group a cathartic moment where the female voice, heavy and low against the piano (lingering between Eb and A below the treble clef) modeled that of a combination of a girl-group back-up and a stereotypical droning *lesbian* voice as they swelled the mantra (“Don’t have to be afraid”) (Figure 24, below). As the sopranos and men entered (with the Alleluias countermelody) the frenzy of the patterned mantra heightened until it moved forward to its joyous end in the final coda.

Figure 24. Excerpt from *He is Not Here* by Derek Campbell.

The image shows a musical score excerpt for the piece "He is Not Here" by Derek Campbell. The score is written in 7/8 time and consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics "Al-le-lu - ia! Al-le-lu - Don't have to be a-fraid. You Al-le-lu - ia! Al-le-lu -". The piano accompaniment is marked "Builds throughout" and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The score is enclosed in a blue border.

These two pieces embody a triangulation between appropriateness of style, musical content, and performance. In both, style plays an important part in the enthusiasm of both musicians and non-musicians. As I had noticed before, ethnicity, here

described in a gospel sound, holds some connective quality for this community which is relative to their own scripting of appropriateness and tradition. Both pieces activate an elevated enthusiasm and enticed spiritual excitement on the part of both listeners and performers. On another plane, the verbal metaphors in the pieces differ greatly at least from the perspective of inclusion. In the former piece, textual content is less in agreement with the value of inclusivity and an elastic theology drawing rather on a traditionally scriptural relationship between the People of God and an all powerful God in whom all strength and protection is deemed. In the latter, the stress on the angel's and Mary Magdalene's role in the resurrection story seems to more readily supply an appropriate flavor (at least in theory) to this community's convictions, expressing a relatively low Christological presence, even on this very high Christological day, focusing on Magdalene's humanness, rather than Christ's victory over death. In essence, on the one hand, communication of sentiment and appropriateness is not solely relegated to textual content but rather is in combination, or even at times, independent from musical style. Appropriateness is subjective. This theory could be stressed further. Though musical style and intensity are paramount to the construction of a social order, this is not always dependant on text for cognition to occur. Transversely, text creates an ambiance of acceptability and often is the deciding factor in appropriateness.

### **Musical Meaning in Translation.**

For many years the proposition of music as a form of pan-human communication has been discarded by ethnomusicologists for a more context and conceptual approach

(Nettl, 1983: 36-51). This departure has proven to rely on the value given to context and shared understanding on the part of communities that create and use music as an element which reinforces and describes culturally specific material. Identifying context specific processes that allow for individual musical events and groups of musical events to communicate meaning has continued to be an illusive topic in analysis. As John Blacking states, “music can express social attitudes and cognitive processes, but it is useful and effective only when it is heard by the prepared and receptive ears of people who have shared, or can share in some way, the cultural and individual experiences of its creators. Music, therefore, confirms what is already present in society and culture, and it adds nothing new except patterns of sound”. With respect to this research we have seen how style, text, and performance quality all reflect and contribute to a series of negotiations which occur either through a) a dialogue between developmental religious hegemonies and newly acquired religious tendencies, b) established norms of behavior associated with religious performance and norms more relevant to a gender-religious state of consciousness, or c) the establishing of appropriate and suitable musical styles.

One might consider that musical sound has in itself no capacity to create meaning like all human behavior. Rather, meaning may already exist within a culture and music is simply the vehicle for describing, reinforcing, and sharing it with others. Its processes are relative to their employment in society. By this conclusion, music might be considered as only an extension of social behavior with no special place in the development of new identities or new awarenesses. In effect, the musical experience in this context is less than unique and can simply be relegated to other types of social behavior.

Another interpretation may be that music in itself is only capable of containing meaning which is already available to both listener and musician. Music therefore is devoid of supplying new meaning by its performance and only reinforces knowledge already available to both musician and listener. This interpretation negates that musical aesthetics can conjure meaning in different and/or unique ways from other forms of social communication. As we have seen, this is not the case in this situation where the aesthetics themselves carry appropriateness of meaning—not through classification but through the progression from one set of aesthetics to another.

Lastly, one may presume a separation between social material and musical material, as if musical material does not belong to the former. This interpretation questions not only music's role and function but the abilities of musicians and listeners to possess vocabularies of meaning which are exclusively musical, however extemporarily social as well.

Musical performance offers the opportunity to experience cultural realities that are meaning latent to both musicians and listener. Regula Qureshi states that,

While meaning systems for music can be found embodied in aesthetic theories, the testing ground for the communication of such meaning is performance, the area of specific interfacing of context and music. Therefore, the task of constructing an epistemology towards understanding performance must be grounded in the search for a means of “analyzing the sound idioms as self-contained rule systems for generating music in performance; and to identify the context of performance, the total situation in which this music is produced, and to understand its social and cultural dynamics so as to relate the performance context to the music in a way that will identify the contextual input into the musical sound (Qureshi, 1987: 57-58).

Music therefore, encompasses two separate but related domains: context and sound. Each has its own specific properties and peculiarities, and as such, dealing with the difficulty of retrieving a common means of data collection and management and combining these

two domains into one homogenized referent is an ongoing problem (Qureshi, 1987:71). The relative lack of success in searching for such means may be rooted in the fact that music over time, subject to contextualization and change, becomes affective by cognitive ebbs and flows of meaning (Blacking, 1977). As we have seen in examples above, certain styles and texts are only as relevant to a community as they are meaningful to a community's condition which for this LBGTQ community proves to be a constantly fluctuating reality. Recognizing the cognitive-behavioral significance of a given change may aid us in constructing an approach which uncovers meaning in musical performance, however, it does little to aid in the problem of analyzing performance (Qureshi, 1987, 69). Both cognitive and behavioral domains require different analytical means of management. In the case of performance ethnography we are faced with an all-inclusive musical domain encompassing both a cognitive dimension and a behavioral communicant. Therefore, performance must be approached as a cognitive product with behavioral properties. This problem of dealing with music as a cognitive-behavioral entity requires a hermeneutic steeped in an expanded and possibly reformed notion of music as a cultural referent.

### **Musical meaning and social ordering: bridging the gaps**

Since social communication is bound by social-cultural norms and/or mores, musical communication must be viewed as linked with other cultural communicants (see Frisbee, 1971). Knowledge of such cultural communicants and insight into the place they serve in the overall system of meaning in a given culture is necessary for an appropriate understanding of musical behavior as a cultural domain (Merriam, 1967). An informed

interpretation of culturally bound musical communicants would seem to require a treatment with culturally specific epistemologies steeped in a contextual hermeneutic (Herndon, 1971: 339-352). Identifying cultural communication through musical performances requires an analytic approach which views music as “a cultural and social entity that includes music[al properties] but also the totality of associated behaviors and underlying concepts” (Herndon, 1971:339). Furthermore, the dynamic of the performer and the performer’s effect on the listener must be considered as contributing to the overall dynamic of context (see Herndon and Brunyate, 1976, and McLeod and Herndon, 1980).

James Porter has illustrated how musical performance can change, not only stylistically but also conceptually. Over a period of about eight years, he mapped the traditional songs of a Traveller of the Scottish lowlands named Jeannie Robertson. The point of his project was to gather insight into the meaningful relationship between the singer, her music, and her world view (Porter, 1976: 1-26). One song in particular, *My Son David*, became a watershed for the study. Porter found that Jeannie’s performances of the song were a vehicle for explaining the world which she encountered including grief over the death of her only son. She became relatively popular and noted for the brand of traditional music which she performed, and while personal meaning was associated with her loss, Jeannie’s music began to be infused with public meaning transmitting conceptual properties about herself, her culture, and those who she would meet on her journey to popularity. Scholars and “folk musicians” became interested both in the ballads sung by this socially deprived artist, and with time, in Jeannie herself as she

became an icon of reaction against the commercial interests of popular and “folk” music in the 1950’s.

In his description of this traditional performer’s evolution from relative anonymity to notoriety, Porter showed how contextual changes effected conceptual and stylistic constructs in the music performed.

As Jeannie found herself exposed after 1953 to new and unfamiliar audiences, to folk music concerts and *ceilidhs*, and to empty recording studios, her conception of herself began to change, and as a consequence, her singing style was transformed. The change can be readily noted from her recordings made before fully-fledged exposure (1953) ...A striking recording made in 1958 at the inaugural meeting of the Edinburgh University Folksong Society showed Jeannie’s singing of *My Son David* marked by an expansiveness of delivery that suggests not only an awareness of the more spacious arena in which she was now asked to sing, but also an enhanced sense of self... Never a reticent person, Jeannie appears by this stage to have felt the restraints of Traveller life loosened, particularly those that place strictures on the behavior of women by emphasizing modesty, so that ego development could be given full play (Porter, 1988: 76).

This example seems to explain well what Qureshi describes as the two analytic assumptions in musical performance. The first assumes that social participants are subject to the socio-economic constraints in which they operate (Qureshi, 1987: 69). Operating within these constraints, the musical performance may be more directly related with the function being served rather than the originating ideological purpose. The second assumes a clarifying distinction between “occasions” and “events” of music performance. A musical “occasion” associates a performance context into a generalized ‘cognitive and social entity’. Jeannie Robertson associates with her own social group of Travellers as well as with the ‘tradition’ of music found in lowland Scotland through her performances, disclosing meaning about her home-society through her musical performances. Her music is an “event” on the other hand, characterizing more specifically an immediate or particular social context. Jeannie’s music in the context of a recording studio, or concert



hall, or on display at a scholarly meeting is an “occasion” of musical performance identifying a specific social condition with the performer and her music. The performance points to the contextualization of the musical behavior which is subject to the present condition of herself, those employing her services, and to some extent the society she presumably represents. At any given performance the music may be infused with new meanings possibly un-associated with those of the music “occasion” due to a stylization of the performance context.

Many of the examples of MCC NOVA musics and ritual shown thus far, even those considered over time, generally describe changes in attitude and musical development noting that musical style and textual alteration are not always concomitant when deciphering appropriateness for ritual inclusion. We have seen that historical and newly encountered styles, traditional texts, and texts which have been altered, all contribute independently to provide for an appropriate *environment* which achieves a multiplicity of theological and ecclesial musical temperaments operative within the community. On the one hand, this moving from set of aesthetics to another and employing language which illustrates what seems to be poles of theological knowledge simply illustrates the complexity and diversity of the group. On the other hand, the journey from one theo-musical awareness to another provides important insight into the negotiations associated with striving for an appropriate and authentic musical corpus. It describes as well as develops social identity.

An approach exercised by Jan Fairley demonstrates the need for considering musical performance within the guise of culturally bound cognitive-behavioral

constructs. In his work studying the music of ¡Karaxu!, a musical group of Chilean political activists, Fairley has analyzed performance as a social reality within the context of concerts performed in Great Britain from 1978 to 1979. He attempts to define the underpinnings of their performances describing the context of a group whose genre recalls the social-political *coup d'etat* in Chile in 1973. Using the work of Victor Turner as an analytical model, Fairley explains the liminal condition of post-*coup* Chileans and how the performing group brings foreign audiences from 'exterior' to 'interior' consciousness (Turner, 1969: 208-11). The achievement of presenting the reality of exiled Chileans life to the musician's audiences would seem to rest in the ability of ¡Karaxu! to reconstruct or to conceptualize for British audiences who had no experience with the *coup*, the social reality of exile (Fairley, 1989: 1-30).

The analysis of the performance contexts were based on the performers themselves and the performers' abilities to recapitulate a cognitive social reality through musical behaviors. The performance of a concert was viewed as the mediating element between the "interior" (Chile, the musicians, individual discourse, individual experiences, and the Chilean environmental landscape) and the "exterior" (outside Chile/exile, audience, discourse with others, sharing experience, and experience of the community). This intersection point between the 'interior' and the 'exterior' domains is what Turner call *communitas*, that point of intersection where the 'us' and 'them' of a specific social context becomes a new conjoined 'we' (Turner, 1969: 131-133). Thus, within the context of the performances themselves, a transformative ambience emerges bringing together both musicians and audiences to a new expression of self-consciousness.

Fairley's analysis of ĵKaraxu! was extensive and attempted to capture social meaning through music structures. Two facets of his work are particularly germane, his treatment of the *voce* and the performance narrative. I use them as examples of how social contextualization and cognitive-behavioral relationships can be analyzed through the actual performance of music. The use of *voce* in both its sung form and in its narrative form is a major factor in understanding the effectiveness of ĵKaraxu!'s music. Fairley states:

The key mediator in the concert is the 'voice' of ĵKaraxu!. This provides spoken introductions for almost all the pieces of music. It is not there merely as a casual link between pieces to allow musicians to change places or exchange instruments. Rather it deliberately expresses the musician's view of the *raison d'etre* of the piece within the performance. It provides a coded frame. On another level, however, as well as a speaking 'voice,' the spoken 'voice' is in a dynamic relationship with the music 'voices', whether they are instrumental, solo, or two, or three, or four voices singing together. Arrangements of music reinforce this 'voice' on every level (Fairley, 1989: 11).

The *voce* engagement of the vocal portions of the music performances creates a certain atmosphere, *una cirta atmospera*, through which the performing group is able to facilitate *communitas*: a dialectic relationship with the public. Most importantly, through the distinct 'voice' used in the performances we can clearly see the social context in which the music seats the audience. It is active and 'present tense,' it presumes that all 'we's,' 'I's' and 'our's' belong to the greater 'us' achieved through this *communitas*. It expresses the reality of the political praxis and experiences of ĵKaraxu! with all its resistance and struggle.

Another musical property considered was form. Fairley found when he reviewed and analyzed the programmatic form of the concerts themselves, referents disclosing social context similar to those disclosed by the *voce* of ĵKaraxu! were found. By analyzing the programming of pieces represented in the concerts he was able to find a

musical code of progression similar to the political struggles of Chileans achieved by a strategic use of three main genres of Chilean music: Música andina, Música folklórica, and Música nueva, each traditionally associated with classes of Chilean society. It would seem that a pattern symbolizing an individual activist's rite of passage from 'innocence' to 'experience' reoccurs over and over again through the musical and linguistic interplay of 'voices' in their different musical and spoken forms. This narrative quality, drawing the audience into the struggle of the Chilean activists, serves as a myth, and henceforth gives the music narrative a quality which recapitulates the struggling social condition. The myth discloses peoples' beliefs and experiences while carrying participants into the music through a social process of consciousness. The 'interior' context and the 'exterior' context become cognitively linked through a common act of behavior. Turner states that "liminality, marginality, and structural inferiority are conditions which frequently generate myths, symbols rituals, philosophical systems and works of art" (Turner, 1969: 128). Therefore, the performances themselves become inseparable from the political and social climates they symbolize—the public and private lives they describe. Stephen Feld has attributed this phenomenon to the "primacy of symbolic action, in the form of musical performance, in an ongoing intersubjective life-world" (Feld, 1984: 383).

### *The Aesthetic Gap*

Searching for an explanation of the complexity inherent in defining appropriate and authentic musical behaviors in the musics of MCC NOVA is ultimately a search for the "bridges" which take the community from one social-religious consciousness to

another. This transition is dependant on the use, acceptance, and rejection of certain musical aesthetics and the adoption, alteration, and creation of others. We have seen this throughout this study (See Table 5, on page 174). Both groups of aesthetics serve as complimentary actions to create a holistic worship environment reflective of who the community was as well as who the community is and who it desires to become. The process of moving from one condition to another is multileveled and musical performance is a medium describing the transition. From this presumption, four main transitional gaps can be recognized which show the parallels between the evolution of performances and LBGTQ self awareness.

*The Historical Gap.*

Musical aesthetics in MCC NOVA worship provide for a description of a wide diversity due in part to the multi-religious development of its membership. We have seen that through the use of a common hymnal, the adoption and development of popular styles of music, the maintenance of a choral centerpiece, and the desire to experience ethnic musics, musicians and participants of MCC NOVA relish the ability to maintain unity in the midst of performative diversity.

The mechanisms of this transitory process are numerous. Textual alteration, non-traditional performance praxis, performative freedom, reordering of musical societies, empowering physical movement, adopting ethnic musics, reinterpreting scripture, all point to the intentional act of transforming known cognitive-behavioral aesthetics into culturally-bound meaning. Providing for this transition is often a difficult task and meaning is often subject to a relationship where revelation leads to new awarenesses. The

LBGTQ *gender-religious* priorities in this transition depend both on past experiences and on newfound awarenesses about self, community, and the responsibilities of maintaining a legitimate and universal church while remaining true to a LBGTQ identity.

Transitioning from past religious and spiritual experience to a contemporary and intentionally valid worship is based on the shared knowledge of hegemonic religious practice and the recontextualization of those performances to a new situation. Seemingly commonplace, these practices serve to illustrate the unique quality of the LBGTQ creative process. Ultimately, the community is faced with taking the Christocentric script and rewriting it to fit the LBGTQ context.

In a touchstone volume for MCCers universally, Rev. Nancy Wilson (presently being considered to succeed Rev. Troy Perry, founder of the UFMCC) proposes that two major components of the *gay agenda* are the “healing of tribal wounds” and “boldly exercising our gifts”.

When speaking of historical oppression and resultant healing of wounds, she argues that the condition of other oppressed peoples (referencing African Americans) has little in common with the LBGTQ community’s social condition where injustices over military status, same-sex marriages, and other socially charged politics are concerned. Rather, she asserts that part of the healing process in healing the wounds of the community is a task which involves dealing first with feelings of historical self-repression and projection. She describes her own revelations where “unrepressing” means entering into a conscious act of recapitulating historical experiences and behaviors, then recasting them into a framework of truthfulness and ownership (Wilson, 1989:523-40).

Secondly, she feels that many attributes, LGBTQ gifts of creativity, originality, art, magic, and theatre, provide a glimpse into vast unrepresented qualities of gay worshippers.

Reminiscing about ritual planning and creativity in preparing worship at the World Council of Churches (WCC) General Assembly in 1991 (Canberra), she explains the impromptu but clearly creative work of preparing an anointing service drawing on some unusual but thought provoking ritual elements- baby oil and frankincense mixed in camera film cases. The reactions of worshippers prompted her to reassess the unusual but clearly familiar state of MCC worship for her. What was seemingly innovative and unusual for some was commonplace and traditional to her.

Many people spoke to me about how moving and *right* on that liturgy was. I felt a bit mystified. To me, it felt so familiar, so ordinary. Not the context, of course. That was overwhelming and extraordinary. But the liturgy, the anointing. The *sense of the moment*, inventing liturgy to move and express the fullness of the moment, was what we experience frequently at Metropolitan Community Churches. It made me realize how much I take UFMCC and the gifts of gay and lesbian people for granted. And I loved the *subtext* of the baby oil and frankincense and film case mischief. The human and joyous and the making do with what we have. As Harry Hay says, 'turning hand-me-downs into visions of loveliness' (Wilson, 1989: 53-54).

Performances by MCCers may be considered as an exercise in tapping inherent cultural qualities to reorient the Christian *ordo*. Often these creative enterprises are simplistic in nature. The focus is on the role these innovations play in bridging LGBTQ culture with a Christian archetype. They make LGBTQ lifestyle a permanent fixture in the context of a world whose politics often disallow it to function openly.

Therefore, LGBTQ aesthetic qualities may act as a vehicle for realigning the relationship between personhood/self and the church on theological and political planes and the unique qualities of LGBTQ performance styles. This contagious aesthetic is

explained by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Professor of English at William Patterson College in Wayne, NJ, who shares her first experience with MCC at the central church in Hollywood, CA.

The day was August 19, 1979. The place: a ballroom seating 3000 people in a Los Angeles hotel. The occasion: the ninth general conference of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches...The songs were the old gospel ones familiar to most Christians, especially to evangelicals: "He Lives", "Blessed Assurance", "Joyful Joyful, We Adore Thee"—all sung with tremendous exuberance...Throughout the entire service, any statement of solidarity with Hispanics or the elderly or the poor or any other oppressed group was greeted with strong applause. These people know their own pulse, I realized, that an attack on the freedom and dignity of anyone is an attack on everyone!

### ***The Normalization Gap***

The negotiations that determine how performance achieves social-religious significance are rooted in the desire to reclaim what has been lost in the transition from developmental religious situations to marginalization and reincorporation. For many in this community, maintaining a religious existence within the MCC NOVA context is bittersweet. Personal histories of many members include the painful abandonment of developmental religious settings after revelations of their own sexual orientations prompted marginalization from churches, families, and friends.

John McNeill, in his book Freedom, Glorious Freedom: The Spiritual Journey to the Fullness of Life for Gays, Lesbians and Everybody Else, explores the processes associated with creating an authentic gay self (McNeill, 1995:61-71). His work references others in an attempt to map possible criteria for the evolution of gays' and lesbians' transitioning from relative denial, to an interior awareness of self, to a public place of expression.



Three stages of evolution based in the process of this “coming out” to sexual consciousness are argued in his chapter. Self-love, leading to love of others, and ultimately public witness to God’s love for everyone are the main strata of McNeill’s observation of LBGTQ members and their journey toward greater self-awareness. This model presumes that traveling through these strata are necessary for gays and lesbians who wish to reach a holistic sexual spiritual maturity (Whitehead and Whitehead, 1986: 54). Transitioning from one state of being to another is an exercise in fear, frustration and ultimate separation as one grapples with turning away from known experiences to a more personal genuineness. Metaphorically and literally, it is a process of ‘exile’ where gender marginalized individuals wrestle with past and present experiences insulating them from fully encountering themselves. At the same time, as one gravitates away from the comfortable place of familiarity on to new frontiers, fears and anxieties can also include mourning as one considers separation from the central environments of heterosexism into environments of new exploration defined by sexual and social marginalism (Fortunato, 1987: 91).

Many gay people strive to hide their gay identity, even from themselves, in order to be accepted. The only healthy spiritual way to deal with our exile status is for gay people to go through a process of mourning, gradually letting go of our desire to belong and be accepted by all the structures of the heterosexist world. At the same time we must deepen our experience of belonging in the spiritual world (McNeill, 1995:63).

Understanding an individual’s place on the continuum of holistic spiritual maturity can be relative to performance if one considers that performance describes stages and cycles of personal self awareness. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross’ five stage model which explains the processes of detachment in dealing with death and dying (denial,

compromise, anger, depression, and acceptance) is an interesting model in light of considering the process of dying to one's own self recognition (Kübler-Ross, 1978). The process of dying to one's own diminished self-awareness is relative to the performance context where music and actions are vehicles for the transition from internal negotiation to public expression. McNeill points out that for many within the LGBTQ community transitioning from one stage to another in the act of "coming out" is often stifling as individuals become permanently or temporarily stuck within one or more of the stages traveling toward greater wholeness. He also notes that within these stages, performance of self plays a major part in disclosing the details of one's condition in the spectrum of change.

For example, at the denial stage, trying to live out their lives as a false self, suppressing or denying their reality as a gay person. They can try the compromise stage, e.g. marrying and clandestinely engaging in gay sex, or acting straight during the business week and going to gay bars dressed in leather on the weekend. They can also get stuck at the stage of anger or depression, becoming full of bitterness and cynicism (McNeill, 1995: 63).

Specific to this research is the question of how distant is the struggle from relative heterosexism to a state of being which is genuinely and publicly homosexual? For this suburban environment, the distance may prove to be greater than in urban environments. T.S. Weinberg and Colin Williams have suggested that the suburban gay/lesbian lifeworld is distinctly different than in other more urban settings. They hold that suburban homosexuals clearly are more circumspect, are more fearful of exposure, anticipate more intolerance and discrimination, and had fewer homosexual than heterosexual relationships (Weinberg and Williams, 1974:132). Homosexuality may also depend on age or generational gaps where older gays may have had more difficulty with "coming

out’ than younger queers (Dank, 1971; Troiden, 1979; Troiden and Goode, 1980). Though these opinions are controversial, they do argue a point relative to our discussion.

Firstly, the task of bridging the unique diversity of behaviors and ideologies with the priority of maintaining normality is highly important at MCC NOVA. While MCC NOVA attempts to exercise its diverse character, simultaneously it holds fast to its social condition which finds normativity in church structure, hegemonic rituals, and lifestyles which reflect a socio-economic affluence. This social condition sometimes places the performative aspects of ritual variation, new musical opportunities, and expressions of freedom further from everyday life than those of some urban homosexuals. This may account for the fact that MCC NOVA rituals are not flagrantly homosexual but contain a more latent LBGTQ agenda. Secondly, celebrating diversity incurs demographic and ideological complexity. Social order, though changing in MCC NOVA, remains centered in suburban life priorities of property, stability, and social control. As Gilbert Herdt describes, “the ideals of our society are contradictory in this respect-one ideal celebrates the diversity and meeting of Old and New World cultures; another emphasizes that all of us will blend together in a melting pot and form a happy family. The melting pot was an illusion, of course, but so perhaps are the utopian aims of gay and lesbians to form a single ‘community’ that represents one and all” (Herdt, 1997: 161). Therefore, we may ask if the common culture of MCC NOVA relates to the common culture of suburban utopia or is it a product of intentional blending. In effect, the important aspect here is that as MCCers strive and succeed in developing a more diverse yet unified world view of their own gay condition through the incorporation of performance techniques and

examples. These more often reflect less of their own everyday life as they become more adept in creating a sense of social dynamism.

Performance is an action of reclaiming as leaders, followers, participants, and observers, a means of reestablishing rights; to openly and publicly worship within a social context that accepts them. This process gives way to normalization as certain performative properties not usually accepted outside of MCC and not typically performed by LBTGQ participants in mainstream churches are reclaimed. Same-sex embraces, acceptance of marital commitments, family units, shared tragedy, and others ideologies critical to LBTGQ lifestyles are placed within a realm of normal engagement on a public plane. The following reflection from my fieldnotes explains one instance where these aspects become part of the ritual fabric and express how mainstream hegemonies are sometimes used to highlight normativity in MCC NOVA practices.

My own involvement in a 'holy union' of two church members was an important event in understanding the importance of establishing normalcy in LBTGQ public ritual. The two women painstakingly planned an event which for all practical purposes embodied similarities between heterosexual marriage and the lesbian life-union. The details which went into this event consumed all the participants for months. Details about dresses, tuxedos, music, flowers, limousines, and the exactness usually applied to heterosexual marriages in modern North American society were all present. It was, for all purposes, *a wedding*; though clearly in other ways it was not.

The event included all the political undertones as did many weddings which I had participated in the past. But most noticeable was the sentiment that the *brides*, fully intended for their guests to leave with a sense of normalcy. This aesthetic was embedding in the costuming where one of the women wore a long white wedding dress and the other wore a tuxedo. The ritual order was likened to that of a wedding ceremony with music and songs (favorites to the couple) adorned a marriage ritual ranging from musical chestnuts for weddings like J.S. Bach's *Air on the G String* to *No body Loves Me Like You Do* recorded by Anne Murray and Dave Loggins. Even the inclusion of the lighting of a unity candle (a ritual found in many mainstream marriage rites) under a garland-draped altar area added to the sense of normality. Though seemingly mainstream, pan-religious readings, the gender bending costuming, and the lack of any legal adjudication all contributed to the uniqueness and "otherness" of the occasion (Field Diary). (See Appendix F, on page 403 for a full outline of the ritual).

This freedom and ultimate empowerment to perform in a way which is intrinsically linked to personhood and gender-specific society is often contrary to the social environment in which one may live, work, and build a life. On the musical front, the placement of developmentally reminiscent songs, familiar musical societies, known texts, and even nostalgic musical events provide a recasting of the parameters of normativity because what is known is refashioned and reclaimed in an environment which empowers members' rights to participate. The end result makes the previously excluded enterprise into an authentic and ownable activity.

### ***The Interpretive/Emotive Gap***

In the midst of this phenomenon, ritual performance relies less on the importance of right behaviors or right decisions and more on the ability to maintain a certain liminal character in performance. The proper archetype for LBGTQ worship has often been defined by the ability to create a systematic worship based solely on the cultural communicants available in LBGTQ society. It stems from a desire to excript historical religious matter based on its ability to conjure past experience with marginalization. As we have seen, this is not the case at MCC NOVA. Rather, musical content and musical alteration forms a complex combination of historical knowledge transformed into appropriate performances within a fresh context. This task is rooted in the desire to create an environment which allows and includes differing notions of theological interpretation, concepts of normal behavior, and gender equality.

Ritual music becomes the reflection of inherent negotiations within the community where differing concepts become unified through the recognition that

liminality is sustainable and, more importantly, inherent in the LGBTQ community. Inclusion of membership is exercised by the community's ability to empower ministry which accepts and owns a variety of theological, ecclesial, and social realities. In effect, the ritual behavior in general is an exercise in acceptance as differing and sometimes opposing factions exercise tolerance, revelation, and nurturing.

Within this process of maintaining an open and accepting environment, the musical elements of social life act as a stabilizing but often challenging mechanism in the community's negotiation process. This reality stems from a multitude of factors which range from nostalgia about music to political interests. The emotivity surrounding music's role in the establishment of a gender-religiosity is not solely based on emotions as they are conjured by musical participation. Rather, as Susanne Langer has expressed,

...If music has any significance, it is semantic, not sympathetic. It's 'meaning' is evidently not that of a stimulus to evoke emotions, not that of a signal to announce them: if it has an emotional content, it 'has' it in the same sense that language 'has' its conceptual content—symbolically. It is not usually derived from affects not intended for them; but we may say, with certain reservations, that it is about them. Music is not the cause or the cure of feelings, but their logical expression; though even in this capacity it has its special ways of functioning, that make it incommensurable with language, and even with presentational symbols like images, gestures, and rites. (Langer, 1973: 216).

The essence of music here is the recognition and exercise of opposition. On the one hand, this opposition is a polarity between internal and external factions, social rejections and church acceptance. On the other hand, polarities may be between differing interpretations of what it means to be *gay* and to worship *gay*. Both these sentiments are argued through the process of music making and not only through the consideration of musical occurrence. Interpreting music's potential to express the latent feelings of

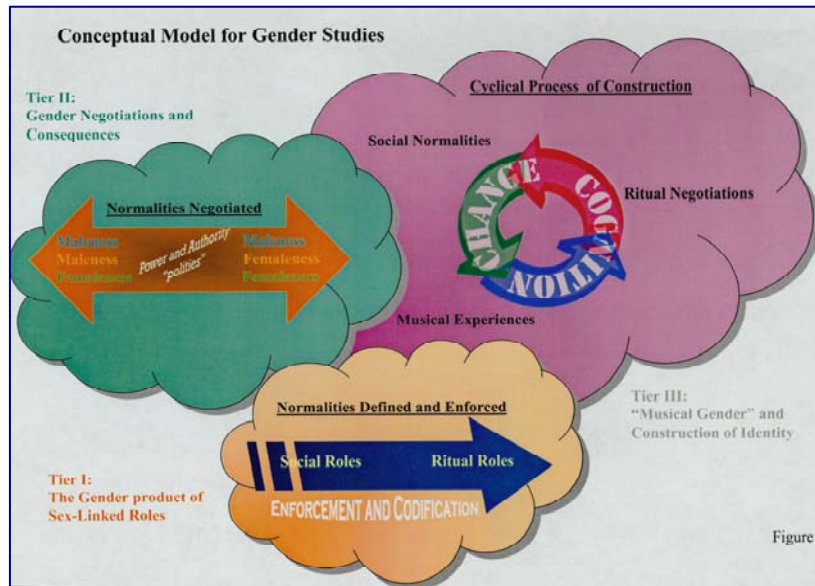
individuals and ultimately of the corporate body is secondary to the role it plays as a unique descriptor of more latent negotiations in the individual and community.

### *The Gender Gap*

The conceptual shift from a preoccupation with sexuality to an inquiry into how gender is realized through performance depends on the acceptance that within the sexual counterparts (male and female) every aspect of the human condition finds a performative possibility (Bem, 1992:154). As a result, a myriad of gender possibilities are allowed to emerge and become plausible (Ibid: 152-159). Culturally nurtured definitions of ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness’ transcend social normalities to represent relative positions on a continuum of gender. Human genderedness is less defined by biology and more by aesthetic values and person’s roles as descriptions of humanness. Masculinity and femininity become less the subject of polarization, while new polarities emerge.

I have previously proposed that studies of gender in ethnomusicology have often been split between three possible tiers of significance. The collective approaches contained within these tiers serve as contributory modes which shape a broad conceptual model of the breadth of the gender question (Figure 25, below).

Figure 25. A Conceptual Model for Gender Studies (Lotrecchiano, 2002, unpublished).



In the first tier, the preliminary work of researchers focuses on sex-linked social roles and how through ritual music these roles are defined and enforced (See Lomax, 1968; Auerbach, 1987; and Walser 1993). In the second tier, the product of analysis recognizes that through the unique platform of ritual music, gender constructions of maleness and femaleness are open to the possibility of negotiation, not only across sexual counterparts but also within them (See Koskoff, 1989; Robertson 1989; and Reilly, 1995). In the third tier, gender constructions can be formulated outside of normative female/male boundaries enforced in society. At the core of this tier is the reality that cognition and perception serve as aesthetic vehicles subject to musical and other means of change. The construction of gender only serves as a means for greater understanding into the whole of cultural and musical systems. Through the perpetual cyclical process of movement from social normalities to the negotiations and reinforcements associated with ritual and musical experiences which lie therein, can there be a truly relevant study of



gender which leads to a revitalized inquiry into the whole of cultural awareness. Otherwise, the question of gender becomes the sole product of inquiry instead of a vehicle by which greater more pertinent information about cultural systems may be derived.

The degree to which context plays in constructing gender is directly affected by the dynamic nature of musical systems which are the product of fluctuating cultural systems of belief. As a result of cultural change, polarities within the perception of gender will migrate in either the direction of conformity or negotiation. These shifting polarities are a byproduct of a self-organizing of cultural expectations which may, based on cultural and ritual beliefs, gravitate toward rigidity or ambiguity with regards to the perception of gender identifying aesthetics. However, this self-organizing may (or may not) be adopted by musicians in the way they perform gender (Herndon 1996:9) and is subject to the acceptance of gender polarities among musicians. The question inherent is not “What is the product of this self-organization?” but rather, “What is (are) the mechanism(s) associated with these dynamics?”

As researchers, arriving at a perspective on context relies on knowledge of the culture as defined through the musical system, which will mirror, either through rigidity or ambiguity, fluctuations in cultural belief about gender.

In Judith Shapiro’s study of transexualism, she notes that the mechanisms of gender construction are firstly supported within culture through a variety of domains. These domains may be political, sexual, economic, personal, etc. Secondly, the possibility of plausible gender characteristics stretches well beyond the constructs or

encapsulations of what it is to be ‘sexed’ as understood by a culture at any given time (Shapiro, 1991: 271). Shapiro shows that gender differences within the sexual condition can only result in an expansion and “robustness of gender systems” which transcends the rules usually assigned by sex. She cites an insightful statement:

Gender is a reality, and a more fundamental reality than sex. Sex is, in fact, merely the adaptation to organic life of a fundamental polarity which divides all created beings. Female sex is simply one of the things that have feminine gender; there are many others, and Masculine and Feminine meet us on planes of reality where male and female would be simply meaningless. (C.S. Lewis cited in Morris, 1974: 25)

Gender as a human characteristic will therefore affect musical behaviors and be communicable through means of cognition, time/motion, patterned sound, and context in performance (Herndon, 1987: 459). Within these means, change permeates as a subjective musical function in itself.

The study of change within musical systems has traditionally evolved from a focus on musical or “sound” changes to a focus on performers and performers’ perceptions about their music and performances (See Merriam, 1964: 307, Sachs 1962, and Blacking 1978, 1986).

The process of musical change can be as important as the product, i.e. the noticeable and resultant change, the nature of the process of music change is dependant on the cognitive characteristics of the society where the music is found; the ways in which specialists and non-specialists think about their musical style. (Herndon, 1987:458).

By asserting that gender authenticity is a priority for MCC communities is really an assertion that the *gender-religious* scope this church takes on allows for the development of a multiplicity of identities performed through an environment which nurtures gender awareness. This stance naturally makes concession to a wide spectrum

which allows for a variety of interpretations across the board affecting notions about theology, personhood, world order, politics, ritual, and authentic behavior. This community's ability to temper the multiplicity of interpretation is unique within a traditional religious structure, i.e. church institutionalism.

Aesthetics of ritual and music include the negotiations and outcomes of a communal dialogue. These represents dialogic of maintaining the tension between self-perceptions and the more marginal interpretations of what it means to be a member of society and of an intentional community. For this reason, perceptions of right behavior will vary in the context of musical and ritual performance, though clearly the search for greater authentication of LBGQT qualities is paramount.

With respect to the musical arena, the aesthetics which make up this transitional stance are partly overt especially when viewed in comparison to culture already known to communicants. These may be noticeable through interpretations of right behavior in light of stereotypical qualities about what it means to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, or the like. In fact, at times these aesthetics clearly operate in worship environments. However, even those behaviors which are less overt, seemingly normal either in light of mainstream society or in the context of religious praxis, are only relative to the shifting conditions of individuals who journey toward greater becoming especially in terms of gender.

Musical occasions supply an opportunity for a collection of individuals to make this journey, each equipped with different means of communicating their own place in the continuum of change. Human performance becomes therefore dialogic. At times,

performers are sharing revealed self-awarenesses and at other times awareness is being constructed in the communication of performance aesthetics.

### **The Musical Bridge**

#### **Music shaping context (properties of conversion)**

Stating that performance at MCC NOVA provides evidence of distinct gaps in the transition from mainstream religious tendencies and a fully integrated *gender-religiosity* requires a method for understanding how these gaps might be overcome. In this third chapter we have explored some of the musical and ritual events of the community in an attempt to describe this integrated religiosity, negotiation, and alteration including both cognitive and musical aesthetics. Arriving at a stable interpretation of these aesthetics can not depend solely on analysis of the musical and ritual components, for if this were the case, the only conclusion that we come to is that musical ritual performance at MCC is a blended arena of multiple and diverse religious tendencies. Furthermore, to the outsider, performances may simply be a collection of alternative and acculturated acts which serve to stylize the Christian *ordo* into a contemporary and inter-religious reality. Rather, the behaviors which construct the social reality as expressed by MCC performance describe the ever-changing and diachronic movement from individual awareness to social acceptance. Socialization in this context is a process of negotiating musical and ritual elements which will inform belief where belief is constantly reshaping performance with a gender-rich priority in mind.

### **The musical collective as representation of diversity**

The core values of MCC NOVA provide a template for fashioning many elements of performance. Though seemingly obvious, the elements of Good News (accepting individuals for who they are), God's Presence (the believe that all individuals reflect a part of God, and that God reflects all of us), Inclusivity (a commitment to ourselves through word and deed to dismantle barriers between individuals and between individuals and God), Spiritual Growth (encouraging and supporting individual freedom and responsibility for spiritual growth), and Elastic Theology (affirming a variety of faith expressions and experiences) contribute to shaping the cognitive belief of the community and shapes its ritual behaviors. The relationship between these social values, their religious overtones, and practical performance are far reaching. Though each contributes to a construction of religiosity which can be easily affirmed through ritual behaviors, they also provide for a cultural setting. This allows for the expansion of one's self concept and ultimately one's world view as it pertains to gender.

Conversion based in these values is one which affects both self and social ordering. It is measurable through individual performer's states of willingness, abilities, the license afforded them, desires, and an ultimate responsibility to inform the group through their performative testimonials. The interplay of a growing world view based in social empathy, theological appropriateness, acceptance, empowerment, and even a growing musical scope directly affects the musical order. This expanding world view shapes praxis to include appropriate language, it breaks down musical hegemonies, empowers creativity, and even refashions historical musics into a new light. Self-

awareness and concept is negotiated in exploratory activities of performance in direct relationship to social order with musical media as the transitioning factor reinforcing belief. The aesthetics of this process are both cognitive and behavioral and rely on each other for performance to have meaning to the community.

The impetus for conversion is the tension between two already stated paradigms (Kilbourne and Richardson, 1988). The assumptions of the “old” (*behavior following belief*) and “new” (*belief following behavior*) paradigms both operate in the reality of musical performance where the cognitive attributes of predefined core values are in constant dialogue with the ritual and musical outcomes brought on by the constant testing of performative appropriateness. The collection of individuals describing appropriateness operate from a platform of diversity where ethnic, gendered, idiomatic, historical, political, and emotional criteria define the decision making process of ritual praxis.

Therefore, the dialogue between the internal self-conversation and the external performances emerges in direct relationship with intimacy where performances “explore the inner workings of the realms of transformation through a process of successful and unsuccessful attempts at passing as one of the social group” (Strauss 1976: 252, p.112). Concomitantly, belief is supplied by both an inner awareness of truth and a shared and palatable system of recognizing the similarities between internal justification and the noticeable performative behaviors from others involved in a similar internal/social dialogue (Hart and Richardson 1981 p.116). If we accept that utterances of this dialogue either in the form of speech language or musical behavior identify both the process of internal dialogue and its social behavioral outcome, we may surmise that the criteria (or

motive) for these utterances are change in the overall condition of the group which strives to order musical/ritual behaviors based on a system of beliefs which are dual product of unknown internal tendencies and known shared behaviors. The latter is the result of the former (Mills, 1940, p.118).

### **Identifying Through Music**

Since defining identity through music is both cognitively derived and practically based, we may take several differing views on the role of music in this enterprise. Foremost is the importance of music and its role in constructing meaning for the individual and ultimately providing a local and corporate identity. On the individual plane, one comes to understand internal negotiations of personhood and its behavioral consequences through an innate conversation with meaning imbedded in the acts (Lonergan, 1974: 61). This human subjectivity relies on dialogues between internal questions about one's self and the multiplication of consciousnesses operative throughout one's existence. Ultimately, the person is one who experiences, understands, judges, decides, and acts while engaged in a variety of activities of meaning: potential, formal, full, constitutive or effective, and instrumental. Transitionally, this human subjectivity gives way to a collective or corporate subjectivity as individuals of like (but not identical) dispositions share in belief systems as the result of meaning-latent activities which draw individuals to share beliefs about human potentiality, fullness, effectiveness, and the like (Kelleher, 1985: 484).

Though the human condition plays an integral part in the dialogue between individual consciousness and corporate behavior, the musical products which emerge

from this process are not simply relative to other similar behaviors (i.e. other creative performances). Ultimately, this is so because music contains specific modalities of behavior in comparison to other types of human behaviors. Even Susan Langer's theories about music's emotivity fail to express the full spectrum of the relationship between the internal self and the transitions one makes in applying internal feeling (either in interpretation or through creative participation) about music and corporate meaning. The meanings of music making and the social context in which they operates are in fact two "halves" of the same "whole" where "it is by this indirect reference to the 'whole' that music as symbol becomes a recognition and identification between subjects" (Kubicki 1995: 439).

As performers and listeners both participate in the same events, and as all participants experience similar musical experiences, the interior activity and disposition of the individual is at the heart of the establishment of meaning as these events contribute to variables of knowledge. The disposition of the individual may be one of many operative categories of how the conversion process occurs (Chapter 2, Figure 3, p.81). Furthermore, how an individual interprets these musical events may be highly dependant on the motivations associated with transitions between one self awareness to another and by what means we attempt to measure the outcome of identity construction (Weber, 1922; Mills, 1940). A "world order" described in this case, a microcosmic "local identity", is one which is rooted in a shifting from a personal interpretation to an interpretation of the "other" which is literally and metaphorically transferred by any



number of aesthetics means and variables (Goffman 1955, 1959; R. Turner, 1962, and Rosenberg, 1981).

### **Deconstruction of historic musical hegemonies**

We have seen musical alteration and acculturation on a variety of levels: linguistically, theologically and ecclesially, stylistically, ethnically, and through gender appropriateness. Within each of these levels, the construction of a social setting is based in interior negotiations and adaptations of personal and corporate self-fashioning. The establishment of roles and social hierarchies is the product of exploratory outcomes of this process (Gecas, 1981).

Musically speaking, style, linguistic alteration, interpretation, and newfound application all contribute to the deconstructing of developmental hegemonies into a new social setting. This setting is based in a performative realm where decisions about musical performance and praxis, ritual appropriateness in relation to values, worldviews, and shared belief converge. The establishment of this “performative” society reinforces and recapitulates knowledge and empowers the expansion of the music realm resulting in an augmented worldview which, as has been noted, is both internal and external.

### **Music’s aesthetics: platform for change**

Within each context of musical performance, periods of traditionalism (establishing appropriate musical styles and genre) are peppered with occurrences of alteration and acculturation that stylize historical hegemonies within newfound self-awarenesses of appropriateness. Musical statements are never meaningful solely through interpretations of their audible and visual aesthetics but meaningful through their

contextual importance. For example, in the MCC context, choral robes are symbols of ecclesial traditionalism, serving as a symbol of normalization. The performance of popular styles is a modernization of the Christian *ordo* and an expression of growing musical and social awareness by its ability to expand the horizons of both the musical landscape and the performer. Drumming serves as an extension of musical tastes and cultural affinities. It also reorders Western music's internal social structures and points to the intention and desire to reevaluate the Christian worshipping stance. All these examples support the notion that in the process of self-discovery, the priority for gender appropriateness is driven by the need to explore freedoms, to search for acceptance, and to allow the musical stage to empower further personal development.

Identifying musical aesthetics in this context is a difficult task. This is mainly due to the problem of identifying individual musical events, their micro occurrences, and the relationship these have to the whole of corporate consciousness. If we proposed that musical aesthetics were to have a direct relationship with the corporate belief systems it would be a continual problem to associate non-theistic language de-sexing God with ethnic musics in which god-language is critical to the genre, environments of ritual performance with specific moments of gender specific content, or personal preferences with biblical reinterpretations of the LBGTQ contemporary agenda, just to name a few examples. Rather, we may group performance aesthetics into cognitive-musical clusters where seemingly different aesthetics are combined into unified experiences and recognize that the musical outcome is a diachronic element in the ongoing process of self-

awareness of MCC NOVA members. This leaves us with several concrete assertions about musical behavior germane to a discussion of gender construction.

Firstly, musical meaning is contextual. It characterizes musical ritual activity at MCC NOVA as a reorganization of the hegemonies traditionally associated with the Christian *ordo*. Musical components contain meaning within certain environments, expressing the overall value system of the MCC NOVA context. This may require the establishment of new creations in the form of language or performance techniques. It may also be a recapitulation of a combination of already known developmental hegemonies (musical, ritual, ideological, etc.) as they are reinterpreted in light of this gender-religious setting. Secondly, change is both a sustained liminal experience and a static state relative to the LBGTQ social condition. In the former case, corporate values and musical expressiveness are never held as absolute or infinite realities. In the latter case, ongoing change is a stable aesthetic as the bridges between normality, interpretation, gender, and appropriateness are ever changing and ever in need of reassessing. Musical performance is the mechanism for this aesthetic to operate on the macro level and on micro levels of performance. Lastly, *gender-religiosity* is grounded in these cognitive musical aesthetics. Challenging the traditional Christian *ordo* with its ritual, MCC NOVA's musical and ideological tendencies exercise values of acceptance and freedom which is at the core of its beliefs. The *modus operandi* here are less focused on the search for ultimate outcomes. Right musical praxis or right interpretations of order are secondary to the research question. Rather, the process itself is the performative cause for the effect of change. This

changes found in MCC NOVA rituals may not be overt at all, but may at times be based more in the interior (cognitive) operations of the conversion process.

### **Summary**

Ethnomusicological insights about cognition, change, and social consciousness and their impact on musical analysis have been the operative theoretical strands with which we have explored the performances of MCC NOVA in this chapter. I have based an analysis of these musical events on the fact that when considering the artifacts, identity can be viewed from a lens which focuses on three important transformational characteristics of ritual: its mythical character (a consciousness about gender/identity possibilities), its multilayered and multivalent character (metalanguages and diverse *voce*), and its dramatic character (describing a series of unfolding realities). By incorporating these characteristics of ritual, we can explore a series of question leading to how the ritual and music experiences describe personal consciousness about identity through locality and ownership of the material of MCC NOVA members. By exploring these questions we have arrived at a determination that individual understanding about the musics and rituals and the meanings embedded in them translates individual self awareness (as described in chapter 2) to a social consciousness which is exercised in performance (chapter 3). This occurs through multiple musical opportunities and examples of changing perceptions about the musical acts.

The musical landscape of MCC NOVA is highly diverse and is the product of many personal and corporate histories. In some cases it is the historical musics and rituals

themselves, reinterpreted and reclaimed within the context of the MCC NOVA safe haven where their meaning is reoriented, reclaimed, and/or owned in a new way. In other cases, historical musics, reinvented from a stylistic standpoint, through the alteration of lyrics, or the through the combination of musics and rituals with newfound perceptions of self and the world, illustrates the meanings embedded in the *process* of music-making. New expressions, those foreign to the collective historical consciousness of the participants, offer other insights into their meaning by virtue of their novelty. But even here, the focus is on the ability of these musical events to describe the transitional nature of music-making and their value is more rooted in the mechanisms of change they illustrate rather than the meanings each example might embody independently. They are opportunities to carve out new avenues of expression unencumbered by the restrictions of history—its politics and/or dogmas.

All this leads to an expansion of the social and musical consciousness of the community. Some of it relies on shifting social perceptions which affect musical and ritual choices. In other cases, it is the aesthetics of music and ritual which ignite new perceptions about self. In either case, the musical and social perspectives are expanded and work in concert with each other describing a unique social ordering, outlook, connection (or disconnection) with a greater world, a marriage (or divorce) with historical hegemonies, and ultimately, a construction of local identity.

The focus in this chapter has been on the “grey matter” of transition from one locale of consciousness to another. This middle ground is a translation of meanings. Some of the shifting meanings are about the musics and rituals themselves while others

are about the social perceptions the musics and rituals conjure. Musical change informs the question of conversion here as a series of gaps are identified in the experiences of individuals and the community at large. The first is an aesthetic gap between those musical attributes carried from previous religious experiences into a MCC NOVA context. This transitional gap is inclusive of the others as it provides for an interpretation of continuity and discontinuity as concomitant entities. The second is a historical gap which is the transition from one set of priorities and traditions into another. The traditions may be borrowed, reinterpreted, or newfound. The experience of ritual music allows for this process to commence. The normalization gap is dependant on the second as normalization of the MCC NOVA ritual music landscape becomes an overarching priority for establishing LBGTQ religious as credible and normative to the local community. This gap may be undetected audibly. It may also present itself in noticeable stylizations. It may rest solely in perception as one body of aesthetics becomes absorbed into a newfound context. On the other hand, it may be very noticeable from a performative standpoint as choices are made about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of certain historical artifacts. Interpretation and emotivity therefore become operative benchmarks for transitions in consciousness. In this gap, the value of musical and ritualized aesthetics themselves becomes the indicators of the *process*. They provide a subtle array of indicators about the stages of transition based in the personal experiences of the member's interpretations and feelings about the musics and rituals. The former gaps inform a transition in gender perceptions. They serve as the ethnographic matter toward establishing a priority for a *gender-religiosity*. In the gender

gap, the discourses which the first four provide point to the conceptual shifting from a sexually oriented religious stance to one which is gender driven. In other words, the gender gap represents a collection of discourses which though grounded in human performance and aesthetics ultimately points to the translations of one locale of gender self and corporate awareness to another.

Each of these gaps is reconciled by the musical bridge which serves as a means for conversion to occur. The musical materials provide four main avenues of transition. First, the musical collective embodying cognitive, social, and audible properties, with its many styles, aesthetics, historical attributes, and traditional representations serves as a mechanism of bridging gaps of perception by highlighting diversity as a descriptive marker of the complexity of MCC NOVA rituals. Second, the musical material allows for identification with the human performances which make up this complexity resulting in an ownership of the meanings they represent and more importantly the translational character which they embody. Third, music and ritual become an opportunity to construct and deconstruct hegemonies of both aesthetic and ideological character. Fourth, the music's aesthetics, more precisely the details of expression, become the platform of change (both externally and internally) from which a blueprint of the charism of this community emerges.

This chapter represents an expansion of the material from chapter 2 in that it continues the major trends of this study: conversion, identity construction, and motivation outlined. It differs in that it purposely includes the variable experiences found in ritual and music performance to illustrate the complexity of the research question. While within

the theories that emerge from social psychology and sociology which strive to locate the mechanisms of conversion (change) in individual perceptions about change, here those perceptions are translated into the processes which represent that change. We have found that in this enterprise, we must proceed cautiously since human performance is not always what it seems to be. It is riddled with subtexts and *modi* which far exceed mere individual perceptions but are the result of politics (both internal and external) operative in the *process* of personal and communal gender appropriation.

These conclusions challenge us to delve deeper into the question of the relationship between performance and identity construction. They challenge us to design methods which allow for the “grey matter” of performance to become the ethnographic material under consideration. To be successful in this endeavor, we must amalgamate the insights of the social sciences with the ethnographic material and devise a method which seeks to consider both insights into a new logic of perception allowing us to break through the restrictions of their methods. In other words, we need to use this information and create new models of analysis that include the mechanisms of human performance (*how* and *why* one performs), the specific intricacies of performance (the music and ritual artifacts and outcomes), and marry it with an overarching model that serves the core of the research, namely its impact on gender identity and human conversion. This is the task of the fourth chapter.



## Chapter 4: An Ontological Ritual Approach to *Gender-Religiosity*

One: Let us come into this house of worship,  
Ready to join together in joyful praise and thanksgiving  
**Many: Let us come, but let us not leave our cares at the door.  
Let us not leave our pain, our sorrows, or our joys.**

One: Yes let us bring all of that with us  
To his place of acceptance and forgiveness.  
**Many: Let us place them on the common altar of life,  
And offer them to the possibility of our worship.**

One: Let us offer ourselves to the potential transformation  
Of the creative process that flows through us and through all life.  
**Many: Yes. As we are, along with everything we bring with us,  
Let us offer ourselves to God in worship.**

(Call to worship, September 5, 2004)

### Introduction to the Approach

The theoretical underpinnings described in the second chapter of this paper highlighted behavioral approaches to the question of *how* individuals develop a self concept, *how* this self concept is constructed and socialized, and ultimately *how* motivation plays a part in the interpretation of *why* individuals behave the way they do in certain social situations. We discovered that as models for analysis, the work of behaviorists provide helpful methods for considering human performance and its relevance in understanding more deeply the processes of human self awareness. The third chapter offered a variety of ritual and musical expressions of MCC NOVA describing religious experiences of this community as members construct for themselves a tradition rooted in Judeo-Christian aesthetics as well as in LBGTQ life experiences. Through both intentional and latent descriptions, we discovered that individual beliefs and corporate beliefs at MCC NOVA are the result of a collage of interpretations based in the historical and conceptual experiences of persons who associate with each other through shared

tendencies and gendered realities. These are sometimes easily recognized in ritual. At other times they serve as venues for negotiation and tolerance.

In short, the second two chapters of this paper have introduced two main terrains of the MCC NOVA landscape which make up its unique *gender-religiosity*. The first is a consideration of gender in light of human development and the intricacies associated with understanding *how* individuals operate in a social arena while developing and employing a self-consciousness. The second is a question of tradition and the translation from one set of beliefs and social structures (mainstream religion) to another (local religiosity). This question considers music, ritual acts, and perceptions as the data under consideration. The consideration of the transitions (conversion) these artifacts describe is located by recognizing the latent and overt means by which the community refashions its perceptions of historical religiosity in light of newfound expressions.

We have presumed several ideas about the MCC NOVA experience thus far. Change occurs as a transition from a religious mainstream to a uniquely *gender-religious* context. This *gender-religiosity* is a culmination of two equally important facets in this community's existence: practicing faith and normalizing gender marginalism. The transition from a mainstream religious arena to this intentional one strives to establish religious history, *ordo*, theology, and texts suitable and palatable to a LBGTQ context. It strives to nurture priorities and to embrace sensitivities of gender marginalized individuals seeking to remain fervent to religious truths. In essence, we have presumed that individual conversions are instrumental in this process of constantly becoming more informed about the community's genderedness as a whole.

The corporate system of belief is critically affected by the role ritual and music play. They allow individuals to enter creatively into religious and interpersonal dialogue through the freedom and license to performance. We have seen a variety of ways where experience is interpreted, and have noticed the congruent and incongruent sentiments which operate concomitantly throughout this process. I have stated that these processes of exploration and negotiation contribute to a perpetual state of evolution where individuals, through their experience of and contribution to ritual life, are involved in the activities of change, both personally and corporately.

Performance provides a venue for self-concept to be disclosed. Ritual aesthetics describe and prescribe one's ability to become more closely committed to the system of beliefs inherent in a community. Since in this context ritual content is relative to the constant and perpetual shifting of self awarenesses, we must also presume that the descriptions of performances are only evocative in relation to a continuum of shifting realities apparent to performers, audiences, and observers. The research is challenging for this reason because the material describing this phenomenon is often found in only latent ways. The emergent realities of this community's transitions are often embedded in what might be initially considered common place for the religious mainstream. In light of transformation, we need to view self identity (the description of genderedness) from a lens of ontological evolution (becoming) and presume that actual change is not only noticeable in the peculiarities of performance but also to the internal and ultimate eventual self descriptions of the human participants as they travel from one awareness to another.

To consider the question of gender evidenced in its dialogue with tradition and to hedge toward an enlightened viewpoint on its significance we need to establish a relationship between gender and its traditional (i.e. ritual and musical) descriptions. When both perceptions about gender and tradition are viewed as having a relationship that informs human ontology the establishment of a truly *gender-religious* stance may be considered.

In this chapter I will shift the discussion of self-awareness to include a transformative quality by firstly exploring the notion of ontological becoming and its relation to divine revelation. This will be done by the presentation of certain philosophical perspectives on the subject supplied by phenomenological insights (specifically the work of Bernard Lonergan) as well as modern liturgical studies. Secondly, I will reconsider MCC liturgical celebrations and discuss transformation as it serves to supply behavioral evidence for this phenomenology and offer a series of analytical means for showing how this is operative in MCC NOVA worship. Lastly, in the summary and conclusion, we will explore the relationship between theory and practice which offers insight into an interpretation of the significance of MCC NOVA worship in establishing a *gender-religiosity*.

### **Bernard Lonergan's Phenomenology of Becoming**

#### **Lonergan's contribution to a method for analysis**

An ongoing problem throughout the research has been recognizing a hermeneutic for studying MCC NOVA traditions steeped in a universally shared historical or

theoretical script. Unlike other liturgical traditions where theological foundations, unique and documented histories, and apologetic witnesses to the development of the tradition are easily attainable, UFMCC represents a complex but undocumented hermeneutic from a universal perspective. Even Troy Perry's works which document his own spiritual and social journey as a religious gay man marginalized from his Pentecostal roots, to his ultimate fathering of a contemporary LBGTQ church, fail to describe in detail the actual religious foundations of the UFMCC like other traditions. Rather they serve as spiritual resources of the mind of the UFMCC founder to his following (See Perry and Lucas 1972; Perry and Swicegood 1990; Perry 2004).

This reality presents a problem in method and analysis. If this were another liturgical tradition we may look to the foundations of the community to see an evolution of liturgical and religious practice by considering the tradition in comparison to its impetus. Lutherans are the product of Martin Luther's cause but clearly are in themselves distant cousins to Luther's originating 95 theses. Unitarians borrow the work of William Channing as a way of thought but gather from him little knowledge about the styles and ways of religious practice. Roman Catholicism, even in light of the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II, returning to its liturgical roots, remains a living reminder of the liturgical and practical experience of medieval ecclesiality. In any of these cases, the research would be an investigation into the roadmap of an evolution in light of history and social consequence.

For UFMCC community's the unfolding of the charisms associated with being a LBGTQ church are in constant discovery. This is due to its open invitation to all who

believe in the positivism associated with being marginal and being respected as religiously conscious. The autonomy of MCC churches throughout the world offers proof that local congregations understand their own identity in light of their local and unique social condition unhampered by universal church expectations—for the most part.

This leaves us with the task of assuming a method for analysis which allows for human experience (religious, personal, and social) to ordain ritual and local meaning. This is an invigorating venture for it allows an analysis to be conducted based on the experiences of the local church unhampered by overly compromised institutional ideological structures.

I've chosen the work of Bernard Lonergan for several reasons. Firstly, his work represents a body of contemporary religious thought which is grounded in spiritual realities but does not exclude empiricism of thought. In the 1950s and 60s when his work began to gain public stature, his approaches served as a unifier between religious, philosophical, psychological, and even mathematical discourses. Second, though Lonergan's religious history as a Jesuit priest clearly affected his approaches to ritual, his Roman Catholic background was only one of several defining elements in his theories. This is particularly important for this research. Like Victor Turner, whose anthropological essays focused on a myriad of Catholic rituals contexts, Lonergan's theories are pliable and universal in their approach, allowing for application amidst a variety of ritual situations. Third, as this research clearly represents blended and integrated religious histories brought together by priorities rooted in non-religious social realities, Lonergan's theories serve well as we attempt to understand a tradition in

evolution based in individual and local human experiences translated into ritual and musical behaviors gathered from a variety of religious cultures.

### **Description of Theories**

The issue of self awareness in light of ritual expression is one which requires a response to the question of humanness *in development*. This can be presented from the standpoint of stages of psychological and biological growth, intellectual agency, transitions in lifecycle, and as we have seen, socialization. When these are viewed in isolation of each other, humanness is conceived as a sum of parts where human activity is relative to different domains of consciousness as they coexist to produce an ultimate human product (Becker, 1981: 307-308). This interpretation of human development presumes an interconnectedness between psychology and biology and human self awareness. The approach is problematic as it often fragments the discussion of gender identity through a series of unrelated disciplinary approaches. The phenomenological approach which is employed in this chapter presumes that the human being is potentially more than the psychological and biological sum of parts due to his/her ability to transcend from one state of awareness to another consciously. For ethnomusicological thought, this tests analytical trends which evaluate gendered performances through a consideration of the sex-gender relationship as it applies to human performance (Herndon 1990: 11-12) and further establishes human potentiality as the product of gender studies (Herndon 2000: 351-354). For our purposes, this phenomenological approach is more suitable as we strive to associate human self-consciousness within an ontology of the human person in light of gender and spiritual awareness.

In other words, one way of analyzing the rituals of MCC would be to base our interpretations on the connection between being *gay* (as a psychobiological state) and performing *gay*. Rather, we have focused on the mechanisms of music and ritual as they inform gender from a human perspective (ontological reality). Therefore, we have designed an analytic lens that presumes foremost that gender is rooted in human awareness. This context views LBGTQ lifestyle as one of many possibilities in the continuum of gender awareness.

Becoming (*existenz*) as stated by Bernard Lonergan, is the *ongoing* consciousness of one's self. It is the public voice of the private and intimate realm of the individual. It presumes a multi-categorical interpretation of the individual's involvement in his/her own self awareness. This process can be the result of any location in the many categorical realms of existence and for this reason the human experience can not be described through any one category.

At any one time it is the psychological, sociological, historical, philosophical, theological, religious, ascetic, and perhaps for some even mystical; but it is all of them because the person is all and involved in all. At the same time, it is not personal in a merely individual sense: it is not exhibitionism on the part of the speaker; it is not exhortation, a domestic exhortation in place of a lecture, for those that listen. It is what the Germans call a *Besinnung*, a becoming aware, a growth in self-consciousness, a heightening of one's self-appropriation that is possible because our separate, unrevealed, hidden cores have a common circle of reference, the human community, and an ultimate point of reference, which is God, who is all in all. (Lonergan, 1967:240).

Human existence presumes a distinction between subject (the person) and substance (one's make up). Substance of human beingness is a constant, regardless if one is awake or asleep, conscious of one's own self or not, involved in overt performance or mired in latency. To be a subject, the human must dream, be creative, be an agent, and have an active role in self awareness. In essence, the human subject is one of potentiality for the more conscious one is the more active he or she is in the process of this becoming.



This accounts for what has been described as change in perceptions about tradition on its appropriateness at any given time. Substance is a constant to all life and describes the peculiarities of the human person. Regardless of the matter under consideration, being young or old, sober or drunk, gay or straight, each is merely accidental to the substance of the individual outside of consciousness. To the conscious subject however, these are not accidental or ambiguous as they serve to describe potentiality, becoming more and more active in the process of assimilating these into his or her own interpretation and description of self (Lonergan 1967:241). This line of thinking adds insight to why MCC NOVA performances are not always reminiscent of overt LBGTQ tendencies. Their performances exist within a process of awareness which at times will draw on known aspects of performance (borrowed traditions) and at other times will be machinations of one's (or the group's) discoveries.

Being is not relegated to the human state at rest but a state in constant flux gravitating towards an unachievable fulfillment of what it means to be fully human. The *self* of one time period or lifecycle is not the *self* of another as the human becomes more involved in the process and becomes more the collective product of his or her own becoming. The individual becomes more and more involved as he/she increasingly develops through decision making about where to turn next armed with newfound knowledge. This said, there is a critical point in the increasing autonomy of the subject. Life transitions are not merely isolated revelations of knowledge predirecting the decisions an individual will make but rather, contribute to the awareness of how the individual will construct him/herself. The matter at hand, the self revelations about *who*

the person *is* is cumulative and ultimately contributes to what he or she is to *be*. However, this autonomy is never truly transcended. The descriptions and ultimate decisions one employs to “make public the private” is relative to reflection and is precarious. “It can slip, fall, or shatter. What is to be achieved can be ever expanding, deepening. To meet one challenge is to effect a development that reveals a further and graver challenge” (Lonergan 1967: 241-243).

This notion is particularly germane to this research for it allows us to look beneath the descriptions of belief described in ritual and music. This first level of knowledge is absorbed as we delve deeper into the *why* of decision making and focus on ritual and musical occasions as transitions from one awareness to another, both individually and corporately.

### **Worlds of experience**

The ever-changing landscape of the subject affects interpretations of two realms of perception: “the world” and “the subject’s world”. The former is that which is to be known and is unchanged by its very knowing. The latter world is a correlative of conscious existence however. It may be rooted in fantasy, reality, hopes, delusions, or the like. The important thing is that within the subject’s world, the individual shapes and is shaped regardless of the measure of reality these perceptions play in other’s interpretations of the way things *really* are.

We may return to the example of the *Sacred Places* meditation group (Chapter 2, p.47) whose priorities for sacred experience occur within a realm of open communication with the personal experiences of the group. Much of their “world” (subject’s) is focused

on a view of the sacred which displaces the traditional “world” of the Judeo Christian *ordo*. Participation in *Sacred Places* (“subject’s world”) is a machination of the individuals who create it. The Judeo-Christian world is not mutilated but rather is simply “the other”. *Sacred Places* is a product of a Judeo-Christian world-view though it is secondary to the reinforcement of a view which the group chooses to nurture and explore. The participants are shaped by and contribute to it through their own subjective *Sacred Places* “world.” “The other” in effect is the antithesis of the Sacred Places “world”. In the example of the holy union (Chapter 3, on page 231), the couple borrows a world view almost identical to mainstream traditions in their depiction of lesbian marriage. Their choices about performance use this view as a staple in communicating their own normalcy. Here, “the other” and “their view” is united more closely on the performance plane, although meaning is clearly different.

Lonergan describes this shifting between worlds as having many modes of efficacy for the person. Firstly, it may play an immediate role where root human desires and needs are met without discernment, much like infancy. For the adult, satisfaction, euphoria, and even sleep and nourishment are of this stance. This immediacy is sometimes met with meaning where pressing needs are met but only after discernment and differentiation. Fact is separated from fiction and stories are separated from outcomes. Here is where the individual realizes that immediacy is simply a part of the real world, where intelligence and rationalization are only a small part of the entire perceptions in which one views the world.

Participating in *InClusion* (Chapter 2, p. 62) is not merely a *modus* to how the performers are shaped and are allowed to contribute to the community. It is the experience of participation, satisfaction, license, and freedom that is translated into a process of transforming histories of exclusion and oppression into a new realm of being.

Transcendence through performance constitutes one's perception as having meaning. Sounds, actions, and words are not only meaning latent, but they are correlative and connections are made between what one feels, speaks, and experiences. This is ultimately where one's innate world view will coincide or collide with the world interpreted by others (Lonergan 1967: 243-245). The performer values performance as repeatable and discernable, not because it simply satisfies or supplies a remedy for past inconsistencies, but because of the way it ultimately affects change and the establishment of a way of being. Each strata of consciousness affects the next. This phenomenon is seen in the sermon *Dare We Celebrate?* (Chapter 2, p.69) as the perceptions of the preacher are translated to a commentary on the worlds of society and the bible having as an end result interpretation of a new "world" commentary. This commentary is rooted in the personal experiences of the performer (preacher) as a translational factor in her ability to interpret the world, make alteration, and eventually promote new responsibilities as a result.

This interpretation of human becoming supplies a bridge between the state of the individual and that of his/her world in which one comes in contact. It expands the definition of community to be a sum of common meanings rather than a geographic complex of like (and unlike) individuals. It measures community identity and agency by

personal experience and not simply social constructs as if they exist outside of individual experience. Community is not the work of isolated individuals in a synchronic time period, but rather, it is the culmination of history as contemplated and performed by individuals over time. Progress in becoming is not only seated in the individual's ability to freely associate new revelations with personal constructs but rather is relative to the community's (the sum of meanings) potentiality to rejuvenate, renew, reform, and develop as a result of individual perceptions.

At any time in any place what a given self can make of [himself] is some function of the heritage or sediment of common meanings that comes to him from the authentic or unauthentic living of [his] predecessors and his contemporaries (Lonergan 1967: 245-46).

In all the examples noted, the "subject's world" is an integral part of the "the world." Their interpretation values it, shapes it, and informs it.

Human ontology is beyond the personal constructs of the individual disclosed through descriptions of human uniqueness however. This is to say that the roles humans play, their demeanors and philosophies, and their overt descriptions about themselves are only reflections of an internal shifting construction of self. They are the processes by which self-consciousness is constantly in dialogue with emerging realities. Human roles provide a communication which is of the two worlds—internally and externally self disclosing.

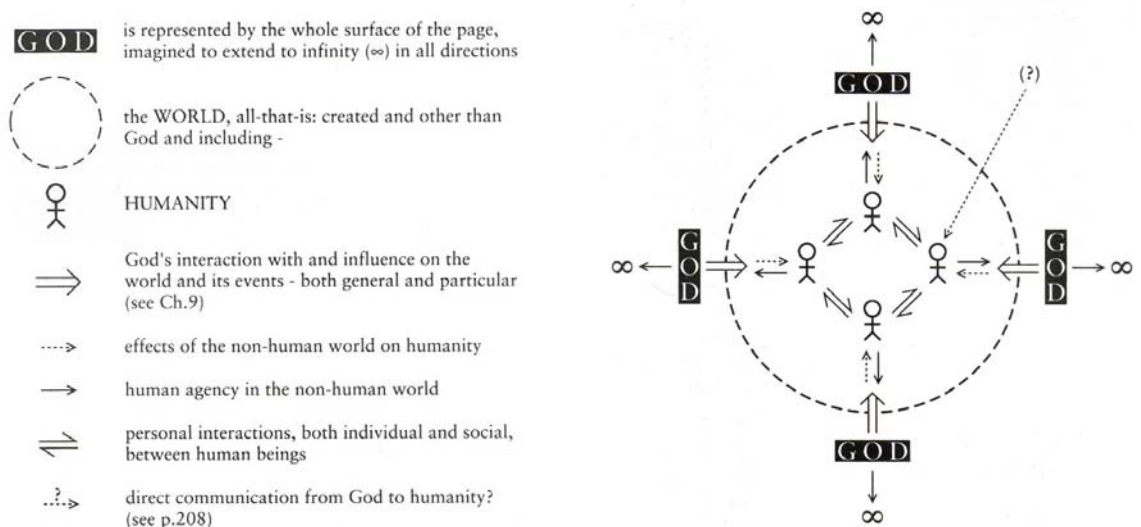
This ideology suggests that the observation and analysis of performances can not be a simplified commentary on the nature of the individual's state of being. Rather it is a glimpse into the multileveled progression of realities present in a person's ontological journey pointing to where one has been, where they are, and where they are going. It

requires that amidst the analytic process, the ontological stance is one which not only expresses meaning about the individual, and their community, or even revelations about the subject's 'world' and the 'world of others' (constituting the 'real world'), but all of the above.

Since this ontological stance is one which ultimately begs the question "who am I?" in light of human self discovery, the individual must also ask "from what heritage have I evolved?" The question allows for an expansion of human ontology to be inclusive of a communal set of meanings from which revelation is disclosed. James Peacock (1993) notes that this is the endeavor of individuals who journey on a twofold approach to self discovery which ultimately is concerned with becoming more ontologically human (more fully self aware) and becoming more ontologically divine (more fully aware of one's potential). This revelation as described by Lonergan is only partly achieved through interaction with "a world" which contributes to the individual's self consciousness about him/her self. As for a divine ontology, James Peacock recognizes that for communication to occur within "a world" where individuals may be part, his/her own potentiality includes an association with the ontological essence of the divine. In other words, communication with God (as in worship) presumes some sort of parallel with the human state not only with a preconceived perception of God's likeness (only partially provided by heritage) but God's ontology (one which supplies a 'personal' depiction at the very least, and a 'superpersonal' one at its greatest potential) (Peacock 1993: 191). This awareness is where individual becoming truly includes a consideration of human potentiality.

This presumption is critical in recognizing that communication with God is one which occurs within the world of the subject. In whatever instance or experience, the human comes in contact with God in many ways ranging from the ordinary experiences of human substance (an innate orientation, biology, or human characteristic) and in those experiences which seem to transcend the confines of human behavior. Be those experiences public or private (as in the case of prayer), mediated or unmediated by something sensory (as in the sensory experience of music making), of the natural realm or more religiously constructed situations (as in *Sacred Places* meditations), communication between persons (significantly effected by likeness or shared experiences), or even mystical/miracle experiences, each points to an interaction between God's innate beingness and human being's process of self revelation (Swinburne 1979: 252, Brown; 1989: 246). This communication is sometimes arbitrary as the world we "live in" and the world "we come in contact with" are often only arbitrarily connected (Figure 26, below).

Figure 26. Peacock's representation of God's interaction with the world, including humanity.



Oliver Quick describes this phenomenon as “pointed to those outward things which occupy space and time and are in principle, though possibly not in fact, perceptible by bodily senses and those ‘inward’ things which do not satisfy those conditions” (Quick 1927: 3). He notes that material objects<sup>35</sup> affect individual experience in ‘the world’ in two ways. They can be instruments used by individuals or they can be symbols supplying something to be known (Peacock 1993: 192).

The ‘worlds’ with which individuals interact, be they a personal construction or one which is more widely experienced, provide a venue, according to Peacock, for communication with the divine. One venue is where some cosmic purpose is disclosed. The individual’s interaction with his/her world entices personal agency to incorporate disclosure about God into the personal process of becoming, paralleling descriptions of what it means to be divine within the human state. In essence, human ontology is rooted in the awareness of not only who the individual *is* but who God *is*.

### **Human and divine ontology**

We have seen these phenomena in ritual. First in the shifting and altering of language to provide a depiction of God that is non-gendered, the act promotes an altered expectation on who the individual is in relation to this alteration (Chapter 3, Figures 8-14). Human likeness is associated with a God who is not confined by sexual descriptors. The resultant expectation is that God’s likeness is transferable to an interpretation of what it means to be more human rather than identified by sex. Second, sacred script evidence in the Bible is interpreted with a human representation that allows for a sensitivity to

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<sup>35</sup> Materials objects refers to ritual elements of more tangible quality. However, in light of this conversation, this term may also include tangibles of a less physical nature including insights, relevant occurrences, and human interactions.



gender marginalized individuals. Both the characters and their substance become an expanded description of what it means to be part of revelation evidenced in the sacred script by the fact that the stories and outcomes fit an experience of the LBGTQ condition.

In sermons, the connection is made not only to relate sacred history to the LBGTQ condition as seen below, but to relate this condition to a social consciousness which is rooted in who persons are. It equates the process of translation to a process of self-transformation (sermons, Chapter 2, p. 69, Chapter 4, p. 352; life experiences, Chapter 3, p. 187 and Chapter 4, p. 269; rituals, Chapter 3, p. 182; and rites, Chapter 4, p. 310, 321, and 323).

A second means of understanding this communication is to interpret the world as symbol in through which God signifies an external nature to those who are receptive (Peacock 1993: 192, See Figure 26, p. 266). The process is an ‘unveiling’ of both the content of God as it is similarly paralleled in the individual’s own becoming. As the MCC NOVA community constructs and reconstructs their corporate values (inclusivity, community, social action, and spiritual transformation), they are in effect disclosing what attributes of God’s character they see as infinite and credifying to their own mission. In effect, through this selection process they become and construct an image of God which is based in a recognition of who God *is*, transversely applied to how they feel they should *be*. Their becoming is one which is rooted in what they feel they should ultimately be.

Communication with God is a process in which the individual interacting with the world is disclosed to revelations about self and the divine through which he/she remains

receptive. This point is secondary to a more pertinent one for this research. By acceptance of the proposed arguments by both Lonergan and Peacock on the nature of human becoming, we may surmise that while the individual continues on this journey, the parallels between the human condition and the divine condition are operative through similar means and within similar dynamics in the ‘worlds’ available to the subject. In essence, the material (societal and ritual) which contributes to a construction of self is concomitantly the same material which discloses knowledge about God’s beingness. The human product does not emerge from self-awareness in isolation but is characterized by both a human and divine ontology.

The material which contributes to human becoming is directly relative to the establishment of parallels between whom the individual *is* and who God *is*. On a deeper level, the consequences of this revelation are immense when one considers that human genderedness, as it is disclosed in the process of becoming, is revealed through the same means in which God’s own ontology is provided. Ultimately, for analytical purposes, the descriptions of self, which behaviors allow us to consider seemingly contribute to the human process of self awareness which is also a description of God’s being interpreted by the same set of meanings perceived through the community’s actions.

**Example: Reflections on UFMCC Region 3 Conference**

The phenomenology of becoming described above is operative in the experiences and outcomes of MCC NOVA as the process of shaping their own *gender-religiosity* continues on its journey. The motto of MCC NOVA, “stretching, connecting, celebrating: people on a spiritual journey” is as much a commentary on its communal commitments as

it is a recognition of God's beingness active in its membership. To illustrate the point I have chosen an unlikely but pertinent example to describe *how* this phenomenology occurs in light of common experiences of the group.

In July of 2004 the Region 3 UFMCC Annual Conference took place in San Juan, Puerto Rico. (See Figure 27, below).

Figure 27. UFMCC Annual Conference Logo.



This annual event is a usual opportunity for members of local churches to participate with others from the UFMCC federation, expanding their scope of the universal congregation as well as providing for an immersive experience into the congregation's values. This year's conference held special importance as it was the first time that the conference occurred outside of the continental United States, due to a reorganization of the geographic structure of US UFMCC local churches which now included regions in non-US locations.

The relevance of the event to the local community was multivalent. It allowed some from the church to experience the universal church for the first time, it included

others in a landmark chapter in the life of MCC as it expanded beyond US borders, for others, it expanded the experience of gender marginalization beyond the suburban Northern Virginia locale.

Upon returning from San Juan, members of the congregation shared their experiences of the conference with the local community. They witnessed, each in very different ways, to the benefits of the conference and how it affected their interpretation of commitment to MCC NOVA and ultimately to their own self awareness as LBGTQ Christians.

One Voice, One Person and I cannot keep silent,” is what I heard while I was at conference. One evening the sermon was about one voice, one person and it hit me. Troy Perry was just that. one voice, one person. Here is a guy that just wanted to spread the good news that Jesus loves you. He was kicked out of his church after coming out and when he realized that Jesus loved him he had to share the news with others.... Troy Perry put an ad in the paper for a morning worship service in his home. He believed in something and made it happen. Troy’s morning worship was built upon and now there is an entire denomination and a place that all of us can come and worship. I always hear about people making a difference but never realized how big something little could really be. I had not gone to church for a very long time because I could not find one where I felt I belonged. It wasn’t until I walked in to this MCC that I found home. I have been able to find God and the love of God within these walls. I just sat there at conference overwhelmed - tears welling in my eyes because of what this one voice, one person, had done. I was thinking about how my life has changed because of one voice, one person. I have grown spiritually, mentally and musically since I have walked through these doors. I thanked Troy for his voice.

The other thing that is still ringing in my ears is “I cannot keep silent.” This was something that we said over and over at each service.... I heard that message. Just last night I met with the people that I am going to Romania with and I found that “I could not keep silent.” They asked what church I went to, I said MCC NOVA. Where is that they asked I told them, then, they said they never hear of it... I told them about our church and asked if they would you like to come sometime. I was also very quick to offer that I am gay I want to be sure before I leave that are ok with me. I find that I cannot keep silent anymore. I am even having political discussions at work which I never did before.

Each of you is one voice, one person – don’t keep silent. Make your dreams come true for the glory of God.

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At our Region 3 conference in Puerto Rico, I saw the Spirit moving in many different ways; in individuals that offered up heartfelt prayers, in the larger community at wonderful worship services, in the voices of the conference choir and even in what some might consider the mundane, the business meeting. Through it all, the music, the worship and the business, this conference was very much a spirit-filled time together.

Now some people think that I am crazy for liking the business parts of being church, but through activities like bylaw changes and strategic planning, I witness a special kind of dedication. Let me give you an example. Diane Fischer, Regional Elder for Region 5, presented to the group the new denominational vision, mission, and core values. Some of the goals articulated were that by 2015, there will be 400 churches; we will have 60K members, and giving will be up by 25%. After the presentation, Diane asked for feedback on the material.

The reaction to this presentation was mixed. There was, of course, excitement about our future, but there was also a sense of frustration that the new material was not widely available, nor was it available in translated form. At first glance, that may not sound much like Spirit, but as the dialogued continued and more voices were heard from, the more I realized that is exactly what Spirit is.

To me, this dialog signified an engaged, eager, and dedicated regional leadership. Both the clergy and lay delegates were vocal about wanting the material, about having something to distribute back home, and to make sure that they had input into what was being developed and formed. They voiced a strong desire to be heard, to be involved, to be a vital part of the process.

When I think about how the group could have passively sat there, listened, and gave a silent and affirming head nod, what a message of indifference that would have been. Just the opposite happened, this vocalization was exciting to me. Our leaders, clergy and lay alike, cared about our future, cared about what was happening and they wanted to be an integral part of that future. They could not keep silent!

Yes, the business of strategic planning, reports, and bylaw changes can seem to some like a spiritual void, but what I witnessed was the Spirit working through our leaders to make sure that we continue moving forward; that we continue to listen to the people in our denomination. And that if we actively engage not only our leaders but all of us, we are going to create a tidal wave of active, committed unstoppable people of faith.

One other item that I would like to share with you is the 4 denominational core values; namely, **inclusivity, community, social action**, and my personal favorite, **spiritual transformation**. Think about that! Our denomination holds a value that we are not going to remain stagnant in our faith, but that we will be open to being changed by the Spirit. It sounds to me that not only is MCC NOVA on a spiritual journey as highlighted by our own vision statement, but so is our entire denomination. And that is something that “I Cannot Keep Silent” about!

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“I cannot keep silent” – as you’ve already heard, that was the theme of our conference. And as I began to prepare what I was going to say today, I kept trying to figure out the significance of that phrase. We heard it over and over as you can imagine, in readings, in songs, in prayer, in sermons, in the announcements. So, obviously it was something we were supposed to “get.” During one prayer time at one of the services, individuals were invited to say out loud those things that they would not keep silent about. As you can imagine, there was a diverse list of those things: world hunger, peace, equal rights for all, marriage rights for GLBT people; one person simply said “I cannot keep silent about my dreams for the future.” Puerto Rico is a beautiful place: white sand beaches, swaying palm trees, gracious and hospitable people. Also a place in limbo: not as that of the United States; not its own country. It occurred to me that the Metropolitan Community Churches is also a place in limbo, struggling not only to move forward as we accept and embrace the retirement of our founder, Rev. Troy Perry, but also struggling to become a church that truly embraces the global/interdependent nature of our world, the value of ALL people, the growth of our personal spirituality, and the willingness to speak loudly and boldly wherever we see injustice

and intolerance. This essentially embodies the core values of our denomination as they were presented to us at conference. Hear the words of our conference theme song:

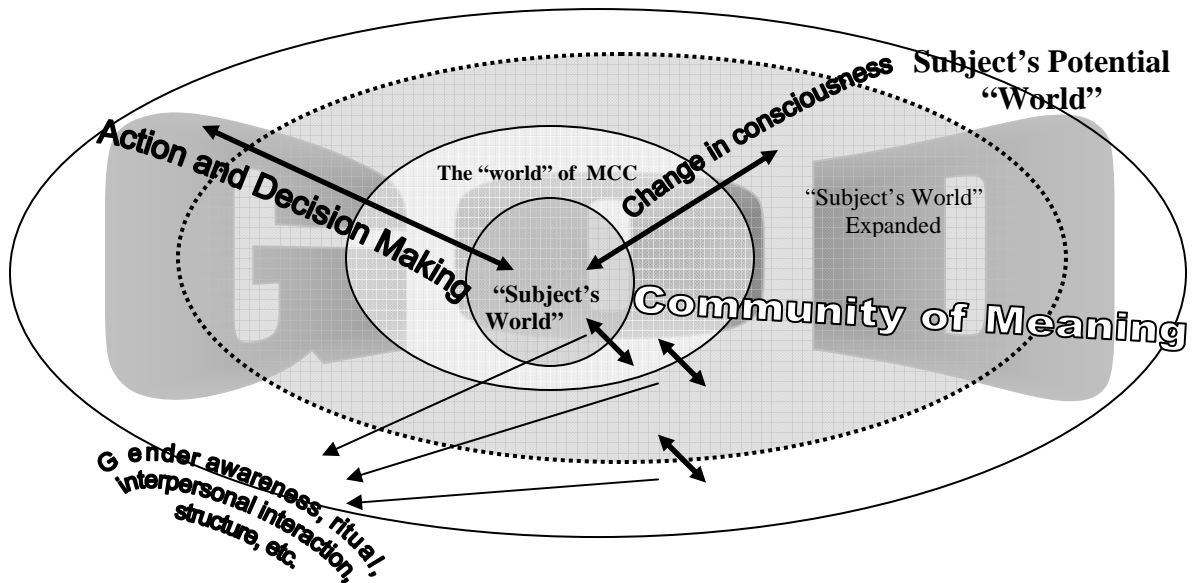
I cannot keep silent when I think of you, my God.  
There's a voice inside my soul that needs to praise you.  
I cannot keep silent; there's a fire burning in me.  
I cannot keep silent, so I lift my voice to you.

MCC has a lot of work to do, and I'm excited to be part of its future. If we rely on the God of love, I know that we can move forward into this exciting new era.

For the purposes of this section of the theoretical discussion, these reflections on the conference provides evidence of several important mechanisms of the phenomenology of becoming explained above. First, for some, the experience of the conference expresses a watershed transition in the consciousness one has about what it means to be an LGBTQ individual within a *gender-religious* community. The activities which make up the experiences points to *who* the congregation is and *how* one concludes he/she *is* in light of these experiences. Second, this consciousness is one which is built on already understood realities about one's self. In some cases this supports already known aspects of selfhood and for others it expands self awareness to include values of the greater community. Third, each of the reflections seems to focus on a different aspect of community experience. Some draw on personal and intimate experiences, others draw on public more religious ones, while others even find spiritual material within the seemingly mundane discussion of church structure. The importance is that outcomes are similar as the participants manage to gravitate toward a common thread of experience based in the conference preamble from Psalm 39, "I cannot keep silent." Fourth, these shared responses illustrate what Swinburne and Brown explain as varieties of experience which are sometimes sensory and sometimes symbolic. In either case, the experiences described

by the church members contribute to a self fashioning which is rooted in transitioning from one state of awareness to another. In some instances it is even exclaimed how this has changed their view of the world and their own decision making processes. Lastly, it is important to notice that though at times latent in the recollections, the experience of becoming more aware of one's self (identifying how one is changed) in the context of the community's shared meaning (associated with the MCC mission), God's own identity is disclosed in ways which may have been unforeseen previously. The experiences may be described through personal interactions, through ritual participation, through a working "of the spirit" through the community, or through affirmations which simply come from the act of shared experience with the group (Figure 28, below).

Figure 28. The expansion and interaction of the subject's world with the world of MCC and overall potential



### **Theoretical parallels**

The point of this example illustrates what has already been shown in other conversations of this paper.

Firstly, world view has a potentially spiritual outcome drawing the perception of human self-awareness through a variety of forms to an innate relationship with God who acts in history. This was stated in the very beginning in an attempt to illustrate that the tensions and cohesions which occur within the LBGTQ religious realm contribute to a “sacred canopy” where the ideologies of religion and gender marginalism coexist concomitantly (Thumma, Chapter 2, p.30, and Ammerman, Peshkin and Berger, on page 117). Here in light of human becoming one’s world is in conversation with the discourses with which it comes into contact. It supplies developmental information to the other and provides a platform for the individual to become more fully aware of their own humanness. This is the product of a world view which directly connects the individual’s insights with how one’s gender condition affects the interpretation of outward performances as well as one’s own personhood.

Secondly, this interaction is one which is operative through communication between humans as well as communication which occurs on a divine level as a result of these experiences. In the earlier portions of the paper, we have shown how social behavioralists identify the interactions with which individual’s participate to show how one socializes into a group. The relationship between self-awareness, conversion, and motivation is based on a consideration that a behavioral performance model for analysis can be adopted to supply pertinent information about conversion (see Chapter 3, p.131).



The theories and examples provided here broaden this approach to consider that behaviors and experiences of the individual are transitional and not solely descriptors of a fully realized social reality. Furthermore, it provides for an assessment of these behaviors based on their potential to enact change in the individual which is rooted not only in interpretations but on the self awareness of one's being.

Thirdly, ritual, musical, and social performances provide meaning to the process of becoming on the basis that they aid in the search for interior authenticity. This notion was presented earlier in the context of "seeking" for appropriate instances of ritualized and socialized participation which congeal personal commitment with social acceptance (Chapter 2, p.104). The model supposed that through learning and practice in the social structures of the group the individual will eventually become a contributing and authentic member of the group. This authenticity, however, is one which is rooted in a knowledge of the rules and models of the social performances themselves and is less likened to the agency of the individual who as Lonergan states "is to effect a development that which reveals a further and graver challenge" (Lonergan 1967:241).

### **Exploring consciousness on a multivalent spectrum**

Speaking of levels of consciousness one may be reluctant to accept that the process of self awareness is easily broken down into stages as in a developmental approach. From an observational standpoint this is indeed dangerous territory.

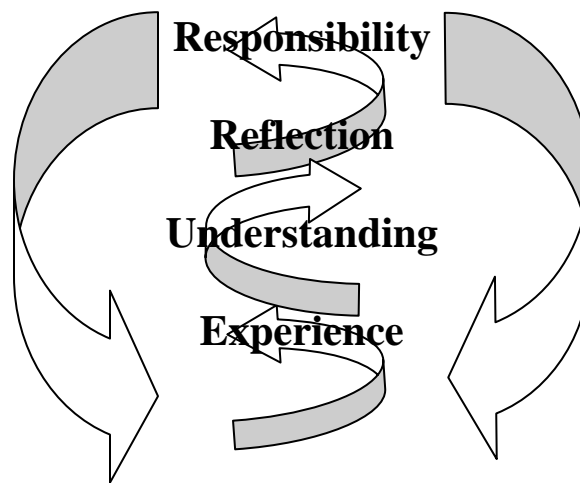
The model of revelation as a straightforward 'lifting of a veil' by divine agency has to be treated with caution. Revelation is certainly more than a mythologically-slanted metaphor for the emergence of striking new ideas...the language of revelation is used to express the sense of an initiative that does not lie with us and to challenge the myth of the self-constitution of consciousness. That is, in revelation God is *active* (Rowan 1986: 200).

On one level, self-consciousness is immeasurable. Even through the observation of behaviors and the collection of personal witnesses the description of individual's states of awareness is masked by human becoming which, as has been stated, is an ongoing continuum of change and reinvention (See Figure 28, p.274 ).

Though this is the case, in light of becoming we can provide a structural model which recognizes the transitions which occur as one travels from one state of awareness to another. Vernon Gregson explains that Lonergan's approach to self becoming operates from a cyclical model of interaction within the worlds of an individual by allowing the individual to actively transcend between experiences and to integrate these into the process of self becoming (Gregson 1986: 30-33). This model is based on four main mechanisms of the individual in the attempt at reconciling the worlds which contribute to self becoming: experience, understanding, reflection, and responsibility (Figure 29, below).

Figure 29. Lonergan’s Transcendental Model (Carley, 1992).

Levels of consciousness	Human Desire	Human Question	Human Task As Knower
Experience	Data	What is it?	be attentive
Understanding	Intelligibility	Why is it?	be intelligent
Reflection	Truth	Is it so?	be reasonable
Responsibility	Good	Is it valuable?	be responsible



Experience is that which exists on the base level of human interaction. Smells, sounds, tastes, etc., all those attributes relegated to the human on the substance level, contribute to a first encounter with the world. This data begs the individual to ask “what is it?” and requires a sense of attentiveness. This supplies a vocabulary of experiences which over time translates into an inquiry of how these entice understanding about the world, i.e. inquiry, conceiving, formulating, etc. *Why* becomes an operative as individuals begin to supply his/her own intelligence about *what* it is he/she is experiencing. Gregson

notes that it is here where the individual begins to divide up the task of gathering life material and starts a process of devising what it is that will be instrumental in communicating truth (Gregson 1986: 31). This search for truth becomes the result of reflection and the reasonable application of that which has been experienced and considered intelligibly. In this final stage, the value of experiences is applied to the person's system of morality, ethics, the difference between good and evil, and ultimately religious consciousness. The result is a way of acting which is in concert with what the individual foresees is the make of his or her existence.

The process is cyclic because experience can always be recalled. It is cumulative in that memory stores and supplies images, the content of previous insights and ever higher viewpoints. The process is whole in that each part is what it is in virtue of its functional relations to other parts. Though the process is spontaneous, it is not automatic (Lonergan 1957). Lonergan's theory holds that conscious effort and specific personal qualities or characteristics are required if knowledge is to be achieved. Above all, the prevailing attitude in the potential knower must be the "detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know" (Carey 1992: 636).

The experiences associated with African drumming (Chapter 3, p.201 ) are at first sensory as the individual becomes attuned to the drum as object, the sensory experiences associated with the production of sound, and the sensation of playing within the group. Through understanding the mechanisms and sensory objects of the act of music making one may ask, "how does this fit with the ensemble and what will be the outcome?" The experience of participation within the circle amidst the rhythms invites commonality, individuality, and skill. The player identifies with the musical experiences and recognizes it for its value. Once recollected, the recognition of the outcomes and symbolic representation of the musical experience are accepted as the individual interprets its personal, social, and spiritual value.

Similarly, social experiences entice reaction and commentary in this process. This is seen in church member's witnessing in a variety of ways. Experience and meaning become interconnected realities which serve to establish recognition that life experiences supply the material for connections between self awareness and a social commentary.

Through this action God creates healing in our selves and in our community. In Isaiah, God calls us "to loose the bonds of injustice/to undo the things of the yoke/ to let the oppressed go free/ and to break every yoke." This is a holy and pleasing effort, our commitment as people of faith not only to mourn injustice but to work against it with all we have been given—to ease suffering, to reject violence, to work towards peace in whatever capacity we can, with every capacity we have.

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Only months later was Feliciana able to make her way down from the mountains, back to her village. There, she found the evidence of the massacre, back at the village. There she found the evidence of the massacre, found the ravine where the bodies had been dumped, found the few other survivors from her village. She will never forget what happened on August 23, 1982. To this day, Feliciana believes that the army is intent on genocide, on eliminating the Maya, so that their land could be confiscated. Along with a monetary donation to Conavigua, we gave Feliciana a seedling tree, a token of our hope for the life and future of her people.

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One voice can make a difference, one act can change reality forever. God does work through us. God uses us to change ourselves, our community, and the world. Sometimes when we set out to correct an injustice for ourselves, we are paving the way for others.

In the first of the examples, God's actions are not only a representation of past events. They are not only a recognition of some scriptural primacy but are interpreted as a call to responsibility and action to be God-like: acting as a vehicle of social justice and change. The second example is slightly different as the person witnesses to the connection with Feliciana. The act of planting a seedling tree is a direct result of this connection. It symbolizes the writers own connectedness while it also serves as a symbolic act of a responsible reaction to what she has experienced. The third example sums up what these examples show. The writer describes that God's actions are innately

related to our own. Through acts of justice we instill change and more importantly, affect change for others.

Through these different types of experiences, one participates in a reality where experience ultimately leads to some sort of responsible existence. Each of the excerpts above show how experience with the “other” ultimately provides one with the ability to assimilate their own being in light of a performative act.

### **Meaning Through the Process of Performance**

#### **The value of meaning**

Recognizing that becoming is dependant on this cyclical process of ongoing consciousness requires an assessment of the value of meaning. We can only presume meaning as operative in this process of revealing truths. As Lonergan states, “what is good, always is concrete, but the definitions are abstracts” (Lonergan 1972: 27). However, regardless of the efficacy of one’s interpretations which supply truth, meaning and its contribution to the building of his/her self-consciousness prove to be at the heart of the discussion.

Part of Lonergan’s approach relies on recognizing the relationship between human truth and the means in which this truth is communicated (performance). Skill, feelings, and values all contribute to the self-fashioning of the human construction. And for the purpose of this research, each provides a helpful analytical approach to the question of interpreting performance.

### **Skill in acquisition and assimilation**

Skill is the acquisition of new objects and situations providing for development. Here Lonergan turns to Jean Piaget's interpretations which state that the acquisition of a skill is ultimately a negotiation of assimilation and adjustment. The human develops meaning as he/she navigates an increased differentiation of operations so that more and more different operations are in one's repertory. This is brought on by an ever greater multiplication of different combinations of different operations. Through the act of assimilation, spontaneous and previously learned operations are considered under the guise of their relationship to similarities with other experiences. Adjustment produces a process of trial and error which over time offers the skill necessary to modify and supplement previously known experiences (Lonergan 1972: 27).

Within the construct of the *Kaki Lambe*, the djembe player first adheres to the requirements of the rhythms. Through mastery over the techniques necessary to control the drum's voice with the hand, the player recognizes that the playing of the drum is the result of many operations in which position, posture, and style are all operative simultaneously. The ability to be spontaneous, to manage the drum and to ultimately make the music an extension of the individual, is the result of assimilating to the necessary requirements and adjusting one's tendencies to accommodate the desired result. The results may be a newfound sense of community found in the ensemble's social structure. It may provide for an expression of genderedness not experienced in other ways. Through the 'grassroots' environment, it may conjure a sense of individuality, or

its traditional hierarchy may construct for the player an environment which harps back to a more primal human existence.

The process of managing this assimilation and adjustment is likened to levels of consciousness, cyclical in that one can always return to the starting point of experience and reassess skill from an initial experience. Skill over time begets mastery as this process is repeated and reinvented. However, through the human imagination, language, and symbolic interaction, the human is active in his/her contribution towards what it is that is truly masterful. Communication with the congregation by singers of *InCluesion* is a mastery over the music making process as well as a patterned experience which has a desired outcome: to be able to play and sing with the freedom to make eye contact and communicate on an interpersonal level with the community (Chapter 2, p.62).

The mediation which performance provides is operative with respect to what is represented or signified and the human contributes as well as learns through the process of developing skill. Though this theory comes from the realm of educational psychology, it is far more reaching for our purposes here as Lonergan explains.

It enables one to distinguish the stages in cultural development and to characterize [man's] breaking loose from it in play, in the climax of making love, in aesthetic experience, and in contemplative prayer. Moreover, technical proficiency can be analyzed as a group of combinations of differentiated operations (Lonergan 1972: 30).

Therefore, we may even include in this category of skill, the ability to understand differing sentiments as contributing to a whole of becoming. The example of the “Three Wise Men” drama brought about an exchange of divergent interpretations as to the appropriateness of behavior. For the director, appropriate performance included the flagrant association with overt tendencies in LGBTQ lifestyle which borrowed certain



role models as a means of description. For the unaccepting actor, these roles abandoned a responsible reply to the experience of marginalization. It stereotyped one's self by performing only a small part of what he/she had interpreted as the complex whole of beingness. These two interpretations contribute to what Lonergan calls "a group of combinations of differentiated operations". In other words, each contributes to a whole of beingness, though independently, clearly they do not.

### **Feelings and descriptions of priority through shifting sensibilities**

In Lonergan's theory, feelings are intentional responses to two main classes of objects. On the root level, feelings can be interpreted as either being agreeable or disagreeable. On another plane, feelings are the product of the ontic value of persons or the value that an individual places on objects or experiences which may include a disclosure about their world view on beauty, understanding, truth, acts, and deeds.

Any analysis of cultural values has at its core an assessment of feelings in vital and social values. As a source of understanding, what one feels about performance—its requirements, its efficacy, its outcomes—will ultimately shape what one's social value is. This may be relegated to personal values and even religious values. The incongruence often found within worship events is the result of feelings. Though seemingly subjective, their potential is to point to cultural values as seen through the individual who possesses them. They are, like much that has been stated, indicators of a shift in consciousness where in one instance they may be completely and rationally in line with what a performance should seem to project while at other times they are negotiated. Language and musical structure in the *Our Father Debate* (Chapter 3, p.205) seems to suggest that

God-language is impertinent to the performance experience at least for some members. Participants opt to not participate in singing even though the language of the piece is in concert with the community values. In the instance of Easter Sunday 2003/2004 (Chapter 3, p.210), the situation is reversed as language is more likely to conflict with community priorities though the musical style seems to override this tension. Ultimately, like a state of consciousness, feelings are relegated to the same shifting realities of time and development as individuals feel in ways at one time and feel in other ways at another time (Lonergan 1972: 30-34).

### **The transcendental state of value**

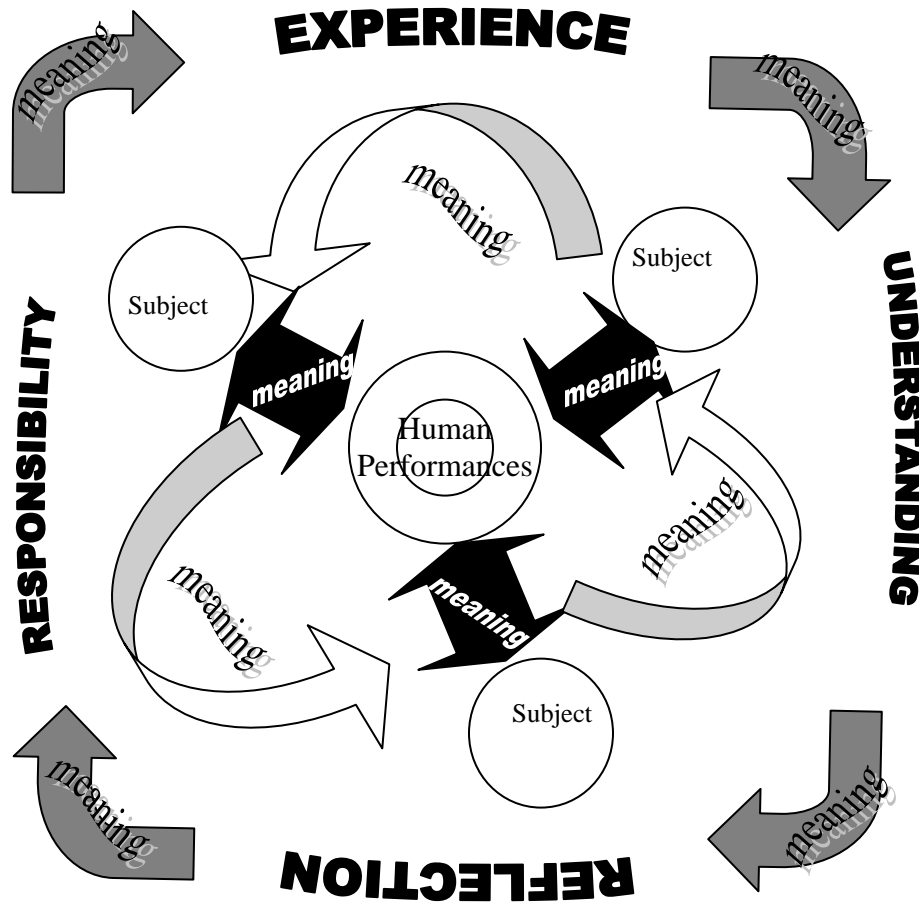
Value, therefore is a transcendental notion as it shifts and churns with the human's own consciousness. The dynamic intentionality of an ever evolving personhood is subject to the level of self-consciousness which one has achieved. In this sense, consciousness and transcendence are similar realities, as one evolves from the confines of historically indoctrinated values. Lonergan reveals that this process is one that ascribes to the very development of consciousness as one moves from 'lower' to 'higher' consciousness about an object or about one's self. Therefore, applying the transcendence model to values is firstly an attendance to the data, the things which are vocables about what it is that is valued. These may be performance attitudes and styles, words or styles of speech, or even anti-structural elements which are new or alternative to what has traditionally been valuable. The alteration of mainstream traditions to suit MCC sensibilities is a reorienting of values even though structure may be less altered. Second, inquiry and understanding are less associated with a hypothetical world but gravitate

towards a real world. Performances become less an alternative or reaction to what is true but become in themselves truths by the nature of their relevance in maintaining values. In essence, MCC realities become less a reaction because mainstream tradition becomes a hypothetical reality. Third, reflection and judgment become absolutes. In the cyclical process, reoccurring experiences become independent to their antecedent counterparts when reconsidered in light of their value. In other words, actions become less alternatives and in themselves become truthful expressions tested by the conscious establishment of their efficacy. Last, at the height of the transcendental process, through deliberation and decision making, knowledge leads to doing as actions become fonts for establishing a core of belief and an operative lifestyle (Lonergan 1972: 34-35).

The efficacy of meaning in light of the transcendental method of consciousness leads us to question what elements make up this meaningful progression from relative sensory experience to the conscious and life altering adoption of values pertinent to the subject's substance. In other words, what elements witnessed in performance are truly descriptors of the relationship between communal behaviors and the concomitant interior realities of the individual. We can arrive at presuming that the sources of meaning are all conscious acts and all intentional contents which make up the "worlds" which one is a part of. In other words, the performances which make up one's existence and which become part of the world are potentially the source for all that will define who one *is* and, as has been already stated, this is the product of both what one learns through contact

with his/her world as well as the intersubjective and reflexive involvement one has with it (Figure 30, p. below).

Figure 30. Lonergan's process of attaining meaning.



This leaves us with two main considerations of the elements of meaning. The first is a transcendental one. It is a capacity to consciously and unceasingly recognize data, intelligibility, truth, reality, and value as contributing to the construction of one's own beingness. The person becomes attuned to the experiences which ultimately supply

meaning. Through skill, feeling, and value, these become part of what the individual foresees as a lifestyle of self discovery. The processes associated with the achievement of understanding the value of drumming, the feelings associated with deciding not to participate in the *Our Father*, and skills associated with the repeated outcomes of communication with the community in performances of *InCluesion* are in effect similar elements of meaning.

The second is a consideration of categorical determinations which are reached through the cyclical process of transcendence: experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding. “The transcendental notions generate questioning. Answers develop categorical determinations” (Lonergan 1972: 74). Interaction through human performance and with other subjects creates a world of meaning (community) recognizable through the transcendental model. He/she *becomes* as the community evolves more recognizably as an extension of the individual’s own becoming. The performance elements stated occur simultaneously to create a world of meaning by their elemental contribution to the ritual experience.

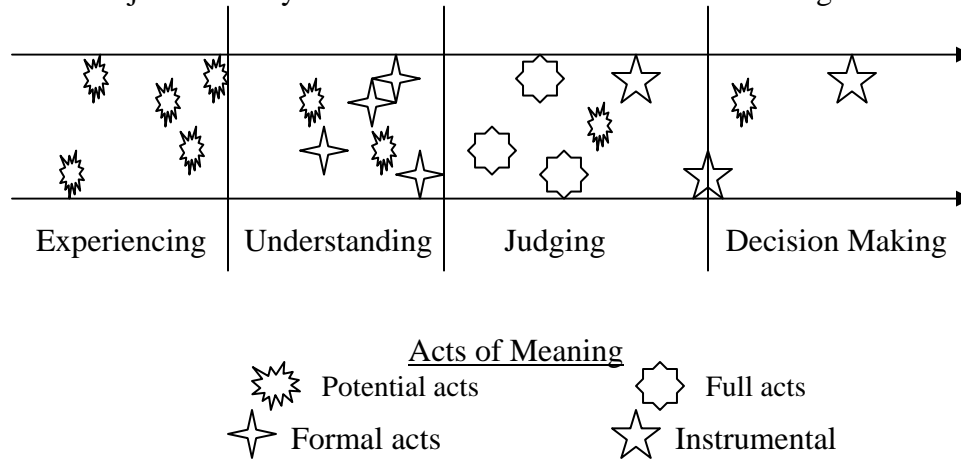
### **The Mechanisms of Meaning**

#### **Multiple acts of meaning**

Since meaning is arrived at through a variety of experiences and is subject to the ever churning realities of one’s consciousness at any given time, equal weight between types of meaning can not be presumed. In fact, what may be critical to the establishment of values for a group at one time, may have more or less efficacy as the level of

consciousness of the individual (or the group) travels through the transcendental model. For this reason, Lonergan categorizes acts of meaning into four groups which ultimately serve as a helpful approach to the weight one experience may have over another. A potential act of meaning is one which through sensing and understanding has only potential significance and over time, and after transcendental consideration, may have a significant effect on how one incorporates it into the total consciousness of one's being. A formal act of meaning is an act where conceiving, thinking, considering, defining, and formulating afford a differentiation over the overt meaning and what is truly meant by the experience. An act of judgment on the part of the participant who inserts his/her own transcendental experience into the interpretation of the meaning's efficacy is one which interprets meaning in a full sense. This full act of meaning is one which points to that which is beyond the available meanings and contributes to a greater reality which may be internal, other worldly, or ultimately pertinent to the breaking free from the confinements of one's own world view. Lastly, instrumental acts of meaning enter into a realm of expressiveness and are inclusive of the above three types of acts. Here expressions are most pertinent and they lead to an ultimate adoption of a system of meanings as they contribute to a life orientation toward what is critically important to maintaining an exhaustive world view (Lonergan 1972: 74-75). (Figure 31, below)

Figure 31. Subjects Journey of Consciousness amidst acts of meaning



### Functionality of Meaning

Weighing the value of meaning is ultimately concerned with the mechanisms at play within the progression of consciousness and how it affects firstly human ontology and ultimately the system of shared meanings operative within a community. Meaning is in itself functional as it fuels the process of becoming through the disclosure of truths as interpreted by community members and assigns value to them. This in turn affects the operative world views of an individual leading to a hermeneutic of being which is active.

Ultimately, the function of meaning is the definition of operations that bridge the gap between a human ontology and its performances in a communal setting. We have argued that meanings are derived through different agencies. In the third chapter we discussed the cognitive elements of meaning as they affect change, as we noticed that certain aspects of LGBTQ interpretation like history, normalization, emotion, and gender

are bridged through musical performance (Chapter 3, p.217ff). We surmised that cognitive communication occurs through the systematic and complex vocabularies of human performance. Knowledge is attained through a mastery or process of *gnosis* as individuals begin to construct for themselves a vocabulary of communication.

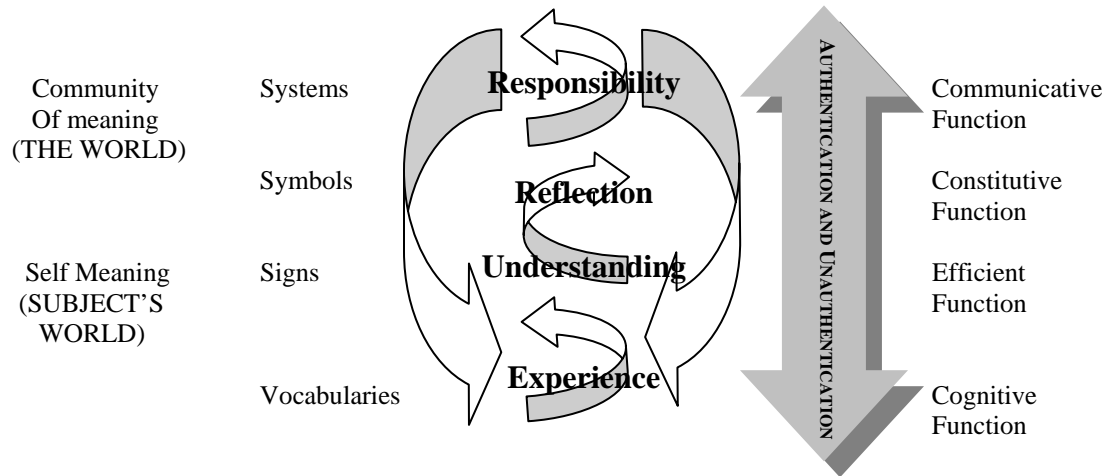
An efficient function of meaning is one which has also been considered. This is one where the identification of known elements are manipulated and stylized into a representation of what is truthful. These meanings are subject to an investigation of the possibilities of meaning, their consequences, and their implementations in the course of planning and executing appropriate actions.

Lonergan provides two more functions of meaning which potentially have a much more yielding effect on the construction of communities of belief. The first is a constitutive function. Likened to the mechanisms which are employed in other vocabulary systems, the decisive employment of words, acts, and attitudes, the human condition is also a system of vocabularies which are vocalized through institutions of communal beliefs. Meaning transcends the finite interpretations of individuals and lives within a realm of human community and in turn is meaningful as institutional order and as a world view in itself. Ultimately, meaning is exchanged through the product of the transcendental process as individuals create communities of belief and communicate them through modes of belief systems. This communicative function takes the form of intersubjectivity, symbols, and linguistic models which in themselves communicate a world view which is the product of an individual's historical transcendental processes



recalled through the public and shared experiences of the community (Lonergan 1972: 76-79). (Figure 32, below)

Figure 32. Functions of meaning.



These latter two functions are the crux of the phenomenology of becoming and its importance to the interpretation of performance. They yield what will become the quintessential conduit between human becoming and a method for understanding the public face of the human ontic journey. It points to the very nature of the research and how the ontology of the subject is related to community, existence, and history.

As it is only within communities that [men] are conceived and born and reared, so too it is only with respect to the available common meanings that the individual grows in experience, understanding, judgment, and so comes to find out for [himself] that [he] has to decide for [himself] what to make of himself. This process for the schoolmaster is education, for the sociologist is socialization, for the cultural anthropologist is acculturation. But for the individual in the process it is [his] coming to be a [man], [his] existing as a [man] in the fuller sense of the name (Lonergan 1972: 79).

## **Normalizing Community**

Community is an achievement of common meaning through which withdrawal from this common field potentially places one out of touch. Generally speaking, participation within the rituals and social activities of MCC NOVA is a reality of normality for its participants. Outside of this realm the individual risks being out of touch with his/her own ontological development. It is formal in that it is a sharing of common understandings. The common understandings of what it means to be of the LBGTQ condition and to be fully Christian is operative within the ritualizing community. Outside of the group this reality is potentially misrepresented. It is actual in that judgment finds a common place and withdrawal from this environment of meanings is one where falsehood is operative. The MCC NOVA landscape supplies the platform for judgment which is a truthful exposition. This is to say that it is not simply an alternative, but in itself recognizes *gender-religiosity* as a normative stance. The community maintains a *real* world which is not a compromise of ‘the world’ of society. Most importantly, community is ultimately realized when the decisions which come out of this transcendental process promote a permanent dedication. Withdrawal from this reality results in an ending of the community and in essence a disassociation from the *real* world in which one has now become part.

### **Authentication through intersubjective discourse**

This leads us to consider existence in light of intersubjectivity. Such existence in community is ultimately a discourse of the authenticity or unauthenticity presented by the community. It may provide minor or major authenticities which contribute to the

individual's effective intersubjective involvement. In effect, seeming continuity and discontinuity in ritual expressions are related in that they collectively describe the very progress of consciousness as it applies to authenticity or unauthenticity within this community. The community of meanings may devalue, distort, corrupt, or scatter and transversely may value, clarify, align, or unite pending on the point of comparison. The importance is that the community of meaning is in direct relationship with the *real* world of the individuals which make it up. The performances of the community stem from individual's transcendental progression. They are actual and an extension of the individual on a public and communal level.

So in the midst of the transcendental activities which allow for individuals to self assess human experiences in light of their value, bringing them in contact with the transition from their own world to a world of the community, the transitions embody a progression from simple vocabularies and signs to complex symbols and systems. These are enlivened as the community involves the individual in a process of authentication (or unauthentication). The activities which promote this phenomenon are instrumental in establishing a relationship between being and doing. The combination of activities in concert with the innate skills, feelings, and values which they embody construct the unique quality of the individual in light of his/her communal involvement (See Figure 32).

### **Relativizing History**

History is a relative factor in light of present actions. Knowledge, on the other hand, is ultimately the depiction of history as handed down through institutional systems

of meaning. It is the work of social organizations, cultural achievements, and personal development. “Meaning has its involvement structures and elements but contents in the structures are subject to cumulative development and cumulative decline” (Lonergan 1972: 81). The historical realities which play a part in constructing the behaviors of the community are a shared history. They are the histories of local individuals realized in a public arena. The individuals may be past, present, or future participants (musicians, pastors, leaders, congregants, observers, etc.). In another light, they are the residue of traditional institutionalized hegemonies passed down through shared histories (church *ordo*, UFMCC history, LGBTQ conditions, or local occurrences). Still on another level, meaning may be the construction of communities less institutionalized however fully operative amidst the community’s own sensibilities (politics, subcultures, etc.).

### **An Ontological Approach to a *Gender-Religious Analysis***

#### **The task of relating rituals acts to a human ontology**

The analyses which follow in this chapter draw from the basic presumptions about an ontology based of human becoming described above. At the onset, this approach presumes that individual ritual and music events are simply an introduction to the deeper meaning embedded in discourses which occur as a result of ritualizing. Their immediate meanings described either by individuals or the dialogues which they represent are only helpful in understanding the embedded discourses if they are viewed in light of their relationship with other discourses. This stated, key or universal events, like entire rituals,

which embody a spectrum of discourses, are in themselves the subject of a deeper analysis as they signify the very potential of depth involved in a truly critical analysis.

Rituals may not always therefore be the sole result of learning. They are also spontaneous occurrences which point to an ontology of humanness contributing to systems of belief. Though seemingly contradictory to some of the presumptions about ritual behavior already stated, the importance of this statement about ritual is rooted in an expanded interpretation of what is a ritual occasion. Marcia Herndon and Norma McLeod have pointed out that in order to consider the potential of a musical experience to express the myriad of contexts in which the experience occurs, it is critical that the interplay of similarity and difference be interpreted as the source for establishing a method for analysis.

While songs can be studied in any manner, one of the most revealing ways is through the occasions upon which music occurs. This is not a theoretical concept; rather, it is a methodological one. The occasion may be defined as the point of focus encompassing the perceptions, performances, or creation of music. The occasion includes what Westerners call performances, but it is not restricted to formal events. It is assumed that there will be something similar about all occasions of a particular type upon which music occurs; one of the similarities may be the kind of music which is performed. While this idea is simple, it has extensive ramifications as far as the concepts of repertoire, ceremony, ritual ordering, and specialized personnel are concerned (Herndon and McLeod, 1979: 34-35).

Symbolic interactionism, therefore, is consequential in that its interpretation can either point to a deeply human characteristic or a socially contrived reality based in order. This is an ongoing analytical problem as we strive to understand more about what the ritual elements describe about the inherent conditions of performers. To consider the outward behaviors of human beings as they are performed ritually is ultimately an analysis of the resultant descriptions of how a person negotiates his/her own beingness in the world in which they are part. On the surface level, this is measured through patterned

descriptors such as skill, value, and meaning as it is espoused in a society. On a deeper level, the process of becoming and the ultimate awareness of this becoming, are rooted in the discourses which are embedded in the changeability of the subject's world. In other words, the way in which perceptions of these values are possessed is relative to one's being and ultimately one's performances. Actions are not always in themselves descriptors of immediate meaning but may be the result of a "domino" effect of meaning dependant on a progression of feelings.

Suzanne Langer offers some helpful insight into the problem of understanding the role of patterned behavior and its function in describing meaning. She recognizes that patterns may be abstract or concrete. Lonergan's description of patterns may draw our attention to music's timbre, volume, movements, tones, etc. For Langer, each provides a description of the elements which make up the musical product. They are on the one hand, independent of each other as they are governed by different aesthetic values. On the other hand, they ascribe to a system of meaning which is the result of the relationship each has to the other in the overall music product.

Therefore, as Langer describes, we need not only look to develop descriptions to the elements themselves to understand meaning, but rather to the patterns of perception involved in the dialogue between the aesthetics. The perception of the elements themselves is objective while these patterns are ultimately subjective and in need of dialogic consideration (Langer, 1953, see also Table 5, on page 174). Meaning for the ritualizer, when fully developed, after it has been fully considered cognitively, experientially, and historically points to something intentionally meant (Lonergan, 1972:

62-63). It is a combination of synchronic and diachronic experiences of patterned behavior which contribute to the establishment of a relationship between the individual's knowledge about themselves and the community which possesses to a lesser or greater extent similarities with these perceptions.

**Example: Sunday Worship at MCC NOVA (7-4-04)**

The example below (Figure 33, on page 299) has been chosen with several important features in mind. The *Catch The Rainbow*, the Sunday Worship Bulletin, from which the title of this paper is in reference to, is the culmination of much that has been already discussed in this manuscript. The Sunday worship is the central act of ritual for MCC NOVA and *Catch the Rainbow* symbolizes the *ordo* of MCC NOVA worship. It will serve as the critical source of data for the analysis which will follow. Firstly, this example of Sunday worship at MCC NOVA (7-4-04) is representative of many of the examples which previously have been described. It shows a culmination of different qualities of music and the different groups which contribute to the musical tradition that makes up the *ordo* of MCCers. Secondly, it serves as a collage of many of the discourses apparent in the MCC world as it described the world of its participants in light of a greater society, a local church community situation rooted in LGBTQ priorities, a developed church *ordo* as is handed down through Christian traditions, and a blueprint for much of the belief which fuels the construction of rituals that make up the MCC local experience. Lastly, the Sunday worship serves as both source and product of many other activities at MCC NOVA. As a source it provides the evidence of a normalized church

structure. This structure is encapsulated in the repeated and accepted patterns of worship which are rehearsed and performed week after week. As a universal source it provides the belief *officio* as it were, drawing on the systems of belief in consensus and illustrates change and expansion of the community identity. As a product, it contains within it the very thesis of this chapter, that is, MCC NOVA ritual is not an artifact of belief but a constantly and ever-renewing conversation between the individuals who perform it, the environment which they hope to establish, and the greater world.

In the following pages, we will use this example as a template to consider an ontological stance of performance by applying a transformational approach. It will be a symbolic/ritual analysis based on a presumption that MCC NOVA rituals possess a quality of transformation and liminality. In this analysis we will consider the experience of ritual as a symbolic venue for transformation as MCCers embark on establishing a community of meaning. We will highlight the discourses evident in ritual which contribute to a construction of identity. In this gender analysis, specific attention will be placed on music's role in exercising discourse within an ontological consideration in the establishment of power and authority. This will supply the aesthetics of performance--the discourses which are at play within the ritual experiences that promote a *gender-religiosity*.



Figure 33. *Catch the Rainbow*: MCC NOVAs Sunday Worship Bulletin, Fifth Sunday After Pentecost Sunday, July 4, 2004.



## *Catch The Rainbow*

*The Order of Celebration and  
A Listing of Upcoming Activities and Events for  
The Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia  
10383 Democracy Lane  
Fairfax, VA 22030  
703-691-0930*

*Reverend Kharma Amos  
Pastor*

*Stretching,  
Connecting,  
Celebrating*

*People  
on a  
Spiritual Journey!*

*July 4, 2004*

*We are honored that you have chosen to worship with MCC of Northern Virginia! If you would like to have your prayer request or praise spoken aloud during the time for Prayers of the Community, please write your request in the Prayer Book, which is available prior to the service. The Prayer Book is located at the rear of the sanctuary.*

*If you are seeking spiritual support or if you have any questions about this church and the community we are building here, please approach Reverend Kharma Amos, a Board Member, or any Ministry Leader after worship, or call the church office during the week at (703) 691-0930.*

Order of Celebration  
Fifth Sunday After Pentecost Sunday  
July 4, 2004

---

\*\* Indicates an invitation to rise as you are able.

Gathering Music

In You  
By Bart Millard

InCluesion

\*\*Spoken Call To Worship     --- From David D. Poh in *Singing the Living Tradition: Used With Adaptation*

One:     As we begin to worship,  
           let us take a moment to remember why we are here.

**Many:**    ***We come to this time and place:  
           To rediscover the wondrous gift of free religious community;***

One:     To renew our faith in the holiness, goodness, and beauty of life;

**Many:**    ***To reaffirm the way of the open mind and full heart;***

One:     To rekindle the flame of memory and hope;

**Many:**    ***To reclaim the vision of an earth made fair,  
           with all her people one.***

**All:**     ***Let us join our hearts together and worship!***

\*\* Song Of Praise     God of the Ages, Who With Sure Command     No. 592

\*\* Welcome and Invocation

Reverend Kharma Amos

\*\* The Passing of the Peace

The Community

***Greet one another with a respectful handshake or hug and join together in song.***

God's Dominion Come

By Rory Cooney

***We wait in joy, joy, joy (repeat)***

***We wait in joy, like flowers in the sun;***

***We wait in joy, joy, joy (repeat)***

***We wait in joy and the spirit, God's dominion come!***

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Ancient Reading

Galatians 6:1-10

My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. For all must carry their own loads. Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher. Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

Contemporary Reading

~ From Barbara Brown Taylor in *The Preaching Life*

Reading the newspaper, I see a map of the world with symbols denoting war, earthquake, famine. There are black lines separating this country from that, this people from that. I note with some relief that the area in which I live is free of symbols. I look once and think, "Thank God I'm an American." I look twice and think, "God, help me, I'm an earthling," and in that imaginative act my relationship to the world in which I live is changed.

Special Music

Oh, God Your Love  
By Rich Mullins & Cliff Young

In *Cluesion*

TODAY'S MESSAGE

**"Interdependence Day"**

Rev. Kharma Amos

\*\* Song of Affirmation

This Is My Song

No. 591

Prayers For Our World And Community

Response

*(Please join choir after each prayer)*

***Spirit of the Living God, Fall Afresh On Me***

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Invitation To Present Tithes And Gifts

***As the offerings are being received, please join together in song:***

Offertory

We Are An Offering  
By Dwight Liles

***All:***

***We lift our voices, we lift our hands, we lift our lives up to You, we are an offering.***

***God use our voices, God use our hands, God use our lives, they are Yours, we are an offering.***

***All that we have, all that we are, all that we hope to be, we give to You, we give to You.***

***We lift our voices, we lift our hands, we lift our lives up to You, we are an offering, we are an offering.***

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Prayer of Gratitude

- Celebration of Holy Communion -

One: God be with you.  
**All: *And also with you.***  
One: Open your hearts.  
**All: *We open them to God and one another.***  
One: Let us give thanks to God.  
**All: *It is right to give God thanks and praise.***  
One: It is indeed right at all times and all places  
to give thanks and praise to you, Most Holy God.  
... and so, with your people on earth and in heaven,  
we join together singing this hymn of praise:

Santo, Santo, Santo No. 793  
*Santo, santo, santo, Mi corazón te adora;  
Mi corazón te sabe decir, Santo, eres Dios.  
Holy, Holy, Holy, My heart, my heart adores you;  
My heart knows how to say to you, Holy are you, God.*

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Blessing of the Bread and Cup

Invitation to the Table

Sharing The Open Meal of Christ

Please maintain a prayerful attitude during the distribution of communion. Each of us is welcome to this table as an individual, a family, or with friends. If you need to be served at your seat, please inform an usher. All cups contain grape juice. Each person who shares the meal will receive a brief blessing. You are invited to sing softly or pray silently at your seat before and after being served.

Music During Communion

*All are invited to join on the refrains*

We Are Many Parts

By Marty Haugen

*We are many parts, we are all one body and the gifts we have we are given to share.  
May the Spirit of love make us one indeed;  
one, the love that we share; one, our hope and despair; one, the cross that we bear.*

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We Remember

By Michael Connelly

*We remember how you loved us to your death and still we celebrate, for you are with us here;  
and we believe that we will see you when you come in your glory. We remember, we celebrate, we believe.*

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We Are Many Parts

By Marty Haugen

*We are many parts, we are all one body and the gifts we have we are given to share.  
May the Spirit of love make us one indeed;  
one, the love that we share; one, our hope and despair; one, the cross that we bear.*

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Prayer Of Thanksgiving

Community Announcements & Opportunities

\*\* Closing Song

My Life Is In You  
by Daniel Gardner

InC/usion

*My life is in You, God,  
My strength is in You, God,  
My hope is in You, God,  
In You, it's in You.*

*My life is in You, God,  
My strength is in You, God,  
My hope is in You, God,  
In You, it's in You.*

*I will praise You with all of my life,  
I will praise You with all of my strength,  
With all of my life,  
With all of my strength,  
All of my hope is in You.*

*(repeat as led)*

© 1986, Integrity's Hosanna'al Music CCLI 515288 Used By Permission

\*\* Benediction

Reverend Kharma Amos

✠ Go in Peace ✠

**THIS WEEK @ MCC NOVA**

**Sunday July 4**  
9:30 am Prayer, Praise, and Abundance  
11:00 am Worship  
6:00 pm Sacred Places *Love*

**Monday July 5**  
*Holiday – Office Closed*

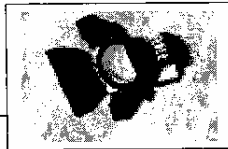
**Tuesday July 6**  
*Office Closed*

**Wednesday July 7**  
7:00 pm InClusion Rehearsal

**Thursday July 8**  
*Office Closed*

**Friday July 9**  
*Office Closed*

**Sunday July 11**  
9:30 am Prayer, Praise, and Abundance  
11:00 am Worship



**SPOTLIGHT  
ON MINISTRY**

*Special Thanks to ALL OF YOU  
who stayed for our meeting last  
Sunday to begin the process of  
discerning the next steps on MCC  
NOVA's Spiritual Journey.*

*Thank you for your time and for your  
willingness to let the Spirit speak  
through you. Stay tuned! This is  
only the beginning.*

**COMMUNITY NOTES**

*Community Notes provided to the church office  
will appear for two weeks, or until the event occurs.  
They may be renewed for additional periods  
as often as space permits by contacting the church office.*

**🗨️ Poets, Novelists, and other Writers** Who says writing has to be a solitary experience, not the NoVA Writer's Circle! We are a small diverse group of committed writers at every stage of our writing journey. Every week we gather to share, support and critique each other's work. If you are looking to develop your craft with others who share your passion, don't hesitate. You will be amazed what supportive accountability will do to your productivity. Contact: [REDACTED]

Day and Time: Saturdays at 11:30 Location: Rt. 7/Mienna Area

**🗨️ Equality Prince William forming** – the GLBT civic group of Greater Prince William County. To join the free mailing list, [REDACTED]

**INCLUSION**

The band formerly known as "Clueless" has come a long way in developing a different style of music ministry, ranging from folk to contemporary Christian. It is comprised of a variety of singers and musicians who wholeheartedly endorse the command to "make a joyful noise!" Rehearsals for the group are every Wednesday evening, from 7 to 9 pm at the church. If you have a musical inclination you would like to share, or just want to come check out what the group is all about, drop by or call [REDACTED]. Although most current members do, you need not play an instrument to come and sing with us. We hope to see you - and hear you! - soon.

**Area PFLAG Gatherings  
(Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)**

The Manassas support group meets every 4th Monday. The Reston group meets from 7:30 to 9:30 pm every 1st Tuesday of the month at the Washington-Plaza Church, 1615 Washington Plaza (Lake Ann). [REDACTED] for additional information.

The Metropolitan Community Church  
Northern Virginia



July 4, 2004

**Staff**

Pastor & Moderator: Reverend Kharma Amos.....  
Minister of Music: Guy Lotrecchiano.....  
Administrative Assistant: Emma Chattin.....

**Board of Directors**

Kim Habermann, Vice-Moderator.....  
Cindy Giese, Clerk.....  
Gail Minnick, Treasurer.....  
Michele Mingrone, Member At Large.....  
Leslie White, Member At Large.....

**Congregational Care Ministers**

Kelli Butler.....  
Eleana Boyer.....  
Chris Fink.....  
Kim Habermann.....  
Gail Minnick.....  
Judith Raleigh.....  
Ginny Reed.....  
Connie Skidmore.....  
Ron Wadford.....

-or call MCC NOVA at 703 691-0930

**Delegation to UFMCC**

Jane Bennett (Delegate).....

The Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia  
is a Church within the  
Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches  
A Christian Denomination Open to All  
10383 Democracy Lane Fairfax, VA 22030  
Church Office 10379 - A (upstairs)  
Voice 703 691-0930 FAX 703 691-0529  
info@mccnova.com http://www.mccnova.com

**THE CHURCH AT PRAYER**

In addition to those mentioned during our community prayers,  
please pray this week for the following:

- Prayers of guidance, comfort, and presence for Zoe's partner, Sharon, as she determines the course of treatment for her recurring back pain; prayers of strength and support for Zoe.
- Prayers for Mika's friend, Shirley, who is being sent to Iraq as a civilian worker; that she and her family may be blessed with strength while they are separated.
- Prayers of healing for Patti's brother-in-law Tim, and prayers of strength for her sister Cherri.
- Prayers for the Graley family. For Kathleen who was recently diagnosed with breast cancer; for Mary's recovery; and strength for Connie.
- Strength and healing for Robyn, Mike's niece, and prayers for her husband and children as they support her through treatment for breast cancer.
- Continued prayers of safety for all loved ones overseas and far from home.
- Prayers of strength and support for Connie, and prayers of comfort for Loretta.
- Prayers of healing and strength for Kim's mother.
- Prayers of continued comfort and healing for Emma's mother; prayers of strength for the family.
- Prayers of strength and continued healing for Winston.

Prayer Requests will appear for about two weeks - or as space permits.  
They may be renewed and updated by contacting the church office.

**FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP**

Approved 2004 Budget \$187,445  
Pledged Amount \$124,932  
Pledges Received 37

Weekly Budget Amount \$3,600

**June Weekly Attendance & Offerings**

June 6	75	\$3,853
June 13	75	\$4,128
June 20	76	\$3,917
June 27	84	\$2,446

Stewardship Packages Are Available  
on the Literature Table

**CARE MINISTRY**

Need someone to talk to? Would you like a visitor when ill? Or are you just looking for someone to be present with you? The Congregational Care Team is here for you. We are a ministry of Prayer & Presence for our community. If you have a need, or just need someone to listen, please contact any of the Congregational Care Team members listed in the adjacent column. We are here for each of you, please call.

### **Perspectives on the liturgical process**

Ritual, as patterned experience, is the repeated and consistent reinforcement of realities at play within a corporate body. This stated, a consideration of repeated behavior like that embodied in the Sunday Worship of MCC NOVA is a representation of the systems of belief which the community holds as endearing to its overall identity. Mottos, emblems, and service songs which are a regular fixture of the community's worship, accepted gestures, and the worship *ordo* are in themselves symbolic representations of the social identity of the community which continually empowers and shapes beliefs. Since the conversation of symbolism within this ritual is grounded in a liturgical context, it is worth mentioning some major perspectives on the purpose and outcome of liturgical celebration.

#### ***Liturgy as transformation***

That worship serves as a transformational activity has been proposed by Mellone Burnim who recognizes that through the triangulation of behavior, aesthetics, and ideology, Black gospel music traditions represent the complexity of Black culture. "It's performances transmit uniformity and contrast, collectivity and individuality, unity and diversity" (Burnim 1980: 165). The performance of Gospel music fosters the innate identity of Black Christians embodied in the histories of in-groups and out-groups as the interplay of these identities comes together in the musical-ritual system. The result is a transformational situation where spirituality and culture intersect to produce an identity that is inclusive of both the innate realities of culture and spirituality (Burnim 1989: 52-61). This perspective embraces that religious ritual is a context where culture and



spirituality merge into a religious tradition that embodies one identity intrinsically rooted in both the histories of culture and the spiritualities of its performers. Ritual is a situation where the complexities and negotiations of the community are worked out and learned.

### *The catechetical interpretation*

Some traditions have considered liturgy as having a catechetical function. The term, liturgical catechesis, has become a great concern in many ritual churches which depend on its worship life to signify belief and to act as a vehicle for the public display of their own core values. Catechesis is not only a knowing about worship or in other terms a knowledge about the signs and symbols which make up one's vocabulary of expressiveness, but rather, it is a process of "coming to know" God in the very practice of the ritual act (Dooley, 1987: 1). It is a gradual formation, a spiritual journey adapted to the age and environment of its participants, their culture, and capabilities. Conversion is the goal of this process and its task is the deepening of the awareness and activities of both humans and God in history (Dooley, 1989: 49-51).

Worship serves as a primary experience for religious formation for it provides a vehicle for shared and learned aesthetics of the corporate belief system. Liturgical celebration serves as a primary experience for formation. Through the celebrations of the church, the worshipper expresses and creates that which is the church. It develops a keen awareness of the components of the central symbolic system of faith through active participation (Dooley, 1989:52). I would argue that liturgical catechesis can not be reduced to a program of awareness that merely focuses on a few aspects of liturgical participation. Liturgical catechesis is not restricted to the sole celebration of the liturgy

nor does it find its fullness in any particular component of celebration. Furthermore, since liturgical catechesis is ultimately directed to the shaping of the Church's experiences of the mystery of faith, it is not private or personal; it happens in light of the make up of the gathered assembly who play as much a part in the catechetical process as does the liturgical content (Dooley, 1992: 287-289).

Gilbert Ostdiek defines catechesis in a way reminiscent of the patristic model of catechesis, calling it "oral instruction" (Ostdiek 1986: 8). He identifies the task of catechesis as ministry which fosters mature faith and puts people in touch, both in communion and in intimacy with Jesus Christ. Ostdiek confirms that the liturgy is central to this task. If we are to define liturgy as a "first theology" it is also right to mention that liturgy is a "first catechesis." Therefore, the overall function of liturgical catechesis is to enable people to participate actively, both internally and externally, in the liturgy which celebrates faith. When liturgy is made the content of catechesis, it has the power to make worshippers self-conscious about their symbols and signs. When this self-consciousness occurs, the worshipper is brought from prayer to reflection and ultimately to celebration. This leads to the most central task of catechesis: the awareness of the mystery of faith. (Ostdiek 1990: 169-170).

### ***The symbolic potential of liturgical celebration***

An approach to liturgical celebration which focuses on its outcomes, its intent, and its function ultimately suggests that the experience of ritualizing is a process with a preeminent purpose. The problem this presents is the very point of a consideration of

consciousness as key to symbolic activity and the ritual actors which partake in it. As

Kathleen Hughes and Victor Turner have stated:

Liturgy is not a logical explanation, nor can its end be reduced to a political or ethical “goal” – a series of “shoulds” or “oughts.” Theme liturgy, whether it be “right to life” or “hope” or “disarmament” or whatever, makes of liturgy and exposition of ideas. There are other more appropriate forums for such discussion...The liturgy has a unique potential for inviting transformation in the Christian community (Hughes 1983: 195). The liturgy gives expression to the community’s faith experience; or to borrow a phrase from Victor Turner, the liturgy transmits the community’s “deep knowledge” from one generation to the next (V. Turner 1972: 399).

For many years, ritual scholars have attempted to dissect these notions and focus on the role that symbol plays in the processes innate to religious ritual activity. As Raymond Firth states, symbols are devices which point to latent realities not normally justifiable or vocal through other means. They have the potential to act as instruments of expression, communication, knowledge, and even control (Frith, 1973:76-85). As instruments they ‘make present’ realities which are otherwise not typified through other means, and they are innately connected to both material existence and the meanings which they embody. Within ritual, the symbolized behaviors of peoples contribute to the right relationships between what is believed and what is the structure of society. Ultimately, symbols “create” a society by their activity as vocables of the beliefs themselves (V. Turner 1974: 56).

**Example: “Passing Peace” reconsidered: ritualized embrace and intimacy**

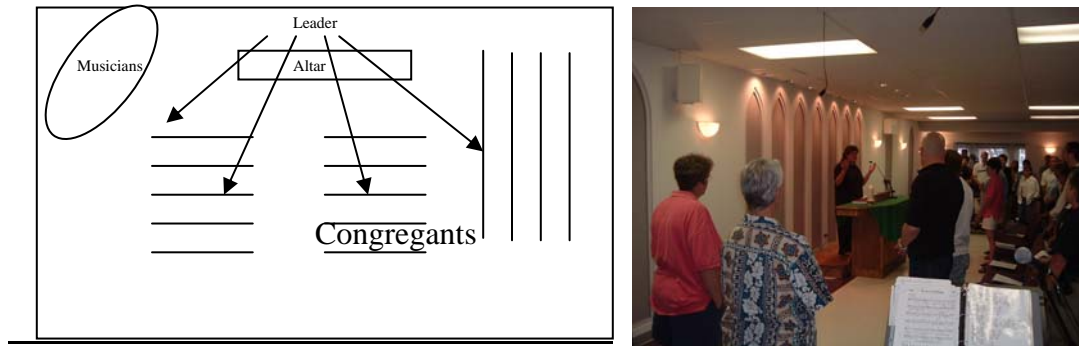
The Passing of Peace has for a long time been viewed as a critical part of MCC worship on both the local level and throughout the entire of UFMCC rituals. As a rite<sup>36</sup> within the worship service it embodies several reinforced ideas within a LGBTQ world.

As the MCC NOVA community breaks from the Welcome and Invocation usually lead by the worship leader, there is a shift in the social structure of the community from one which highlights leadership by the presiding member who welcomes newcomers, visitors, and established members to one which deconstructs elements of division. Spatially, the leader stands in front of a gathered community and explains the context of the MCC NOVA environment thus expressing its corporate beliefs in language (Figure 34, below).

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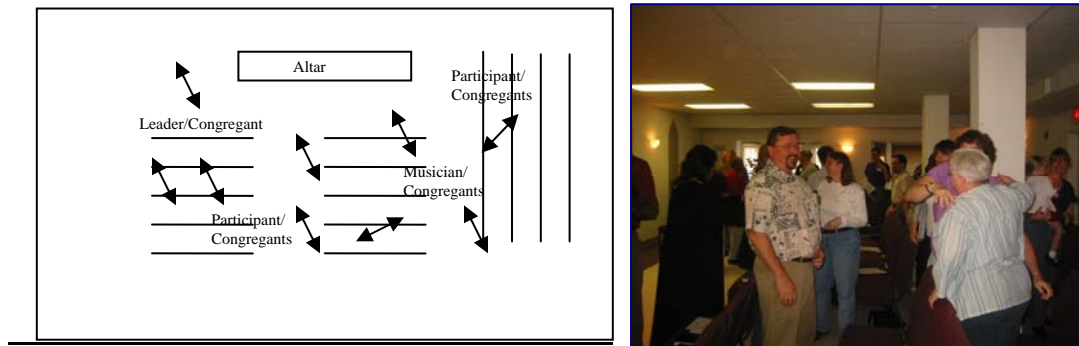
<sup>36</sup> The terms ‘rite’ and ‘ritual’ are used differently in this section. By ‘rite’, I am highlighting occurrences within the entire ‘ritual’.

Figure 34. Photographs and diagram of the spatial configuration of the community during the welcome and invocation.



**Welcome and Invocation in the Sunday Service**

Good morning and welcome to Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia. We are very glad that you are here this morning. If it's your first time with us or if you're back after some time away, a special welcome. We are honored to have you with us and hope that you will find this time one of welcome encounter with the spirit of God moving in community. If it is your first time with us, we invite you to fill out one of the guest cards located in the seat pockets and then later in the service when the offering plates come by, you can just throw those in. This is the day that God has made, together, let us rejoice and be glad in it. Would you please share with one another some sign of peace.



The invitation to share peace (usually through embraces, hugs, and kisses) is an opportunity for several ritual acts to come together and support both the cultural and spiritual priorities of the community. We have already seen how this rite embodies basic neutrality amongst member of the congregation (Chapter 3, p.207). On this very basic level, the community is involved in a transformational shift from a leader polity to a

congregational polity as the ritual acts are created and designed by the community. On a deeper level, the combination of individual involvement and improvisation, musical content, and the transitional element of shifting power and authority come together to create a symbolic reality paralleling LGBTQ priorities.

First, in concert with an ontological approach to analysis, we must consider the repeated and consistent quality of the act where week after week the act of intimacy between members is experienced as a good and authentic quality. This experience is transient as meaning of the act and the skills required to participate may over time change as individuals become conscious of its potential meaning. As a symbolic indicator to the participant, it may only be over time as one becomes aware of the personal and community expectations of the act in light of his or her own identification with the community. This process of understanding about the acts (its aesthetic requirements, its genuine character, etc) potentially leads to reflection about how this fits into the individual's ownership of both the rituals in which he/she participates and the world in which he/she is operating. Responsibility stems from the ability to promote and/or reject this sort of behavior as having an important role as the world of the subject interacts with the world of MCC polity.

Second, the experience of sharing peace becomes a liminal state where the transitions from one world of understanding are translated into another. This may be a world of individualism into corporatism, isolation into intimacy, one of social taboo to social normalism, or from traditional hegemonies to identity driven ones. Through the process of the rite, LGBTQ priorities rooted in commonality, physicality, and gender

neutrality, are established in parallel with newly concretized religious ideals like love, gender neutrality, and acceptance. Involvement in the musical selection, *Thy Dominion Come* (Figure 23, p.208), reinforces a memorial (or *anamnesis*)<sup>37</sup> of presence in what is being presently experienced and what will one day be a reality as the community “waits in joy.” It ultimately contextualizes the presence of belief into a hope for greater acceptance and belief in the future, possibly within a greater world of consciousness.

Third, the activity of passing peace is a good example of the triangulation of qualities which create the discourse of becoming more attuned to LGBTQ piety. It is an experience innately connected to one’s personal becoming as the individual negotiates feelings about intimacy in light of a public act designed to describe the closeness the community has with itself. As one negotiates his/her involvement, it is liminal on some levels as it fuels interior consciousness about the participant’s own meaning of intimacy in light of the values and actions of the community. It in turn communicates what the community’s hopes for the future are by a reinforcement in the musical selection.

This example supplies several explanations of the approaches of modern liturgics. In Burnim’s assessment, the rite is transformational as politics apparent to LGBTQ world view are integrated in a religious piety. Ideals of universal love, intimacy, creativity and equality are infused in a spiritual polity of goodness, acceptance, hope and freedom. The activity is catechetical as one’s relationship with God and with the Church is known through the ritual acts which possess the symbolic ability to make an act of personal

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<sup>37</sup> *anamnesis*, Greek. “Literally, ‘to remember’. The part of the liturgy that recalls the narrative of the Institution and records those events of Christ.” (Day, 1993: 13). The concept of *anamnesis* is one which is not unique to Christological artifact but rather is more importantly a function of memorializing that which has come before as contributing to present and future realities.

intimacy into a corporate act of meaning thus communicating meaning through the doing of an act. The act has no agenda nor does it have a prescribed outcome as the experience is multivalent in a number of symbolic ways.

### **A consideration of symbolic ontology**

For Lonergan, a symbol is an image of a real or imaginary object that evokes a feeling or is evoked by a feeling. These feelings rooted in the human condition are related to objects, to one another, and to the subject who engages in their activity. The symbols themselves are akin to basic human feelings like desiring food, fearing pain, enjoying a meal, or regretting a friend's illness. They supply a feeling of satisfaction, loyalty, groundedness, or identity. As sources of reflection they supply what one desires as the good that is absent, the hopes for the good that is sought, and an enjoyment of the good.

Within an ontological stance a personal relationship with symbols is established making the ritual representations which they embody a part of the innate identity of the one who supplies meaning to them. "To the subject they are the mass and momentum and power of conscious living, the actuation of his affective capacities, dispositions, habits, and the affective orientation of [his] being" (Lonergan 1972: 65).

The identity which symbolic behavior promotes and empowers deepens as the individual's interaction with it. It is intersubjective as often as a symbol is meant to embody a notion which is contradictory to the individual's own self-conscious stance. In the act of analysis, the symbolic attributes of ritual behavior can in themselves testify to the negotiations and tolerances operative in a community as well as the systems of belief which they are meant to reinforce. The value of symbolic activity is therefore potentially



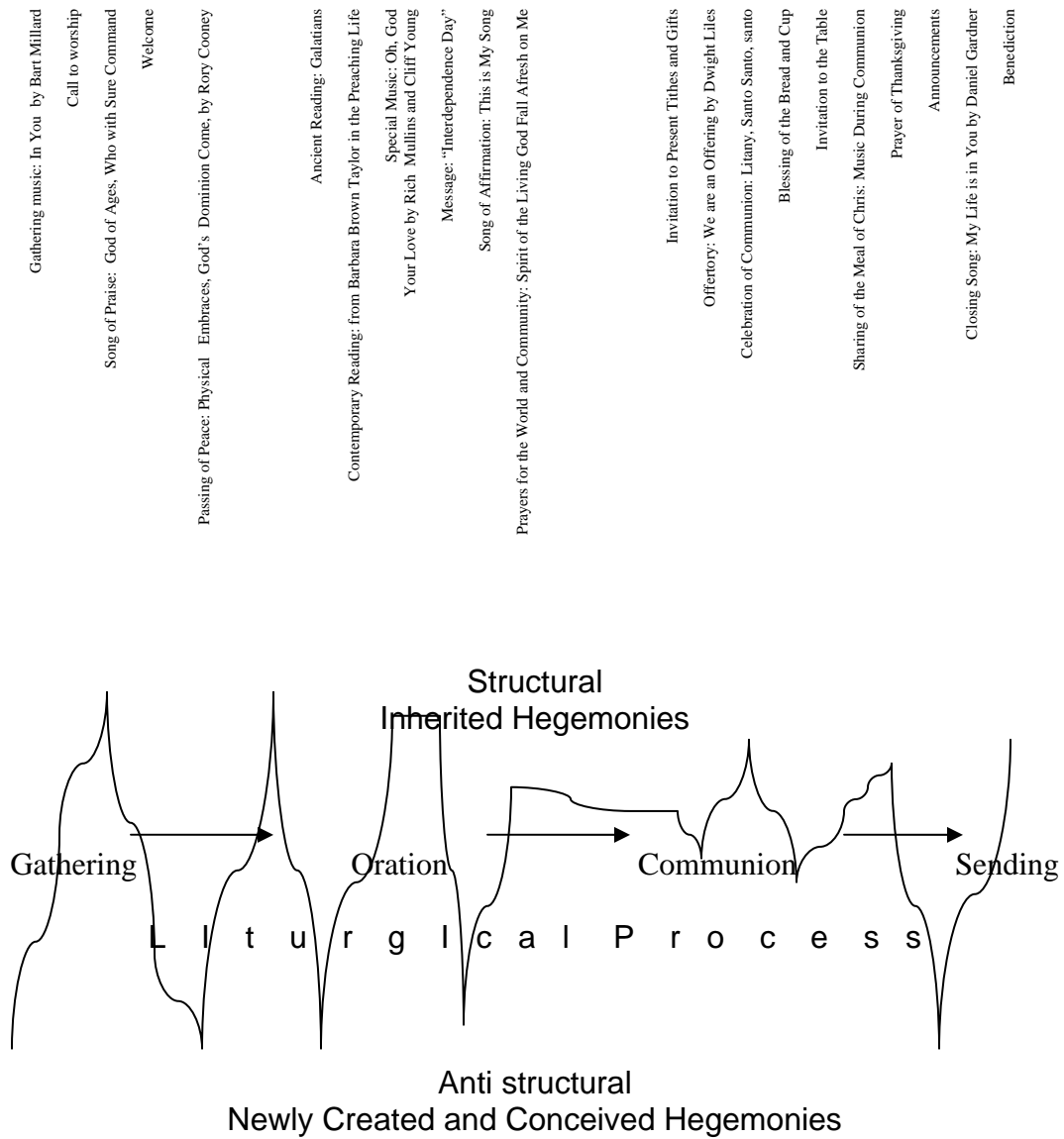
structural (embodying a reinforcement of meanings) and anti-structural (inviting an alternative to that which is being reinforced). If we are to look at the combination of rites as they come together in a major ritual they offer what Victor Turner describes, a “dangerous ambiguity” to the ritual stage (V. Turner 1974: 273). Ritual symbols possess the potential to act as signifiers of what is traditionally or historically valued while simultaneously acting as an instrument which deconstructs such hegemonies.

Ritual symbiosis is critical to an interpretation of the value which is placed on seemingly oppositional acts of performance. In the third chapter I’ve isolated one incident where this structural and anti-structural relationship had been played out in the Easter Celebration as text and musical style represent seemingly different representations (Chapter 3, p.210). The text of Derek Campbell’s *He is Not Here* is seemingly structural as it reinforces the traditional interpretation of the relationship between an all-powerful God and a supplicant people. It is anti-structural as the musical genre and style presents a performative quality which interpretively deconstructs other hegemonies and allows for a newly experienced sense of feeling and celebration not equally typified in the text.

When one looks at this notion of structure and anti-structure we can interpret symbolic behavior within a single ritual event differently and as having different values of meaning with regards to the overall community interpretation. In the example of MCC Sunday Worship ritual, the *ordo* of worship corresponds to a historical hegemony found in many mainstream churches as we have shown in Chapter 2, p. on page 56 and 57. It contains an historical gather-oration-communion-sending structure which is reflective of many mainstream traditions and in fact models the Judeo-Christian *ordo* of worship.

However, within its *ordo*, the stylization of these rites embodies both traditional and newly generated sentiments which provide for fluctuations between structural and anti-structural realms of interpretation. Contemporary versus traditional worship songs, ancient sources and contemporary ones, the stylization of forms themselves to include new insights, all contribute to this fluctuation between structure and anti structure. (Figure 35, below).

Figure 35. Structural and Anti-structural Analysis of Rites.<sup>38</sup>



The representation of both traditional and newly created symbolic behaviors serves to represent the diverse character of the community. Spoken call to worship,

<sup>38</sup> This analysis is only one of many interpretations of the value certain rites have in representing the structural and antistructural tendencies toward preexisting hegemonies. It's based on a presumption that the individual rites with their seemingly different performance styles comments on a proximity with traditional hegemonies. This of course will change from Sunday to Sunday as different musical and ritual selections are exercised. Here its offered to show a spectrum of traditional and antitraditional worship elements.

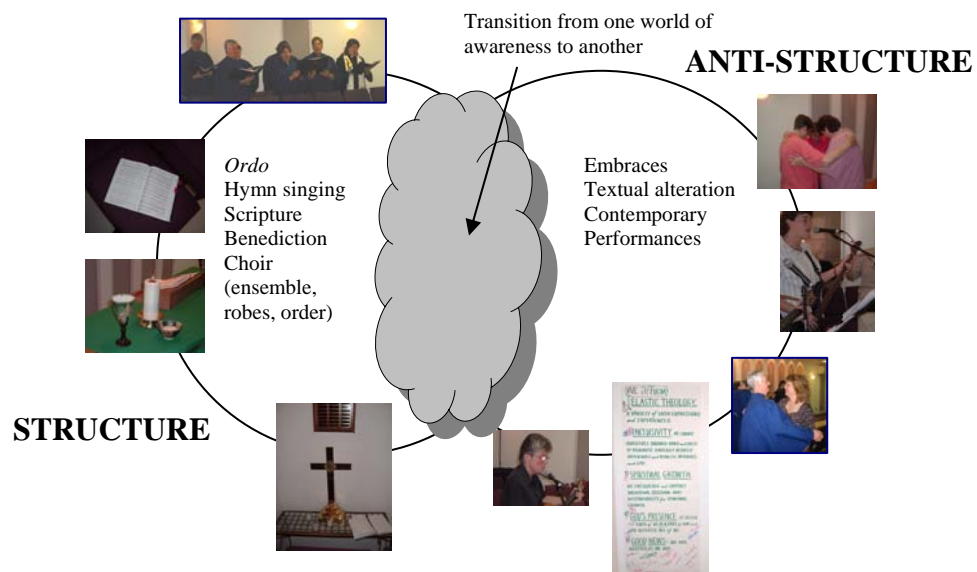
scripture texts, prayers of the community, presentation of tithes and offerings, communion, metric hymns, and benediction and other rites of the worship experience all serve a symbolic representation of a structure of church which normalizes a LGBTQ worship stance. Common worship elements like call and response, the Galatians reading, the collection, the communion procession, songs from the metric corpus of sacred literature like *God of the Ages*, *Who With Sure Command*, NCH#592, and the sending of the community by the pastor all represent a normalized representation of church worship rooted in a sharing with historical hegemonies (See Figure 35, p.317). They provides for shared experience with the greater Christian world through its likening with mainstream worship structure.

Transversely, through the performance of these rites, the alteration of text found in both performances of *InCluesion*, theological interpretations in preaching, contemporary readings and songs, clapping, movement, and biblical interpretation, all provide for an anti-structural representation which stylizes the meaning of the worship experience to include themes which are more adherent to the values held by the community. The meaning embodied in the various qualities associated with the wide variety of performative acts is ultimately dependant on the historical experiences of individuals who, depending on their own consciousness, supply value to the various and intermingling symbolic acts.

Returning to Lonergan's models of efficacy, we may consider the structural and anti-structural embodiments found in different ritual acts as contributing to a process of transition from one world of worshippers to another. In this interpretation, symbols which

embody the hegemonies of Judeo-Christian worship establish a groundedness and normalization of worship. Those acts which are of a more creative quality may represent a world which is beyond the known realm of Christian behaviors leading to a transition to a greater awareness. The two represent a simplified dualism found in all MCC worship environments (See Figure 36, below).

Figure 36. Relationship of Structural and Anti-structural Elements of Worship.



By this interpretation of the relationship between different symbolic elements we may surmise that within the worship event, there is an interplay of that which is considered to be of a previous or preconscious world (traditional religion) and a world which represents a newly fashioned awareness (MCC/LGBTQ existence). On a sensory level, all the elements supply basic needs to the worshipper. Song, scripture, blessing, embrace, etc. provide for the elemental attributes of worship. Meaning is apparent

through the representational qualities of the individual rites of worship and the various structural or anti-structural functions they provide. Through participation, one's world is construed as having meaning as the elements contribute to an empowerment of what it means to be Christian as well as to be a local community.

As we have considered in other sections of this paper, the interplay of differing symbolic attributes in MCC worship presents a problem in the research as we attempt to consider the value of discontinuity and continuity embedded in what seems to be unlike common acts. The danger in this model suggested above presumes that structural elements and anti-structural elements represent a movement from a historical awareness to a more conscious one highlighting a movement away from historical religion. This is not the case. The transition which occurs as artifacts of Christian worship come in contact with newly stylized and meaningful symbols of MCCers is not only a transition from one awareness to another but rather it illustrates how the interplay of traditional and non-traditional religious elements come together to express the embrace of seeming continuity and discontinuity.

**Example: Communion: hegemonic continuity and discontinuity**

The experience of ritualized communion at MCC NOVA is typical on a very elemental plane. It is the reception of the elements of the last supper blessed, broken, and shared. For many, it is the basic task of the Sunday service—a communion symbolized through the process of sharing a meal. It normalizes as individuals retreat from their seats into lines which feed into stations where ministers offer them the elements for consumption. Musical selections are lead by the cantor and/or choir as participants sing

throughout the rite. The musical selections, *We Are Many Parts* and *We Remember* support the sentiment of unity and diversity by emitting a sense of commonality. In essence, the rite is seemingly a combination of many acts of continuity ascribing to LBGTQ priorities focusing on themes of unity, welcome, and wholeness. On this level the community participates in the hegemonic rites of religious heritage which expressed continuity with desires and hopes of LBGTQ members—and for the most part a clear identification with universal Christian precepts.

The dangerous ambiguity which Victor Turner described lies beneath the ritual acts and in the some cases the acts themselves. LBGTQ priorities value a sense of corporateness and this is evidenced throughout the ritual *ordo* of the Sunday Service. Amidst these examples lies a combination of acts of meaning which contribute to the continuity and discontinuity present in all of MCC NOVA worship.

As LBGTQ members Share of the Meal of Christ, they are faced with a rite of continuity and corporate becoming which for some, and at times for all, has been a source of tension, stress, and even exclusion. Here the symbols which represent a normalizing of traditional hegemonies coincide with LBGTQ priorities which are the same symbols which provide discontinuity. In the very nourishment provided by the ministers, wafers and juice have at times stood as symbols which remind participants of the broken aspects of the LBGTQ world as concerns about alcoholism, infection, and rejection are the same symbols used to communicate inclusion and freedom.

The act symbolizes the scrutiny and anguish this community suffers at it deals with alcoholics, immune suppressed individuals, and those who in past experiences in

mainstream churches have been denied reception because of their gender orientation. Grape juice, replacing wine; the practice of intinction<sup>39</sup> replacing the handling and physical sharing from the same cup; and physical embraces are the micro-occurrences of the rite which stylize the behavior to meet specific needs of this community. The symbols in themselves conjure the multitude of realities as the liturgical process becomes a process of individual translation and ultimate new corporate belief. The intimacy, sharing, and freedom as seen in the example of Passing of Peace is counteracted with this experience of restriction, individuality, and hygienics, including these realities of the LGBTQ world into the spiritual exercise. Both attempt to conjure a reality which is similar as the event embodies latent struggles within the community while also providing for a nurturing and empowering experience.

**Example: Closing Song of InClusion: performance or liturgy?**

We have discussed previously the notion of parallels between musical and ensemble form and social structure. We have also mentioned that when considering music, we cannot expect that forms which are obvious to MCC NOVA priorities always represent community politics. A symbolic consideration would typically suggest that through composed and metric song, making no reference to leadership or division of musical parts would be the most inclusive and corporately egalitarian, i.e. metric hymnody. These would be in comparison to choir and leader led songs where the

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<sup>39</sup> A style of receiving the elements of communion where the bread is dipped into the wine (or juice) and consumed. There are many variations on this practice. One way is for a minister to perform the act for the communicant placing the wafer onto the person's tongue after the wafer and liquid are commingled. Here, the process is done by the communicant him/herself. The meaning is twofold. It first shows a greater participation on the part of the communicant receiving the elements. It also is a hygienic consideration so that the handling of the elements are done only by the communicant and not another. The practice has a multitude of consequences when one considers issues of communal sharing and safety.



congregations have only a partial participation in the performance of the entire piece, i.e. call and response. In essence, as we have discovered, genre, style and performance quality contribute innately to the overall efficacy of musical participation and meaning.

In the closing song of this Sunday ritual, *My Life is in You* by Daniel Gardner, some of the typical alterations have been made for the music to fit MCC NOVA priorities. The text “My life is in You [Lord]” is altered as the dominant description of [Lord] is replaced with “God” and is taken off of the last section of the melodic motive. In*Cluesion*’s performance style of this contemporary piece is typical to contemporary Christian popular music which has physicality, clapping, and an overall joyous tone as aesthetic requirements. Continuity is apparent as the piece achieves an upbeat closing sentiment to the service and participation on the part of the community is secured through singing and clapping.

It had been a concern of the MCC Worship Committee that the music of In*Cluesion* had begun to take on a “performance” quality gravitating away from a sense of musical empowerment held as a priority by the community. This is due mostly to the development of skill amongst its membership. While involvement of the congregation in musics of In*Cluesion* have been positive and upbeat, focusing on a joyousness inherent in LBGTQ community celebrations, leaders in the community have been concerned about the performance style as the band becomes increasing more electric, overt, and experimental. Modes of empowerment drawing attention to the freedoms and transformational quality of participation in the musics for members of In*Cluesion* which have been presented in chapter 2 are counteracted by the representations of performance

which the group emulates. In essence the continuity with MCC priorities which is embedded in the musical experiences of *InCluesion* members who are freed by their performance becomes the very attribute which presents discontinuity with the corporate belief system.

There are two important points in this dualism worth mentioning. First, the skills which make up performances of *InCluesion*'s freedom to play music of one's own choosing and liking, skilled guitar playing, improvisation on the drum, the integration of genres not typically associated with worship, and spirit-filled singing, provide for aesthetics of incorporation with histories and realities apparent in LBGQT community. Second, it is in these same musical skills and value placed on them through the perception of MCC NOVA members where discontinuity and continuity are symbolized. As members become more skilled in the qualities necessary to embody a contemporary sound in music performance, their expected roles in liturgical performance are tested. Musical leadership meant to empower congregational participation is shifted to include a sense of exclusion on the part of the performers themselves who emulate a musical stance which is more virtuosic. Meaning is twofold in this example as on the one hand, the performance symbolizes a transition and transformation in keeping with a greater LBGQT awareness in the players, and on the other hand it tests the relationship between power and authority in liturgical celebration.

#### **Example: Corporate structure in the Call to Worship**

The Call To Worship, a traditionally Protestant rite, has throughout history symbolized a variety of liturgical meanings. Sometimes historically and scripturally

based, and sometimes freely composed as a result of the reflections of authors, the ritual act supplies a context for that which is to follow in the course of the service. Following a simple call and response, one way the Call to Worship expresses meaning is by its structuring of roles. It highlights leadership while empowering the community's response as accepting a *call* to enter the worship arena.

I have already shown that forms, musical and spoken, supply a blueprint for corporate awareness. Through compositions, metric pieces, call and response, and freeform structures all contribute to a symbolic explanation of roles and priorities within liturgical celebration. In this example as with others, the rite provides for continuity with a Protestant hegemony as a leader (incidentally not usually the ordained pastor) stands in front of the community and leads the congregants in a litany of affirmation. The roles of both the presider and congregation are solidified as members from the congregation take on a leadership role often afforded only the pastor or presider in an act of liturgical presidency. In one way, the formal rite provides a traditional hegemony as it supplies a historical presence. In another way it allows for a shift in authority stemming from the president to one from the community.

The traditionally Protestant ritual hegemony is altered in a highly nuanced way. This is found in the descriptors which show that the leader is "one" of the community leading the "many." This departure from traditional language describing the president as "leader" and the congregation as "all" is a minute detail fashioning the ritual act to reflect MCC NOVA priorities. It is a commentary on the symbolic presence of "leader" as only

“one” of the “many.” Symbolically it alters the traditional hegemonic to include LGBTQ qualities of wholeness and egalitarianism.

### **Ritual and Music and the Description of Social Discourses**

#### **Authority and power in musical performance**

The examples above bring us to question power and authority in performance. We must realize that the inquiry of gender is often clouded by a confusion in definition which depicts sex and gender as homogenized into one static reality. Throughout this paper I have highlighted that a *gender-religiosity* is rooted in the interplay of discourse associated with becoming and its effects on religious performance. Focusing on the experiences of MCC NOVA with a lens overly concerned with performances of sexual orientation (a unique and critical state in the make up of the community) would be incomplete for the results would lead to an interpretation of the relationship between sexual orientation and the behavioral descriptions of it. If we isolate gender as a purely social reality rooted in learned, communicated, and shared behaviors we run the risk of describing it by merely noticing the overt behaviors which feed into stereotypical expectations of LGBTQ culture. This problem is compounded when authority and power are collapsed into one interrelated human performance, one natural outcome of the other by means of performance. Power and authority, like sex and gender, are intrinsically linked to one another. However, power, unlike authority, is embodied in activities of performance rather than being indelibly assigned to one’s ritual role.

Jean Lipman-Blumen reminds us that “power—seeking it, using it, abusing it, decrying it, conveying it, contesting it and overthrowing it—is central to the human

condition.” She goes on to describe how in the negotiation of power, gender roles serve as an “instructive paradigm for power relationships” (Lipman-Blumen 1994: 108-109). Negotiations of power between human beings can not be separated from the gender constructs which embody human status. They are detectable in the dynamics of power organization. Therefore, the consideration of power and its possible implications on identity in social activities ascribes to the same dynamism which I have held as a constant through the paper.

While most definitions of power are embedded in the notion that power is the ability of one to force conformity, Lipman-Blumen describes power as

That set of processes whereby one party (be it individual, group, institution, or state) can gain and maintain the capacity to impose its will repeatedly upon another, despite any opposition, by its potential to contribute or withhold critical resources from the central task, as well as by offering or withholding rewards, or by threatening or invoking punishment (Lipman-Blumen, 1994)

These processes are operative and maintained through relations among people, institutions, and other human factions. Dominance, resulting from the negotiation of power, is measured by the accesses which one faction will have over another in light of resources which over time become institutionalized and quasi-permanent structures. “Moreover, the ideologies, discourses or belief systems that the dominant party creates or articulates, constitutes the prevailing ‘truth’ which, in turn, becomes a justification of the dominant group’s hegemony” (Lipman-Blumen, 1994).

If we propose that the resources which Lipman-Blumen describes can be translated into human qualities, we may also propose that the performance of ritual acts is a stylization of contexts used as a process for establishing power relationships. Accesses to certain types of performances can be displays of power if understood in light of power

relationships apparent between those who exercise it. Ability and virtuosity amidst ritual actions therefore (like those governing music, preaching, gesture, etc.), is as dynamic as are other performances of power which are rooted in the presence of discourse like license, inclusion, and those pertaining to an altering of world view. In other words, power may not always describe the success of a performance. It may be measured by the attempt and the role a performance plays in the embodiment of discourse. In fact, we see this over and over again in MCC NOVA performances. For the possession of power, we may say that by exercising the power of speech, the power of locomotion, or the power of music, one exercises the ability to perform a human characteristic which is otherwise not usually accessible by another or in another context. The characteristics that these ritual performances communicate are as liminal and oppositional as the aesthetics that they employ. There is an expectation that acts are vehicles for that which promotes powerfulness, thus affecting the human matrix of relationships. Those who ascertain the necessary skills to lead become therefore leaders. In this case one who is capable of a certain kind of performance, for instance, musical ability and creation, can serve as a vehicle for performing power and access to otherwise inaccessible power roles. This has been seen in some of our examples where the interplay of human becoming and performance has afforded one a new world view or and new station in life, i.e. as a singer, communicator, or a contributor.

Another perspective on the issue of power accounts for one's exercise of abilities in light of the freedoms inherent as the individual (or group) becomes an agent of power. This concept of agency gives implicit access to power through performances which are

intrinsically linked with ideals of plan and intention. The access which an individual employs through agency is “a course of action which is conceived in advance of the actual performance as well as that action which can be performed as an alternative to whatever is actual power” (Harre and Secord, 1972:246). On another level, it is the process of applying newly understood knowledge about the outcome of performance to repeated instances informed by self reflection.

### **Empowerment in ritual music**

Throughout the many types of ritual performances of MCC NOVA, levels of powerful performances can be observed. These are intertwined as the transition from individual agency to a corporate system of empowerment is established.

On a primary level, we may consider the approach of Lipman-Blumen to assess how roles of individuals are established in the Sunday Service. Musically speaking, the choir, instrumentalists, *InCluesion*, and congregants represent a matrix of relationships ascribing to the possession of skill and the abilities inherent in performing these roles. Singing ability, improvisational skill, command over instruments, and musical qualities specific to different genres would be included in this category. Leadership is afforded to those who possess the skill to supply support, shape a rite through creative playing, or entice participation. Their identity is constructed through the roles they perform but are not restricted by the aesthetics of these performances. The innate aspects of *how* one comes to be able to perform these roles are secondary to the role they provide.

The significance of the abilities themselves is based on a “deeper knowledge” of the transitions which occur internally and corporately allowing for such performance. On

this level, abilities are interpreted as the result of internal qualities which have brought one to a place of access describing the internal mechanisms of change and transition. Improvisation is a sign of creativity and the ability to draw latent creative tendencies to the surface in the form of freedom and fluidity in playing. To sing and play an instrument while simultaneously maintaining visual communication with the congregation is quality that depicts one's ability to bring the personality of the individual to the performance situation. The ability to entice participation and overall celebration in the musical performance is a quality that signifies a group's essential connectedness with the temperament of the entire worshipping assembly.

We have shown how form contributes to the phenomenon of establishing certain meanings within the group which are in line with the values and beliefs of the community. Metric hymn singing, African drumming, and other musical ensemble structures establish an environment which empowers community in different ways by offering unity, freedom, and participation to the overall ritual element.

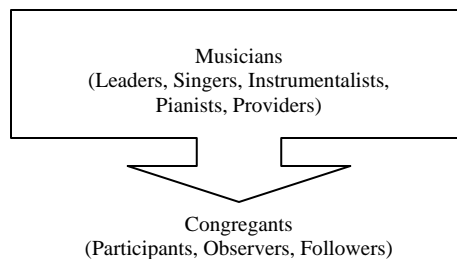
Through form and genre, a symbolic representation of the community's own self-awareness is constructed. In chapter 3 (Figures 11-14, pp.166, 167, 170, and 171), shifts in form and genre describe the transitions which occur from one set of priorities to another. The musical selections strive to deepen the awareness of the group by their alteration of the aesthetics associated with offering. The result is a change in the theologies, self descriptions of the community, and the spiritual consequences that ensue. We have also noticed that through the incorporation of 'ethnic' genres including African American spirituals, Spanish-language selections, and the musics of other marginalized



peoples, the suburban world view, and ultimately the world view of the LGBTQ individual is expanded and empowered by a solidarity with communities these musics intend to represent (Figures 15-18, pp.177, 178, 179, and 181).

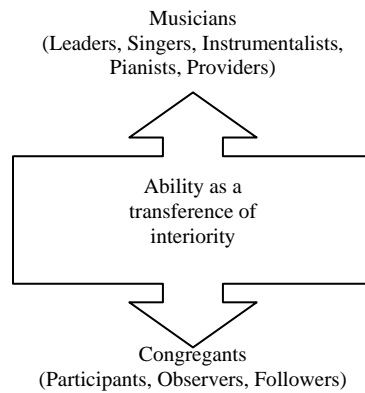
This brings us to question the relationship between ability and empowerment. As individuals (musicians and non-musicians) participate in the diverse musical occasions which the Sunday ritual offers, relationships between members of the group are established. These relationships may be as simplistic as the difference between leader and musicians, or followers and non-musicians. This is primary based on the distinction between music producers and musical participants (Figure 37, below).

Figure 37. Relationship between Musicians and Congregants



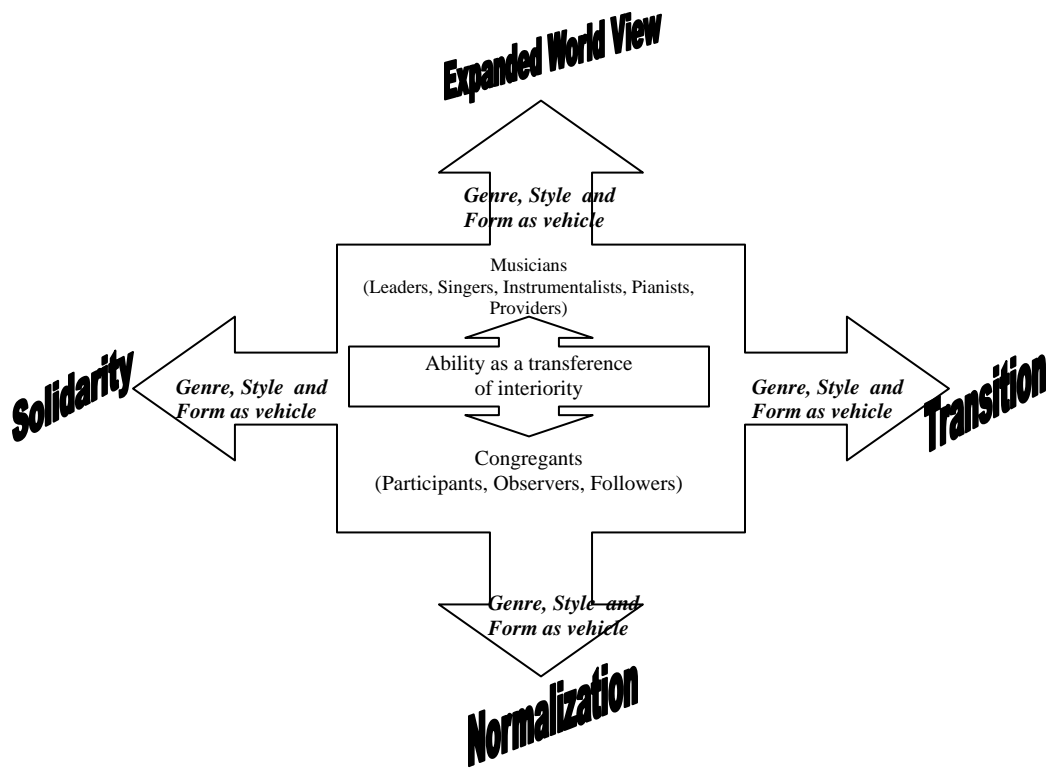
Ability is valued on a level of interiority as leaders are identified as those persons who possess the ability to externalize through musical means the internal attributes specific to their own journeys of self-awareness. This increases the basic aesthetics of music-making to include the internal negotiations of individual musicians. This ability serves as a vehicle as it ultimately is transferable to other musicians and non-musicians through their varied and diverse participation in the same musical occasion (Figure 38, below).

Figure 38. Ability as a transference of interiority.



Lastly, genre itself provides for a vehicle of self-awareness as it serves to aid in the transition from one world view to another. In this case, musical empowerment is one which effects the interpretations of the participants, each in their own world of understanding, to experience an empowerment which takes them beyond the borders of their own self-awareness and that of the community (Figure 39, below).

Figure 39. Role of Genre and Form in empowering growing self awareness.



Ultimately, powerful performances are an exercise of agency over resources and planning (Lipman-Blumen). Foresight maintains that the power to organize and handle symbols in performance allows for a reinforcement of key values in the community. This recognizes the key role of the one possessing these skills. This power endows the performer with the ability to understand symbols and to emit and control their uses. The abilities endow a consistent set of readiness. Thus, to speak of one as *having power* we need to conceive of the agent as being in a certain state, being an agent of power as well as performing a certain agency worthy of powerfulness. The condition of the agent exercising his/her ability to perform is displayed in long-term or short-term capacities

(Harre and Secord, 1972: 246-247). In other words, through patterned and repeated acts as well as occasional and spontaneous acts assuming of these power roles, the performances will over time shape a world view which is grounded in individual agency, the transference of the transitions which describe it, and transform them into a vehicle for greater community self-awareness. The result of this may be a newly emerged power roles which define or support already existing authority structures.

By looking at musical performances in this light we may infer that 1) to perform musically is to assume a role of power which serves as a possession of resources for to embody the performance of music is an exercise of agency. These resources may well be musical ability itself but must also include the ability of translation. 2) Regardless of long- or short-term access to certain musical performance roles, otherwise less accessible, powerfulness may be achieved by exercising musical leadership. Here leadership is a subjective term as it may sometimes reflect one's role in the community or may even be the leadership established through participation in particular genre or form which has the ability to enact transformation. 3) The performance of musical roles of leadership may with time upset pre-existing authority structures to the point where new power roles may become temporarily or quasi-temporarily juxtaposed. This is particularly important in the case of normalization where music plays an integral part in the establishing of a normative stance for both musicians and participants. 4) The manipulation and emission of music as ritual symbol can serve as a constituting agent of power. The abilities and skills associated with musical performance establish the performer first as an individual and second as a technician. The abilities which are of greatest efficacy in the ultimate

transformation of the community rest in aesthetics of personhood more than they do in the musical properties. In the cases of genre, style and form, the ability to reproduce critical occasions of transformation are repeatable, however, their relationship to the feelings, investments, and self-awareness are intersubjective, depending on the locality of the individuals who participate in them.

The inferences stated presume an expectation of skill necessary for expected results of performance. The musical act may be an act of agency; however, a shift in power roles will occur often by the necessity for a more suitable agent. The skill to perform a music role may be passed from one faction to another thus prioritizing the skill requirement over the appropriate authoritative agent. So quality is less important in comparison to the outcomes of license, freedom, and the invitation to transformation. When this occurs, the possession of power in musical performance shifts from one agent to another often interchanging authority. The attributes which make up the transitional qualities of the “musician” become shared priorities as “non-musicians” share in the process. Skill refers to both the sound qualities and the personal qualities associated with the music making process.

This assessment contradicts what Leonardo Doob describes as the skill necessary for the performance of power stating that if musical skill is lacking, often desired power may not be achievable.

Participants may be highly motivated to attain power, his potential followers may believe that the time is ripe for a new leader, and he himself may be self-confident. Even so, he may fail to achieve his objective because he lacks the necessary skill...The search for attributes associated with the skills of participants as they interact (Doob, 1983: 104).

Musical leadership may depend greatly on the possession of the skills necessary to perform. However, in MCC NOVA musics, skill is an expanded reality as it includes both the personal and social agency necessary to translate the experience of becoming to the community. In fact, the opportunity to perform in a power role may evoke a sense of empowerment stretching beyond a self-possessed power achieved through command over musical technologies. In fact in MCC NOVA situations, this musical aesthetic includes the individual's powers of translation.

### **Identity as an ontological reality in performance**

The different types of empowerment which the musical and ritual experience afford MCC members are rooted in a desire to grow more deeply in self awareness. This individual self awareness is transferable to the community as it attempts to construct for itself an identity. In a paper presented at the ICTM meeting at The University of Maryland sponsored by the Music and Gender Study Group entitled "Gender and the Musics of Death" (1996), Pirko Moisala drew her own inferences about music's role in this process and asserts that the musical experience is an ontological environment where participation and creation are critical to the translation of self identity. She focuses on five ontological stances in music and gender which though primarily concentrate on music performance, can be applied to ritual activity as well.

“Music, like language is a primary modeling system based on the presumption of and has similarities to language in that it is a direct product of the development of human understanding”. The communicative properties may be basic and rooted in musical aesthetics which focus on the properties of music. In an expanded expectation of what

these aesthetics are we have included the possibility that music makers possess a quality of communication perfunctory to the musical product. This is a condition we have found is based in the ontological state of being LBGTQ. Creativity, community consciousness, tolerance, acceptance, inclusion and the many other attributes of LBGTQ lifestyle are the dominant themes in this condition. These become in themselves systems of communication as they are translated into the construction and practice of religious ritual experiences. They affect meaning of its musical forms, the expectations associated with regards to musicians and their abilities, and ultimately the value of music as a whole. Though seemingly disjointed and often times contradictory on the planes of tradition and ideology, the continuity and discontinuity evidenced in different musical styles, genres, and leadership styles provides for a communication which is intrinsic to the diversity found in the LBGTQ community. The discourses which become apparent when they are considered side by side create a modeling system which depicts the social condition of the community.

“Music is a bodily art and recognizes that movement and dance are critical to the potential of music-making.” In this stance the construction of gender is directly relative to the negotiations and reinforcements that occur through normative and newly expressed movements of the human body. The musical process at MCC NOVA is one which allows for physicality and emotion but does not always realize it. This follows suit with what has already been stated about the value of ability. While this is the case, the transition from individual self-awareness to the construction of community identity is linked with the sexual side of the identity question in MCC NOVA community life. Bodily expression,

clapping, guitar playing, drumming, and singing are fueled by a priority for greater self awareness which is connected musically. This effects an interpretation of movement on two levels. First, it reinterprets movement to be more than just an integrated part of the musical element. Rather it focuses on the role movement plays in self-awareness for a community whose identity is partially grounded in sexual politics. Again, the aesthetics of movement, clapping in time, mastering the drum, embellishment on the guitar are subsequent to the symbolic representation these acts represent to the process of becoming. Second, in themselves they are an extension of the transcendent process as they become symbols and signs of authenticity contributing to a greater system of meaning associated with a world view beyond the abilities of the individual performing them. Skills and abilities are not precursors to authentic performance. This is due to their relationship to establishing ritual and musical repertoire. The repertoire is the precondition which values such actions as vehicles to greater self exposition.

“Music is not made for auto-communicative purposes. It has the power to manipulate an act for political purposes.” In recognizing alteration as a creative and innate act to the liturgical experience, one can not underestimate the political aspects of such manipulations of tradition. The translations of descriptions of “God” for instance into gender neutral descriptions carries with it a shift in polity. It expresses the participant’s ability and willingness to create a pan-theism which is self actuated. In the case of musical occasions, the inclusion of musics of other world views, adopting or abandoning certain genres and forms, and the overall result of processing empowerment provides for a political arena which manipulates hegemonies and establishes new ones.



“Music is a ‘time out’ from the ordinary, allowing for a wider range of gender performances that are not normally found within social everydayness.” We have shown above how the liturgical experience is in itself a transformation process where the very ritual occasions promote structural and anti-structural elements into the worship experience. The ritual experience provides for a transition from the greater world into a world of MCC where elements of performance are experienced within a system of belief which tests mainstream hegemonies. Within this experience, the ritual and musical performances have the ability to describe desirous outcomes as well as already established beliefs. The liturgical arena *in toto*, as well as the elements and rites which make it up, are an opportunity to experience one’s own self-awareness outside of the confines of the greater world which hold for the LBGTQ members limits and exclusion. This ontological stance is one which will be viewed in more detail in the next section of the paper.

“Music has the ability to alter consciousness and the strata of mind.” Elemental musical aesthetics, those ascribing to feeling and emotion or through more expanded aesthetics which include the abilities of members to translate their own internal transformation experiences to the entire community are conscious altering actions. They rely on the “other” as evidenced in musical style, comportment, license, genre, and form. In combination they create a collage of the realities which LBGTQ members embody. Ultimately, through the sifting and sorting through the various aesthetics and through the process of experiencing them concomitantly, consciousness is altered and new awarenesses about one’s own identity and the identity of the group are discovered.

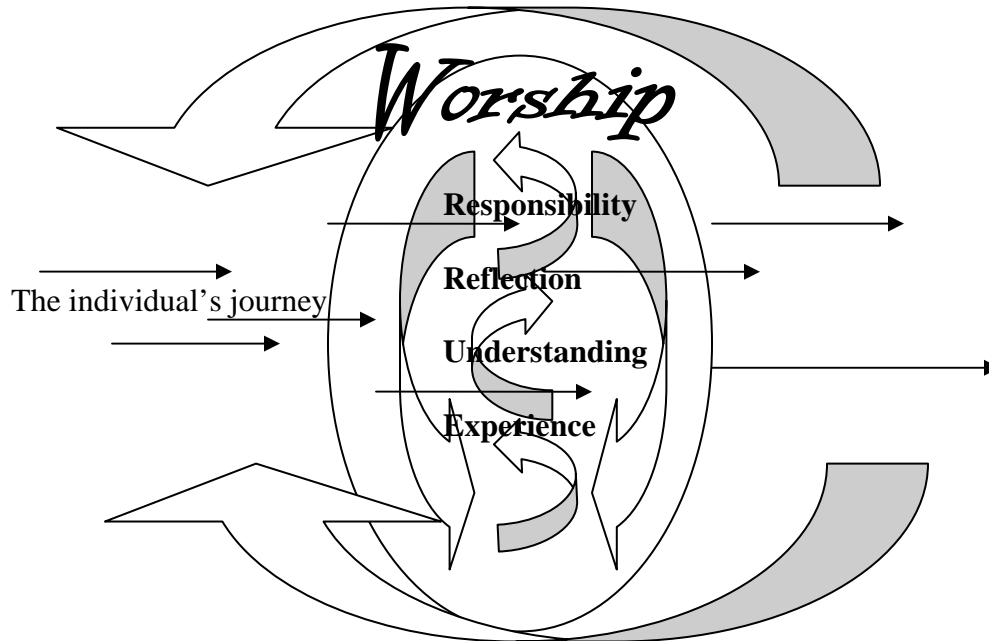
### **Continuity and discontinuity as a description of perpetual liminality**

Acts of discontinuity and continuity serve as similar symbolic representations of the values of MCC NOVA. This is to say that irrespective of the aesthetics themselves, whether considerably hegemonic or more dynamically contrived, it is the interplay of these symbolic representations which act to construct an identity grounded in individuality and corporate acceptance. They provide for a symbolic representation of what it means to be in a state of constant becoming. The ritual components are not only in constant flux, considering more and more their impact as descriptors of the community's awareness, but the individuals themselves are in flux as they interpret them and place value on them. Through their own agency they are constantly bombarded with the continuities and discontinuities embodied in its symbols.

This stated, we can say that ritual is symbolically parallel to the transcendental paradox stated earlier (Lonergan), and the act of ritualizing is a process of continual self-awareness and flux. The act of becoming is exercised and symbolized in the journey from the subject's world (self constructed through historical experiences) to a complex and diverse world of MCC (embodied in the translations embedded in its ritual) expanding one's potentiality through its symbolic diversity to expand the subject's world. The discourses which occur as one attends, participates, and retreats to a previously experienced world enact a communal sharing of identity. The ritual experience as a whole is efficacious in its role to bring the self awareness of the individual to the common place of the community and thus retracts back into a world where the individual is therefore changed. The patterned and repeated quality of Sunday worship allows the individual to

repeat, evaluate, and emerge again in a constant exchange of personal and communal dialogue (Figure 40, below).

Figure 40. A symbolic process of personal transformation through worship.



The worship environment becomes a symbolic arena where levels of different consciousness are at play and the individual comes in contact with continuity and discontinuity. Regardless if the ritual components are oppositional in relation to the world of the individual or to the world of a greater church environment, they represent an interplay of consciousness about what it means to be Christian, LGBTQ, and social. It is also processual as the experience is patterned and repeatable. This process is explained by Victor Turner who explains that

For individuals and groups, social life is a type of dialectical process that involves successive experiences of high and low, *communitas* and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality...In such a process the opposites, as it were, constitute one another and are

mutually indispensable. In other words, each individual's life experience contains alternating exposure to structure and *communitas*, and to states and transitions (V. Turner 1969: 97).

Turner's model of *communitas* is central for this analysis on many levels. Within the search for a homogenized recognition of value and meaning within community the concept of *communitas* allows for the possibility that community meaning operates through symbols and rituals in flux. In other words, signs and vocabularies which identify a world of meaning (be it the subject's world or the world of the community, using Lonergan's terminology) are in themselves transitional as their meaning supplies a dynamic tension between the individual and the community in which he or she is in dialogue. The transition from signifiers of what it means to understand one's beliefs requires an authentication or unauthentication process before they can be understood in light of the community's set of meanings.

This approach allows for the central elements of ritual which include possible stresses and negotiations to be in themselves symbolic representations of what it means to be in *communitas* with a community. We have seen this in the work of Jan Fairley and performances of ¡Karaxu! where the Chilean environmental landscape, its social and political realities and the realities of British audiences, congeal in a representation of the tensions and cohesions between Chilean and British relationships (Chapter 3, p. 220). In this work, the tension and cohesion is similar as individuals travel from the world of a society riddled with its inconsistent tendencies with respect LBGQT individuals, to a world of MCC where it is normalized and returned to a world whose landscape is changed by the rituals themselves. The entire process embodies the LBGQT condition

which is one of stress, negotiation, and tolerance as well as freedom, greater self awareness, and license. Anthony Gittins writes:

Transition, tension and other kinds of stress may produce *communitas*, a "modality of social relatedness" identified by Turner (1973: 216), in "simplified and homogenized social structures," and characteristic of liminal times when one is surrounded by equals and friends. For Turner, liminality is the "mid-point of transition in a status-sequence between two positions" (V. Turner 1972: 398); for me it provides a helpful way of understanding some of the processes involved in situations of pain and alienation as experienced in other simplified, homogenized social structures, namely religious communities. *Communitas*, a spontaneously generated relationship between leveled and equal people is a social response, which is therefore as structured as it is spontaneous. It should be available to people in need; that is their perception. *Communitas* arises in liminality and out of stress, transition, or certain forms of suffering, and as such can be seen as the creative product of suffering. But liminality does not always produce healing *communitas*, even in tribal rites of passage. Some isolation is expected, as a proving-ground; some personal embracing of pain is demanded as a sign of resilience. And in our own experience too, liminality does not always point to wholeness, but may precede disintegration, in a society which tries to externalize, objectify, keep at arm's length, institutionalize, remove, or otherwise disavow itself of the tediousness of other people's traumas. The crucial determiners of the outcome of suffering and stress in contemporary religious life seem to be not so much the degree of support, and not so much the progress of disintegration (emotional, spiritual) as the prospects for reintegration (social, personal) (Gittins, 1987: 317-330).

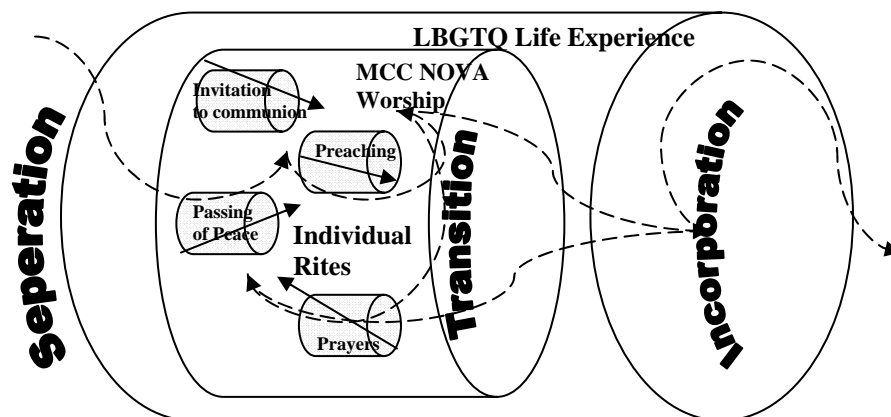
The marginalism which LBGTQ individual's experience in a greater world evidenced by their religious, social, and sexual histories is one which is brought to the ritual arena. While the MCC rituals offer a sort of resolution to these tensions, it also symbolizes them in a series of contexts. First is the larger context of entering into the process of separation from the world of society into a world of acceptance. Striving to disassociate with former self and trying something new is a hallmark of the process. Self awareness is transient as the perception of self in the greater societal context is realigned to a self as conjured in the MCC context. MCC ritual is an experience of transition in itself as previously designed religious priorities are reassessed and realigned with MCC priorities. Separation from previously conceived religiosity leads one into a system of liminal experiences (some of which are unknown) with the intent to establish a known resolution to the inconsistencies between being LBGTQ and being religious. The

transition which this represents is one which infuses both the experiences and the individuals themselves with a sense of incorporation resulting in a new religious context which is attentive to the desires and priorities of LBGTQ existence as well as the historical and communal identity required by worshipping Christians. Arnold Van Gennep explains:

For groups as well as individuals, life itself means to separate and to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and to be reborn. It is to act and to cease, to wait and rest, and then to begin acting again, but in a different way. And there are always new thresholds to cross: the thresholds of summer and winter, of a season or a year, of a month or a night; the thresholds of birth, adolescence, maturity and old age; the threshold of death and that of the afterlife—for those who believe in it (Van Gennep, 1960:189-190).

This translational process is multileveled and unending. It occurs on the level of human existence as the LBGTQ individual travels through life in search for greater meaning and self understanding. It occurs on a ritual macro-level as the individual enters into the process ritualizing within the MCC context exemplified in the first preaching example, *Dare We Celebrate?* on page 69. And it occurs in the micro occurrences of rite embedded in the ritual as seen in the rites themselves (Figure 41, below).

Figure 41. Modes of Liminal Experience in the construction of a *gender-religiosity*.



The ritual acts themselves serve as a symbolic means for *communitas* and the liminal state to be performed. While on the one hand, the content established as meaningful is relative to the outcome of shaping a community of belief, the process of negotiating on the personal and corporate level supersedes the actual aesthetics associated with the ritual acts as far as meaning is concerned. This explains why certain historic hegemonies are less threatening to a new consciousness. Their substance is only partially relative to the process itself. This explains why seeming hegemonic elements in the macro-structure Sunday worship like Gathering-oration-communion-sending do not threaten other more anti-structural elements evidenced in new music styles, embraces, communion practices. They contribute unilaterally to a process of transformation which at times highlights the entire ritual liminal and at other times highlights the liminal qualities of a particular rite (See Figures 33 on page 299; 35 on page 317: and 41 on page 345).

Vocabularies and signs are the vehicles for establishing authenticity which is ultimately developed into symbols and systems. Chosen words, musical sounds, biblical interpretations, and objects supply a vocabulary for the dialogue to occur through a transcendental process. These are used to make connections between deeper realities of participant's ontological state which may be the awareness of changing personal awareness, the attributes that are unique to a *gender-religious* stance, or those peculiarities embedded in one's particular beliefs and individual philosophies.

Transcendentally, the process points to the act of becoming as persons negotiate their own placement amidst the sum of meanings represented in the community. In fact

certain ritual elements are fashioned to allow for this process to occur more freely (Figure 42, below).

#### Figure 42. Invitation to the Table

Pastor: It's my joy and privilege to remind you that the communion we celebrate here at Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia is, as it is in MCC's around the world, an open communion. That means you don't need to be a member of this or any church, nor do you need to come believing any particular thing about what happens as we celebrate the sacrament together. Whoever you are, wherever you've been, wherever you are right now at this moment of your spiritual journey, you are welcome at God's table.

In just a moment the servers and holders will come forward and the usher's will begin to release you by row. We invite you to come forward alone or with friends/family, take a piece of bread, dip it in the cup and eat it before moving on to one of the people who will share with you a brief prayer of blessing.

These are the gifts of God ... for you, the very much beloved people of God. Please come.

Meaning for the individual is not presentational. It is not simply supplied but is offered in ways where individual involvement can dictate its efficacy. Categorically, this approach provides for an establishment of meanings as the combination of ritual components create a platform of reflection which includes both structural and anti-structural elements. The different ritual elements serve as different acts of meaning (Lonergan). What may be initially potential or formal, after perception may become more full or instrumental.

#### **Example: The public face of internal priorities: The Prayers**

The prayers of the community, like other rites, are a traditional hegemony. Their performance differs from other mainstream environments where prayer is offered in more supplicative and intercessory ways. At MCC NOVA, the prayers are offered from the community through a member leader. Members are invited during the week to notate prayers in a book which is used by the leader to improvisationally shape the words of the



people into public utterances. They represent the personal and corporate priorities of the community from its source—the individual. Intentions are multiple as individuals offer prayer for sick loved ones often reflected in the health struggles of LGBTQ persons with AIDS, cancer, and addictions, pets in need or lost, the UFMCC congregation as it fights for equality amidst other churches, socially charged issues like gay marriage and financial rights, and a multitude of other topics.

As the rite begins, music plays a freeform role as the pianist improvises on the musical response to the prayers. The leader performs the prayers irrespective of the musical accompaniment and centers the group through introduction to the prayers and at an appropriate time defined by pauses in the prayers and a reinforcement of the cadence of the motif calls for a corporate response by the congregation (See Figure 43, below).

Figure 43. Final stanza of *Spirit of the Living God*, by Daniel Iverson, NCH#283

The musical score for the final stanza of "Spirit of the Living God" is presented in two staves. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "Spir - it of the liv - ing God, fall a - fresh on me." The piano accompaniment consists of chords: F, Gm, D, Gm, F, Dm, C7, F.

The example is an interplay between leadership, individual awarenesses, and corporate performance. As the leader performs the litany of prayer he/she improvises on the public voice as he/she negotiates grammar, appropriateness, and intent in the haphazard array of individually written prayers. Leadership is defined here as an empowerment by the community as content of the performance takes on a specifically individualized

translation. The awarenesses of individuals who contribute to the prayer list are performed and disseminated as his/her own hopes and dreams for a brighter future are vocalized. This in essence shows the real awareness of the community without machination by any specific polity (MCC or otherwise). The individual awarenesses of the members is made known in a public display and owned in a corporate manner by the endorsement of the community by its corporate singing of the acclamation. Throughout the process, improvisation and spontaneity plays an important part in the translation of individual transformation as the “I” of interpretation become a “we” of belief. The musical leadership (pianist), the prayer leader, and the congregation act as an ensemble based in a communication which explains the priority of the community to recognize the individual’s contribution to corporate belief, ritualized and disseminated. Individual belief becomes corporate performance amidst musical and ritual aesthetics (Figure 44, p.350).

Figure 44. The performance pattern of the Prayers of the Community.

---Prayer---

F Dm C7 F

fall a-fresh on me.

F Gm D Gm F Dm C7 F

Spir - it of the liv - ing God, fall a-fresh on me.

----Prayer----

--- *improvisation*---- (musical call)

----corporate singing---

*improvisation*

//

F Dm C7 F

fall a-fresh on me.

F Gm D Gm F Dm C7 F

Spir - it of the liv - ing God, fall a-fresh on me. ---Prayer--- *etc.*

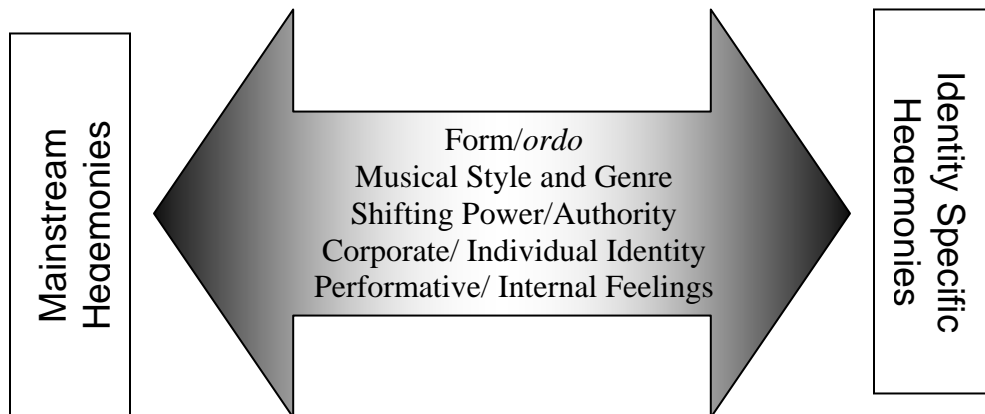
(musical call)

---corporate singing---

*improvisation, etc.*

The ultimate outcome in all of the examples offered is recognition of one's authenticity in light of the community. This is a concomitant process where acts of meaning take on functional characteristics in their ability to help one negotiate their own authenticity and unauthenticity. The vocabularies and signs become more established symbols and systems of a genuine personal investment in the systems of belief embodied in the MCC NOVA community. Essentially, self meaning is translated into corporate meaning. Therefore, symbols like bread, song, embrace, and form are at any one time signifiers of normality, feeling, or social acceptance respectively. As to what they culminate in their existence side by side, they supply a process which ultimately points to systems of belief embodied in acts which are sometimes formal, full, instrumental, or potential (Figure 45, below).

Figure 45. Elemental discourses of ritual providing continuity and discontinuity with mainstream and identity specific hegemonies.



### **Example: Crossing the threshold: “Interdependence Day”**

In a final example from the July 4, 2004 MCC NOVA we see how society, belief, and authentication interplay and congeal in the rituals of this community. Amidst the exterior struggles of the LGBTQ community in its dealing with social strife, political activism, and brokenness, the MCC experience is a place where individuals strive towards authentication. It is a blending of an exterior world and an interior realm of justification represented in its ritual; where the interpretation of this struggle is contextualized into a religious realm where ethnic division, political divisiveness, and marginalization are collapsed into an opportunity for reassessment and the reordering of social structure.

#### *Interdependence Day*<sup>40</sup>

*Would you please pray with me?*

*God of Love and Peace, as we turn to you in this time of reflection, we pray that you would set us free to authentically encounter your Spirit of wisdom and truth. Give us ears to hear all that you might speak to us this day, through your words both ancient and living. Break through every barrier that would separate us from you and from one another, and help us know you more fully. In your many names, we pray. Amen.*

I want to begin this morning by taking just a moment to acknowledge those of you from this community who participated in the Stand Up for Equality demonstration this week. If you were present for the rally on Wednesday night, would you raise your hands? Thank you. Thank you for participating in that important event and for letting your voices be heard and your faces be seen as a part of the crowd of over 1,000 people who gathered to protest and mourn the implementation of HB 751.

Now, I don't know about you, but I find it rather ironic to be celebrating Independence Day today, just four days after that demonstration. I find it ironic because the document whose adoption we celebrate on this national holiday (the Declaration of Independence) begins with a broad declaration of rights for all people, whom it claims are created equal (a beautiful thing) ... and yet, the text of another, quite different document (HB 751) just became law in *our* state that could **take away** some of the basic rights of certain people – namely, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, whom we can now assume aren't a part of the “all” who are created equal.

And, I don't know, I just don't feel as if I can really stand here on this land, as my full self, and celebrate some of the values and ideals that I've heard lie at the heart of our nation's celebrations today. Honestly, it feels a bit false and contrived to me. And as I've been trying to wrestle with and process that feeling, which has been gnawing on me this week, I've come to realize it's really about much, much more than this

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<sup>40</sup> Unpublished Sermon by Rev. Kharma Amos, pastor, MCC NOVA (7-4-04).

particular example of irony and tension. Because, in the same way that it's ironic for me to stand on the puzzle piece called Virginia and celebrate equality within the bigger picture of the entire U.S.; it's also ironic to stand in the puzzle piece called United States of America and celebrate such things as independence and liberty and justice for all within the still bigger picture of the World, in which there are so many places where these are not realities of life. I understand well the sentiments expressed by Barbara Brown Taylor in our contemporary reading ... that feeling of relief when looking at a **fragmented** picture of the world that (whew) our section is relatively OK ... and the startling realization that if we feel that way, relieved, our focus has been too narrow ... because our section **really** is the whole thing. For we are not ultimately just Fairfax-tonians (is that proper?), Virginians, or even Americans, but rather earthlings – earthcreatures – global citizens.

And that tension that exists between our small and our large identities – for example, between our identity as individuals with rights on the one hand, and our corporate identity as a people whose rights can only be secured together, on the other – is a tension about which we should rightly spend a good deal of time reflecting. And I can't think of a better day than today to do so together.

You know, one of the things I most value about being a part of a community of faith – is that I don't have to figure out these complex issues on my own. Rather, we have the benefit *not only of having* one another with whom to process, to pray, to seek the Spirit's guidance ... *but also of having* the heritage of our faith — a living faith, which is influenced by a long and rich history of other faithful people and communities striving to understand and make sense of the very same tensions and issues. Much of what we now call the Bible serves as something of an anthology of that history.

Paul, who either wrote or got credit for writing a good chunk of the New Testament, focused a lot of energy on **this particular** issue. He engaged in a number of dialogues with people about the tension and the movement between being independent and being interdependent — between being individual people of faith and being members of one another as the global Body of Christ. And, you know, he sometimes even gave some pretty darned good advice about how to make sense of these aspects of being human, which seem to be in opposition, but which can, in actuality, be quite complementary. The ancient reading for today is one source of that advice.

Now, we began reading this particular letter to the churches in the region of Galatia last week, and you may recall that the occasion upon which Paul penned this angry epistle was one in which there was a great deal of tension and infighting among the Galatian community. After Paul had helped establish these churches and had moved on with his apostolic mission elsewhere, some other missionaries had entered the community preaching a different sort of gospel than Paul's message of freedom in Christ ... one that had interjected the greatly divisive question of just which members of the community could rightly be considered "true" Christians, the real deal. The missionaries insisted that only those who continued to follow the Jewish law were **truly** faithful, while those who did not were somehow less than faithful – if not **unfaithful** altogether. As you might well imagine, this set up the "our way is better than your way" dynamic that, unfortunately, still plays itself out in so many contexts in both church and society today. You're familiar with it, right? Right. It often appears as the not-so-subtle message that "our way is the only right way."

Well, in the portion of the text just prior to this morning's reading, Paul had finished blasting the missionaries for assuming that arrogant posture, and had delivered "the most impassioned defense anywhere in Scripture of the sufficiency of the Spirit [vs. the law] to guide the community of faith" (Hays). As we discussed last week, he believed that living in and being guided by the Spirit was the only way these churches could ever hope to maintain their community of faith against those who threatened to tear it apart.

And in the final verses of the letter, some of which we heard read, he winds down by giving them a few parting examples of what it might look like if they succeed. Quite notably, he does so in such a way that takes very seriously the tension in which he knows the community does and likely always will exist. In

fact, some of the things he says are in such tension they seem to contradict one another altogether. For example, he says “bear one another’s burdens for in so doing you fulfill the law of Christ.” Then in the next breath, he says, “everyone must carry their own burden.” Huh? Well, which is it? The answer, I think, is both. For Paul, the truth and wisdom of the Spirit exists somewhere in the interplay between individual responsibility *and* communal responsibility ... between being sure we take care of ourselves, *and* making sure we take care of one another. He also tells the members of the community that they need to be both mutually supportive (coming together to bear one another’s burdens) and mutually accountable (helping, in a spirit of gentleness, to point out one another’s transgressions and restore one another to right relationship). He concludes, “Whenever we have the opportunity, let us work for the good of **all** ... and especially of those within the family of faith.”

You know, it boggles my mind just a little bit when I try to imagine what it must have been like for Paul to try and get across such a complicated – and yet vitally important – message, with such a tight economy of words. This really is spiritually deep and meaningful stuff, when you think about it ... and as essential as it was for the Galatian Christians to get it in order to survive as a family of faith ... so it is essential for us to get it if we are to be able to survive as people in all sorts of relationships — with lovers, with friends, with our faith community, with neighbors in our regions and nations, and with the human family around the world.

You see, the point Paul is trying desperately to make ... is one that really matters ... or at least, I think, it should matter to us ...

At the demonstration on Wednesday night, one of the speakers said something about this very topic that was so powerful I leaned over to Kala and said, “Help me remember this ... this is important ... this is exactly what Paul was talking about ...” and she said “Hush, if you want me to help you remember, I need to hear her.” <*She had a point.*> The speaker was Sophie Hoffman, the then president of Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington. She was quoting the great Jewish scholar Rabbi Hillel, who said, “If I am not for myself, then who will be? But if I’m only for myself, then what am I?”

This is one of the most famous quotations of Rabbi Hillel, and I believe I had heard it several times before ... but standing there this week, the wisdom of it really sunk in for me. “*If I am not for myself, then who will be for me?*” **Right** ... which is exactly why we were standing there saying to the government of VA that it is not OK for them to do this to us ... to take away our rights to enter into basic contracts with one another in order to protect our loving relationships. That’s why it was so important for us to take responsibility to lift our own voices and also to carry the burden of others for whom such public demonstration was still too risky.

“*But if I’m only for myself, then what am I?*” **Right** again – and that is the necessary second part of the equation ... which points exactly to what always lurks at the back of my mind as a danger for us if our own issues are our only issues. I truly believe that there will be a day when we won’t need to worry about GLBT rights in this country ... even in Virginia ... but, I really hope that we will not stop there, when we ourselves have gained security. I really hope we will not be like others have sometimes been when they have given up the struggle for universal equality once they make it into the “in” group. And even before that day of equality arrives for queers, I hope we will not be so focused on ourselves that we cannot also embrace the struggles of people unlike us who need our help, in so many different ways, both here and around the world.

I also have to say that this second part of Hillel’s question – “If I am only for myself, then what am I?” – points to another likely source of my Independence Day discomfort ... illustrated by some of the nationalism present in this country, which is made evident when the phrase “God Bless America” is followed by the unspoken yet strongly implied words, “and nobody else.” If we are ever content to sit idly by and celebrate our progress while other parts of our world cry out for justice, what are we, indeed? The same is true if we assume the arrogant stance of those who believe our way of doing things is the best or

only way to do them ... and we are not open to the voices of others who point out our transgressions — we can hope, in the spirit of gentleness Paul mentions.

It seems to me that the basic message that both Paul and Rabbi Hillel want us to understand is that the only way we can be faithful and responsible as individuals, is if we make that cognitive leap that understands our interconnectedness with one another as a vital aspect of our individuality. And I think this may well be the enduring message that people of faith are still called to bring into situations when it is forgotten.

South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu talks about this in a helpful way by explaining something indigenous to his own culture. He says, “Africans believe in something that is difficult to render in English. We call it *ubuntu*, *botho*. It means the essence of being human. You know when it is there and when it is absent. It speaks about humaneness, gentleness, hospitality, putting yourself out on behalf of others, being vulnerable. It embraces compassion and toughness. It recognizes that my humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together ... We are made for a delicate network of relationships, of interdependence. We are meant to complement each other. All kinds of things go horribly wrong when we break that fundamental law of our being. Not even the most powerful [person or] nation can be completely self-sufficient”.

I truly believe that these principles of Interdependence and Mutuality – articulated in different ways throughout human history – are core characteristics of what it means to be faithful. In fact, I believe that even or perhaps especially in those moments of tension that exist in our lives when we long to figure out where we *fit* in the grand scheme of things, these are consistent indicators of where the Spirit is leading. And so today, I want to propose a supplement to our secular celebration of Independence Day – and that is a spiritual celebration of Interdependence Day. Let’s take to heart Paul’s invitation, “Whenever we have the opportunity, let us work for the good of all,” and seize this as one such opportunity ... an opportunity to remember that there is a bigger picture into which we all fit ... one that shows us interconnected as a global people whose humanity and whose future are truly wrapped up in one another’s. And let us allow that imaginative act to change the way we interact with the world, as people of faith, not just today, but every day – and in every situation when that spiritual truth needs to be spoken anew.

## **Summary**

This fourth chapter is departure from the confines of method and analysis in the previous two chapters. This is so on several levels. First, it employs phenomenological theory to highlight the more deeply embedded mechanisms of transformation operative in MCC NOVA rituals and music. By its adoption, we reorganize the sociological and ethnomusicological methods by the use of a logic which stresses the transformational character of ritual events rather than basing an analysis solely on their aesthetic expression. Second, by doing so, we create a means by which to consider the ethnographic material as a dynamic entity. In the third chapter we highlighted the musical



aesthetics which led us to this conclusion. Here, a method for analysis is supplied. Third, the transitions of consciousness embedded in the musical and ritual experiences become more clearly stated as their aesthetics are discussed in light of their overall contribution to discourses within the community at large.

Bernard Lonergan's phenomenology is at the theoretical heart of the chapter and his theories about *becoming* illuminate what has already been stated in other chapters with a more detailed orientation to our research question of transformation. Foremost, his theories highlight what has been shown as the division between worlds of experience applicable to both the individual's progress of consciousness and the consciousnesses which emerge from the community's performances. This ontological approach incorporates both human and divine dimensions into one spectrum allowing for a consideration of consciousness as it exists on a multivalent spectrum. It informs a problem which has been prevalent throughout the dissertation—

How does one measure transformation? The theoretical principles of *becoming* do not answer this question; however they do supply us with an approach to considering the more latent aspects of the transformational process.

Firstly, the principle of *becoming* releases us from the confines of considering performance as a sole descriptor in itself. This is to say that it allows us to question the embedded transformational processes that occur within the performative avenues. It highlights that performance is a point in time of the human condition which can safely be presumed as only a synchronic point on a diachronic continuum of awareness both communally and individually. Second, the theory explains how transitions from one

awareness to another are based in a transcendental model that recognizes the developing individual as a factor in establishing meaning about human acts. Here, we can presume that performance describes cognitive shifts (as explained in chapter 3) but cognition is also operative in human performance leading to this transformation.

In both chapters 2 and 3 we considered how meaning, skill, and feelings affect interpretations of performance. In this chapter, these are considered in light of their contribution in describing the process of transformation. The value of meaning in this approach allows for a consideration of the role of the abstractions available to the individual who experiences them. This is a departure on two levels. First, it considers aesthetics as containing some transformative quality which is available to the person or group as they intersect with the positionality of the human condition at a given time. This is counter to an interpretation which focuses on comparisons of meanings in a spectrum of difference and/or similarity with other meanings. Second, the approach recognizes that the transference of meaning, regardless of the source from which it is obtained (i.e. musical style, texts, genres, etc.) is secondary to the insight gathered from the *process* the experiences embody. In other words, musical and ritual aesthetics carry meaning moreover by their processual nature than by the details of their structure. Skill therefore is subjective. It need not be the sole repository of the metalanguages operative in this *process*. This is to say that the aesthetics which are normally relegated to the acquisition of skill are not necessarily dominant in the transmission of meaning. In fact, they are sometimes secondary to realities of shifting consciousnesses which place the aesthetics in an appropriate place for performance to become meaningful. We have seen this many

times as musicians *strive* to create musics which will reflect their own interpretations of identity. The musics may be borrowed, stylized, or even foreign, but these are attributes are secondary to the role they play in establishing a system of reorienting consciousness. Sometimes the musical skills required are available to the musician or “non-musician” and at other times they are not. The point is that meaning rests with other mechanisms (license, freedom, inclusion, and belonging) which are higher level attributes than musical virtuosity and performance expectations and requirements. Feelings about music represent two distinct descriptive markers therefore. First, they are directly related to the performance experience and are grounded in the individual’s perception of the aesthetics from an auditory perspective. Second, though tempered by the auditory spectrum, they also represent the application of sensibilities about musical performances. Here lies the main dynamism of interpretation of music and ritual aesthetics.

The shifting and churning of the human condition within a ritual environment where a multitude of hegemonic and anti-hegemonic experiences are present creates a web of transitions which occur in tandem with each other though not always ascribing to the same group of aesthetics. The spiraling and repeatable transcendental model of experience-understanding-reflection-responsibility encounters a matrix of performances which supply meaning, sometimes met with reception on the part of the individual and at other times not. It is a multilayered experience that can not solely be measured by the interpretation of meanings of the aesthetics themselves. Experiences are therefore hierarchical. They may coincide with any of the individual’s stages of transcendence and therefore may entice differing consequences. In some cases they may simply be potential

having little immediate impact about the interpretation of an experience other than its presence as a performative option. They may be formal affecting understanding about a performance and recognizing its value as ascribing to some other priority in the community. They may be full acts, as Lonergan terms them, affecting judgment about the efficacy of performance in the forms of ownership or appropriateness. Or they may be instrumental enticing responsibility and decision-making for future expectations. The process which these acts inform ultimately explains the stages of negotiation within the individual and more so the role ritual and music play in the transformation process. They are the transitory progression from a single world view to one grounded in the “other”.

The transcendental phenomenon embodies several transitions. First, it instigates a process of decision-making about what experiences are authentic and which are unauthentic to the person. Second, in the transition from the subject’s world and the world of the other (a community of meanings), aesthetic vocabularies are built up and eventually lead to the establishment of systems of belief which incidentally includes both musical and non-musical components. Third, the phenomenon is repeatable. It may be as common as the frequency of ritual participation. It may be only one of many phenomena of conscious transformation which are at times in concert with each other and at other times oppositional.

The transcendental model offers us a way to interpret the *process* of transformation by focusing on the details of its mechanisms rather than striving to elaborate on the aesthetics solely. In other words, we may become overburdened with the analysis of aesthetic values to the point of overlooking the contribution these aesthetics

make to the overall transformational process. Normalization is the hallmark of this perspective as it allows for the researcher to interpret the aesthetics on the level of their ability communicate truths rather than to search for their comparative importance in light of other traditions and historical hegemonies. This is the downfall of questioning the appropriateness of hegemonic forces in the overall experience of performance with the hope of defining authenticity. Authentication of MCC NOVA rituals and musics is understood by intersubjective discourses and not a hegemonic/anti-hegemonic comparison. It relativizes history and simply adopts it and stylizes it for its own purposes. When this axiom is applied, it brings us to a new place of considering the value of meanings *in context* not from the location in which the aesthetics may have originated. The task of relating ritual acts to a human ontology, therefore, is an adoption of a symbolic ontology that values the dialogue which emerges when different aesthetics coexists and counteract with each other.

The discourses which emerge from this approach are latent in that they emerge as products of the transformation process and are not solely dependant on aesthetic meanings which make up the experiences. Authority, power and empowerment, and the expansiveness of a world view become the material from which an ontology is constructed. They are the product of dialogues set into motion by the musical and rituals experiences which express at times both continuity and discontinuity. For the community they embody a constant experience of liminality where the individual (and corporate) journey is subjected to a constant renegotiation which shifts and churns with the dynamic human condition. This is evidenced in the whole of the communal experience and is

located in the micro occurrences (rites and individual musical events), the rituals of MCC itself (worship and other ritualized experiences), and in the entire experience of being a LBGTQ member.

## Chapter 5. Summary and Overall Conclusions

Many colors paint the rainbow, Arching over land and sea.  
Many colors form the fabric of our human tapestry.

God, with joy and hope you made us by a pattern you had planned,  
weaving varied threads together with a skilled and loving hand.

Many peoples bring their treasures as those kings who traveled far,  
Drawn from all earth's scattered places  
Back to Christ, the Morning star.

All may offer gifts to others, And from them receive in turn.  
In the gathering of nations, Help us, God, to teach and learn.

Many faces round the Table wait for Christ, the Risen One,  
For he comes with love to meet us in the loaf, the cup the word.  
All are welcome, none rejected, bound by Christ in unity,  
Naming others, sisters, brothers in a world wide family.

Many voices sing God's praises in a language all their own.  
Tongues confused at Babel's towers now are joined around God's throne.  
Free our hearts of hate and discord till our lives in concert blend.  
"Alleluia! Alleluia!" be our anthem with out end.

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia  
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Be our anthem with out end.

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.  
Be our anthem with out end.  
Alleluia!

(*Many Colors Paint the Rainbow*, Words by Herman G. Stuempfle, Jr. , Music by Roy Hopp, SATB Voices  
divisi and Piano)

### **Defining *gender-religiosity***

The goal of this project has been to survey, through different means and theories, *gender-religiosity* in the ritual life of the Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia. On its most elemental level, *gender-religiosity* is a state where the depiction of religious life, one grounded in worship and performance, is deeply affected by the priorities which associate the perceptions of humanness with its religious outcomes. Ultimately, it is *way* of establishing the relationship between beingness and performance.

In the context of this research the triangulation of LGBTQ priorities, the religious and spiritual beliefs of MCC NOVA members, and the interpretation of meaning as the realities of church and culture come into dialogue has been highlighted. The process changes perceptions on both the individual level and corporate level supplying a matrix of dialogue for the communal body. Throughout the paper I have nurtured this elemental notion and have presented different models, primary examples, and analytical tools to further understand its complexity. Ultimately, a definition of *gender-religiosity* rests within the research as it strives to supply descriptions of the term in light of a series of significance examples which amplify the study of identity and religion.

In this final section I will recapitulate the research in light of its ability in describing the phenomenon of *gender-religiosity* as evidence in MCC NOVA rituals and music. Within the descriptions of the discourses themselves a definition and significance may be achieved.

### **Gender as an operative term in the research**

Gender has been used as an operative term in the research and the *foci* of its definition has been intentionally elusive. This has been to allow for a development of a notion of gender which transcends the normative and popular uses of the term to describe the innate and intricate relationship between human sexuality and performance roles which so often becomes the centerpiece of research in ethnomusicology and other disciplinary traditions. In fact, a progression from the male/female polarity (a first tier of significance) as it informs the normalization and negotiation of gender polarity (a second



tier of significance) to an ultimate understanding of the more critical process of constructing identity (a third tier of significance) supplies helpful information about the human-gender reality on all levels (See Chapter 3, Figure 25, p.234). The research has supplied relative attention to all of the tiers in question with deference to the final tier and its importance to the overall significance of the research question.

**Tension and negotiation in light of liminality.**

The gender equation in the research is one which views the operations and performances of individuals as only subtly and remotely consistent with interpretations of performance events which assign gender priorities. Being *gay* and worshipping *gay* are not always apparent realities and the ritual sensibilities of LBGTQ persons often only supply a trivial relationship between the two as seen performatively. Assumptions about sexual performances are not only a latent reality, but in the research are often unapparent. In fact, the performances themselves may only supply a subtle glimpse into the unique sexual qualities of individuals and the world in which they are attempting to construct for themselves (Chapter 2, p.32).

This said, the musical and ritual acts represent a safe harbor where the work of promoting the community's core beliefs are worked out in light of the ambiguities associated with a gendered stance. The voices of challenge and solidarity which make up this tension and negotiation come from historical and cognitive means which serve as a pretext to experience (as in the interview with JO and JM, Chapter 2, p.33), through more experiential means based in the performances themselves as in rituals which promote a heightened individualized experience in the spiritual process (*Sacred Places*, Chapter 2,

p.47), through the process of reflection on process of music making and its affect on human and social development (InCluesion, Chapter 2, p.62), or in the construction of a world view *via* the LBGTQ condition in light of revelation and commentary on LBGTQ priorities (sermons, Chapter 2, p.69 and Chapter 4, p.352, and “The Three Wise Persons” Chapter 2, p. 84 ).

The aesthetics which play a part in describing the tensions and negotiations which make up these awarenesses are processual in that from a research standpoint, they provide more pertinent information when analyzed as transitory activities. They may contribute to the maintenance of solidarity as in a socialization process (Chapter 2, p.90). They may support an overall liminal state, where on the primary level, values are worked out and are communally evidenced by their motivations (Chapter 2, p.117 ), or on a more significant plane, pointing to the process of individual and communal becoming (Chapter 4, p.255). The interplay of all of these contribute to the importance of the latter as ultimately, and regardless of the position taken or the analytical means employed, tension and negotiation are an indelible characteristic of this community. Ritual and music are liminal states of consciousness exposted in a public arena (Chapter 4, p. 342).

### **Universalizing the sacred realm.**

We had initially seen that through performances of *Sacred Places*, the realm of the sacred was expanded beyond the normative traditional mainstream of the Judeo-Christian *ordo* (Chapter 2, p. 47). This expansion translates into other areas as the research considered an expanded explanation of the function of ritual and music to communicate religious information (Chapter 4, p.307). Musical choices and the

progression of consciousness affect one's own self perception in the work of creating community and fostering a world of inclusion and acceptance (Chapter 2, p.62). Furthermore it includes a translation from hegemonies found in the Christian *ordo* to a perception of its appropriateness for a MCC NOVA ritual environment (Chapter 2, pp. 56 and 57). Expansiveness of the ritual elements to include non-Christian attributes provides for a world view which takes the individual from his/her own interior negotiation of self (Chapter 2, p.30) to an experience of socialization and conversion (Chapter 2, p.90), prompted by experiences of the sacred found in the everyday and religious experiences of ritual and music (Chapter 4, p. 266), to a realization that the world of the individual is not only within this newly fashioned existence but is wholly in conversation with it (Chapter 4, p.274). Ultimately this process recognizes the sacred "world" of existence as a culmination of who the individual *is* as who God (or the sacred) *is* rooted in a perception affected by one's experience of becoming.

Sacred history is relative as it presumes the historical traditions in light of its efficacy to continue the process of revelation handed down through ritualizers and clarifies the identity of living individuals as they continue the shape responsible reactions to it through the acts of establishing meaning (Chapter 2, pp. 56 and 57; Chapter 4, Figure 30, p287). From the ritual and musical standpoint, experience, understanding, reflection, and responsibility create for the individual a platform for supplying meaning to the very tangible objects they come into contact with. It provides a method for questioning and an ultimate lifestyle which incorporates and authenticates interiority with

public experiences through a culmination of the sacred episodes of life (Chapter 4, Figure 32, p.292).

**Dialogue between belief and performance.**

Recognizing that transition and negotiation are core aspects of this *gender-religiosity* begs the question of the establishment of performative values. At times, ritual and musical performances are guided by the values which the community has promoted as germane to the process of constructing this *gender-religiosity*. This has been shown in the alterations of language and musical/ritual structures which explain the dialogue between traditional hegemonies and newly fashioned performance events (Chapter 3, p. 154), as an extension of the community's core values system and its application to performance styles, and even as a prerequisite for engendering a God likened to humans, freed from preconceived notions of sexual assignment. In all these cases *belief informs performance*.

Performance transversely affects belief in its ability to shift individual and local realities to promote a religious stance which supports a *gender-religiosity*. This operation may supply newfound perceptions about ritual expectations creating an altered consciousness about one's interactions with others and the sensitivities involved with being within a community of meaning (Chapter 2, p. 33). It may, through the very performance of musical and ritual events, alter one's expectations about the structure of community. It may change perceptions about the ritual content or its meaning and its significance to the community at large as evidenced by the aesthetic realities of certain ritual/musical events. Performance in itself may provide fuel for the negotiation process

as individuals are challenged to reevaluate their own previously conceived expectations of what it means to be an individual, the communal consequences, and the tensions and negotiations performance presents for the individual . In this light *performance informs belief*.

In essence all of these contribute to the process of becoming more humanly authentic as meaning of the prerequisites of performance are established and ultimately challenged. They question the very nature of meaning and provide for the researcher a problem in attempting to establish which meanings are critical to the journey of consciousness and are navigable through the ritual process. Performance supplies the method as the “subject’s world”, a world built on both the preconceptions about community and the value assigned to it through a self-conscious evaluation of one’s individualism, and “the world” of the community, a world descriptive of MCC evidenced in its performances congeal and commence dialogue. This dialogue is where the authenticities and unauthenticities are worked out through performance (vocabularies, signs, symbols, and systems) and the individual transcends his/her own consciousness and enters into the consciousness of the group (Chapter 4, p. 292).

### **Meaning of theological content**

Theological content in performance has been considered in a number of ways and for the most part its relevance depends on what has already been described above. The theology of a *gender-religiosity* is ultimately constructed by evidence of God’s revelation through actions. For this reason, though it has not been explicated specifically, the actions of MCC NOVA rituals and the LBGTQ priorities which are in constant dialogue with

them offer in themselves the content of a theological analysis. We may first consider that a theology is ultimately concerned with the description of God: God's ways of acting and the perceptions about God's being as disclosed through revelation. In numerous examples in the paper, God is expressed in ways which are relevant to the *gender-religious* journey of the MCC NOVA community as the connections between human consciousness and self discovery are likened to a disclosure of God's beingness (Chapter 4, p.255).

On another plane we may look to the very instances of worship, its musical texts, its musical and ritual structures, and in preaching where the exposition of God's being is related to the LBGTQ condition. This is seen in the alteration and refashioning of hymnic and liturgical sentiments (Chapter 3), the experiences of newly constructed rituals (Chapter 2, p.47), or the systematic theologizing on scriptural texts as applicable to the LBGTQ condition found in sermons. In each case, we look to the content of ritual components as disclosures to the meaning of an operative theology for this gender rich society.

Language, as has been seen, offers both helpful and incomplete descriptions of the latent realities of human development. We have seen how in the case of conversion, the descriptions of individuals expressing the conversion process can either describe the outcome of conversion or can supply the process; however a condensation of the two is difficult to interpret through linguistic descriptions (Chapter 2, p.109). We have also noted that in the case of alteration, uses of language to describe theological realities is often a situation based simply on an expression of God's being by measuring what God is

*not* (i.e. excripting sexual descriptors) rather than what God is (supplying supergendered descriptions) (chapter 3).

Rather than basing a *gender-religious* theology on ritual content which is ultimately flawed in its depiction of how the community understanding God, we need to focus on the functions and operations at play amidst these descriptions. As previously mentioned, music and ritual enact a sense of becoming as the individual travels through a cyclical stasis constantly reevaluating experience as it applies to the process of transcendence (Chapter 4, Figure 29, p.277). In this process acts have a diverse set of values which contribute to the overall journey of consciousness. If we base the overall journey of consciousness on the description of acts as they make themselves available to the participant who is in constant self-conscious flux we may too readily supply meaning to what is an ongoing, emergent process of understanding.

This research problem requires that as we consider the ritual environment as a discourse for understanding community meaning as it is performed and learned. This allows us to assign theological relevance to the *process* of ritualizing rather than assuming that ritual content will disclose theological meaning by its aesthetics. This is an alternative to research methods which ascribe theologies to what the community is doing. It questions the role of liturgy as a whole and the perspectives which have considered its function (Chapter 4, p.307) Focusing on the *act* of making ritual, its purpose and its potential, and the outcomes it enacts, and not the function liturgy plays, is where a theology of *gender-religiosity* will surface.

### **Creative performances and normalization.**

Assessing authenticity in LGBTQ religious performance is problematic in the research. The presumption that gender marginalized individuals will perform their own religiosity in ways that are overtly relative to sexual tendencies is stifling to the research. In fact, in the course of this research that presumption has been completely aborted. Creativity as an operative aesthetics is not always defined by the ability or desire to create something new though at times this is clearly seen. The creative experience is often a function of owning what has been previously considered as an unexpected addition to a *gender-religious* stance (Chapter 3, p. 182). Stylization is something that does not always presume an alteration of content (text, performance style, performance structure, or performance expectations). It is a function of reauthenticating and reclaiming a traditional value as the community attempts to reclaim what has been lost once due to oppression or suppression (Chapter 3, p. 231).

The vocabularies and signs which represent a function of meaning act as vehicles for authentication. Their uses in ritual are enacted by the meanings understood in the “subject’s” world. They are the product of one’s own experiences and the validations of efficacy found through a process of reflection. They contribute to an establishment of symbols and systems of belief which identify the “community’s” world as having value to the individual. Through this process, the individual becomes part of the community’s corporate awareness. The previous informs the latter in a dialogue that is rooted in the ontological reality of both parties. The rituals and musics which are the product of this process are a description more of the exchanges which occur than they are an artifact of



belief. They explain ritual's outcomes while simultaneously describing the tensions and negotiations that it symbolizes (Chapter 4, p.292 ).

The instances where this reclaiming and reauthenticating are noticed suggest that part of the *gender-religious* stance is one which is rooted in normalization as the community meanders about the hegemonies, aesthetics, and traditions of its shared history. The result of this process is multifaceted.

In some instances it intentionally manifests a reordering of historical hegemonies by including them into a new field of interpretation. Traditional religious attributes not normally promoted within LBGTQ interpretations like sin, reparation, and repentance are refashioned to supply a conditional explanation about the greater world and the community's unique role in it. These become normalized through their reinterpretation and stylization into the LBGTQ landscape. At other times, ethnic and/or world musics are incorporated into ritual experiences to expand and heighten consciousness of the greater world as it applies to the suburban condition of the community. Exposure to the worlds of others is normalized and symbolized as a connection between the locality of the community (its own experiences of oppressions and suppression) are likened to the experiences of others even though the properties of this oppression are far from shared. Transitions occur in this normalization process which transforms the individual from interpreting their own world in light of the world of MCC to assuming the MCC landscape as their own and ultimately charting a new horizon from which the "other" is observed (Chapter 4, p. 274 ). The translation of roles in the ritualizing process itself, transforms expectations about music itself as the consideration of power and authority in

musicians and congregants points to a shifting interpretation of the efficacy of musical performance (Chapter 4, p.330). Experiences of the greater world, be it the world of MCC NOVA, the universal fellowship, or the world which encapsulates them, is normalized as the person becomes more ontologically part of it. It is both the font and source of what it means to be identified with a community.

### **Behaviors and core constructs of identity**

This brings us to question the nature of behaviors in ritual and the core constructs of identity which they expose. It is not always likely that the ritual behaviors in MCC NOVA worship are disclosing a complete interpretation of its membership at any given time. The reasons for this have already been stated above. It has also been noted that this presents a problem in research when we focus on the behaviors themselves in isolation of the processes in which they are part. It has been shown that toleration is operative at times as personal interpretations of acceptability or the lack thereof do not always restrict participation (Chapter 2, p.33). We have also seen that experimentation is not always necessarily an alternative to historical constructs as one might presume, but serve as a means of augmenting already known aspects of religiosity as it has been handed down through tradition (Chapter 2, p. 47).

Other examples like that of the “*Our Father Debate*” (Chapter 3, p.205), “The Three Wise Persons” drama (Chapter 2, p. 84) and the “*Passing of Peace*” (Chapter 3, p.207) represent the restriction of participation or the invitation to participate in new and different ways. The former two examples clash with feelings and sentiments in individual expectations about how music, text, and physicality should be constructed and performed.

The third affords an opportunity to express community in a new and different way. In any case, the presentation of self and community coalesces to reveal the gender discourses at play in community events. Both the expectations and the ritualized mechanisms point to the ultimate construction of an identity which is in constant flux.

The problems these examples present are overcome by a reassessment of the researcher's tools for analysis. If we are to understand the experiences as they contribute to a greater system of being (in this case a *gender-religiosity*), we should be prepared to explore not only the mechanisms of performance as has been offered in the third chapter, relating ritual occurrences to the immediate representations. Nor can we simply rely on the functional approaches which attempt to describe *how* and *why* individuals disclose interior negotiations as has been described in chapter 2. In this approach, we run the risk of misinterpretation as behaviors and the means individuals choose to describe them is often inadequately capable of presenting the entire process of awareness. As Bruce Kaepferer states:

The structuring of social action and relationships constituted as these are by and within culture limits the likelihood of individuals sharing the same experience. Culture, as it relates to the ordering of life in mundane situations, is both particularizing *and* universalizing. It mediates the relations of individuals both to their material terms of existence and to each other. It is particularizing in the sense that the structuring of relations between individuals in terms of a framework of cultural understandings variously locates individuals in the mundane ordering of everyday life. It differentiates them and makes possible a variety of individual perspectives and standpoints on the everyday world. Individuals experience themselves—they experience their experience and reflect on it—both from their own standpoint and from the standpoint of others within their culture (Kaepferer 1986: 189).

We must offer a deeper assessment of the material based in an analytical approach which assumes that the ritual product is just that—*the product* of a series of discourses which are at times preestablished prior to the act of ritualizing or are discerned through

the ritual act itself—or may even have a future value. This discourse may be symbolized on a macro level where the process of human becoming is constantly governed by a state of separation, transition, and incorporation. This liminal state may be symbolized in the ritual celebrations themselves as the act of ritualizing enacts a state of uncertainty or isolation. Individual rites in themselves may prove to be microcosmic events which evidence this process on a macro level. In all these cases, the liminal state is constant (Chapter 4, p. 345). The musical components, the ritual acts, their cognitive and even spiritual results are simply a moment in time—a passing in the overall existence of both the person and the community. They supply for the participants an enacted transition. In Lonergan’s terminology, it is the shifting from one “world” to another (Chapter 4, p. 261). In Turner and Van Gennep’s approach it is the “betwixt and between” experience of liminality (Chapter 4, p. 345).

The research problem described is of particular importance when one attempts to isolate the relationship between conversion and performance (Chapter 2, p. 100). It supports what has already been presented as the dynamism involved in a construction of the self-concept through transformation (Chapter 2, p. 106). Conversion-identity negotiations are operative as a person travels along the road of self awareness. This journey is described through a variety of mechanisms and presumes a variety of approaches and definitions of the individual as subject (Chapter 2, Table 4, p.114). This being the case, both for the individual subject and those who he/she comes into contact with, inconsistencies in constructing this core identity are the result of motivations which describe the dialogue between the individual (as they become more versed in the

vocabulary of self understanding) and the society in which they are part (using this vocabulary to under into dialogue with the culture) (Chapter 2, p. 118).

A resolution to the problem rests in the definition of the subject who is more than the sum of interior negotiations as they are realized on the social plane. Additionally, the subject is a vehicle for the internal dialogue between self and community. The emergence of one's beingness contributes to a community who supplies a collection of meanings (Chapter 4, p. 274). It may be argued from the standpoint of a sacred canopy where both gender diversity and religiosity are concomitant discourses, (Chapter 2, p.30) leading to an interactionism which is ultimately symbolic allowing for tangibles, philosophies, events, and 'world's' of discourse to provide the vocabularies of discussion (Chapter 2, p.118). These symbols are weighted as they contribute to the dialogue the individual has with meaning (Chapter 4, Figure 31, p.289 ) which is ultimately critical to the establishment of *communitas* through ritual participation.

### **Diversity and core beliefs**

Assigning diversity as core elements in the ritual of MCC NOVA is a simplistic resolution to the problem of identifying core performance aesthetics. It can presume that diversity within the LBGTQ condition is a matter of acceptance of a variety of gender constructs and traditions (structural and antistructural) and that MCC rituals are the mere performance of these diverse factors. But this is only a precursory priority for MCC NOVA members. It is a stable condition which allows for divergence to supply meaning. In the end, as with all aspects of MCC NOVA culture, diversity must be considered in light of the role divergent aspects of ritual contribute to the building of a corporate set of

meanings. We have described that a critical modus in identifying this aesthetic is the interrelationship between continuity and discontinuity. It supplies the canvas for a two main ontological descriptions of the LBGTQ condition in the MCC NOVA context.

Firstly, the process of becoming has an indelible relationship with the recognition that elements of meaning provide a series of definitions for the individual striving to understand his/her world (Chapter 4, p.261). These elements of meaning, the signs, and the vocabularies employed afford the person on a journey of self becoming a template for discourse and serve an immediate function (Chapter 2, p. 45) . They become the means by which recognition of one's relationship with the group's core beliefs. In instances where ritual elements become boilerplate examples of the transitions the community makes from one set of awarenesses to another, like in the case of changes in the offertory song, they provide the worshipper with a sense of participation, normality, or a feeling of familiarity with the ritual. Through reflection, meaning supplies an opportunity for this immediacy to develop into a process of self reflection as value of genre, text, and style become in themselves sources for greater discernment. Text and sentiment give way to the recognition that genre and style are equally important factors. The transition from participation to intentionality becomes in itself meaningful.

The aesthetics which make up the performances are independent and interdependent of each other. The theologies, sentiments, and cognitive factors range from a sense of inclusion (Chapter 3, p.166), to more hegemonic theologies (Chapter 3, p.167), to the self identification of the community in light of its role as a spiritualizing people (Chapter 3, p.170). They are independent from the genres and styles of

participation which lead the community from a system of through composition, to one of call and response, to a sense of rhythmic and performative joy, returning to a through composed structure. Each shows a different progress of priorities. They are independent aesthetics. On the other hand, when viewed in combination, their diachronic progress describes the interdependence between diverse ritual structures, their antecedent potential performative qualities, and weightiness of these aesthetics in light of their importance as acts of meaning (Chapter 4, p.289). Transcendence from one awareness of value to another is parallel to processes which ascribe meaning to the individual aesthetics. They embody a factor of diversity not because they are differently measured but because they contribute to recognition of the diversity found in the social structure of the community. The core beliefs of the community do not simplistically prescribe appropriateness but rather allow for this progression to occur.

Secondly, the core beliefs of the community are based in the notion that amidst the negotiations occurring on this plane of performance, a world view of solidarity is available. Symbolically speaking, multiple genres and styles evidenced in the MCC NOVA rituals provide an interplay between the diversity found in LGBTQ life events while simultaneously recognizing that this diversity acts as a system of solidarity. This is found in two distinct levels of awareness. In the first, social diversity serves as a source for identifying with peoples outside of the LGBTQ landscape. In these instances, African-American musics, non-English language, and musics of oppression and freedom, all represent a *communitas* with other peoples with histories and conditions of marginality (Chapter 3, Figures 15-18, p.177, 178, 179, and 181). Furthermore, through

the adoption of certain structural hegemonies, this solidarity can also be applied to a universal Christianity. The styles, sentiments, and cognitive properties which they possess enact a connectedness between foreign culture and a North American LGBTQ suburban life condition. In a second way, this very adoption of the “other” is inclusive of practices and sentiments which in themselves have little similarity with a LGBTQ world view. Sin, repentance, reparation, mainstream music styles and theological hegemonies become sources for a translation from traditionalism into a re-contextualized interpretation that is relative to the LGBTQ condition. Be the structures a *tenebrae* service with its dark subtext (Chapter 3, p.182) or the historically oppressive context of Ash Wednesday highlighting human brokenness (Chapter 3, p.187), each supplies meaning to a reestablished world view. This view is rooted in the both the discontinuities with the LGBTQ life view and the continuities between MCC NOVA religious life and the lives of those from whom the community has been historically fashioned.

Diversity in performance supplies continuity and discontinuity on both levels of context and style. Irregardless of the immediate feelings which these conjure, in tandem, the elements which they possess contribute to a translational world view from one that is “subject” oriented to one that is “other” oriented. This discourse is relative to one’s locality with the “subject” being either the individual, the LGBTQ community, or an LGBTQ outlook and the “world” as being other members of the community, MCC NOVA, LGBTQ outlook and the greater world. It is intersubjective in its definition.



## **Musical Ritual and Social Consciousness**

In the second chapter, we focused on the variety of conversion-identity negotiations and recognized that models of active and passive individual agency serves as a means of understanding the processes of socialization (Chapter 2, p.106). In the third chapter the ritualized experiences which describe the tension and negotiations associated with this process have been provided to explain the unique qualities MCC NOVA rituals possess creating a problem for analysis using these functional models.

As has been stated already in these overall conclusions, social structure and musical form in MCC NOVA worship experiences are an integrated experience of traditional hegemonies and resultant meanings which describe the relationship between histories and performance stances as they construct a social consciousness.

The problems in analysis and research are numerous as one strives to note the parallels between musical and ritual structure and social structure. The aesthetics of music and ritual do not always contain descriptions which allow for a serious and credible paralleling of ritualized behavior and the social condition of the LBGTQ/MCC individuals. It's rituals and music presume that the MCC NOVA community is one in flux, a community where becoming is an operative aesthetic, and the rituals which make up the exposition of its own beliefs are in constant dialogue with the world in which it exists, the emergent MCC world with its tensions and negotiations, tempered and fueled by the individuals which make it up.

Cognition is relative to consciousness where the processes of transcendence are constantly at play. This results in a performance arena involved in a constant and

continual invention and reinvention process. As was stated in the third chapter, this experience bridges gaps in the social situation of LGBTQ/MCC members by providing for a means to constantly negotiate the role of this community in light of a world where marginalism and oppression are constant life realities. Its rituals provide a platform for dealing with these. They also serve as a means for reevaluating the relationship between marginalized individuals and the greater world for which it is intrinsically linked. In essence, the Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia provides on many levels a boilerplate situation where the divergence found in everyday society is considered and reconsidered in light of a community who symbolizes the dynamism found in everyday life. This precarious state is where the community finds value for itself, the LGBTQ community, and the greater world at large.

The rituals and music of the Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia are not simply attempts at creating a religious lifestyle which is amenable or palatable to the lives of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transvestites, transsexuals, and others who find few environments to live their life as they see fit. They are part of the fabric of their lives themselves with their consistencies and inconsistencies, traditional and non-traditional aesthetic, and the constant self awareness of personhood that they enliven. These *are a gender-religiosity*, a way of being which strives to reconcile the differences and celebrate the unique contributions LGBTQ members are able to bring to the world of spirituality and religious celebration.

## **New Horizons: Theoretical Consequences for a Gender-Religious Ethnographic Liturgiology**

The research presented in this dissertation is an admitted departure from traditional ethnomusicology. On the surface, it entertains that ethnomusicological inquiry can be performed from an insider's perspective. When the researcher's role is considered as valued and unique, a lens from which a functional perspective on the subject may be obtained. The research tests the boundaries of the ethnographic enterprise as it attempts to explain a local and somewhat familiar culture of liturgical ritual while simultaneously dispelling popularized assumptions about the gender context of LGBTQ individuals and groups. This is of equal importance for both the reader and the subject.

For the reader, the ethnographic description reorients expectations about a culture popularly depicted as exotic and countercultural; to consider it on the plane of human performance unrestricted by traditional confines about sexuality and gender marginality and the ensuing polarities which permeate much of modern research. For the subject, it has a twofold importance. It firstly allows for a description based in its process of *becoming* and not one which presumes that all of its own questions are answered. In essence, it focuses on the "unfinished business" of identity construction to be ethnographic matter under consideration. This presumes of course that both the descriptions and conclusions are in themselves dynamic by nature. By reflecting on past events in relationship to present and future goals, the struggles which impede (or nurture) self discovery become the material under consideration. On this plane, ethnographic work is a description of the "grey matter" of performance less often seen—the

mechanisms which point to uncharted territory discovered and yet undiscovered by both researcher and subject—though clearly part of the conscious map of both parties.

Secondly, and more importantly, the ethnographic description provides a challenging self assessment of the intricacies of, in this case, *gender-religiosity* by providing some insights into the distinct relationship between mainstream practices and MCC NOVA performances. It serves in a way to dismantle the polarizations often found between these structural and anti-structural hegemonies and focuses more importantly on their relationship as it contributes to a collective of pertinent questions about the impact of this group on a world with which it coexists. This stated, new horizons in the ethnomusicological study of gender in liturgical/ritual celebrations emerge testing current academic confinements.

For gender studies, this type of approach, one which focuses on human performance as an identifying mechanism in the consideration of gender marginalism, serves as a departure from other methods embroiled in the task of identifying dissimilarity between normativity and alteration. It strives to associate the outcomes of performance, their meanings, and aesthetics within the shifting dynamism of a human ontology. This is a far cry from simply focusing on aesthetics of enculturation and acculturation. Performance requirements and expectations become as unstable and undisclosing as the human dynamic may sometimes be, constantly changing and variably expectant. Their presence is only part of an ever-changing and ever-growing complex of information which informs both the performances themselves and more so the individuals who experience them. In other words, the research focuses on a new horizon about the

gender question, one that locates the more pertinent questions about how humans perform their own identity informed by, but also independent from, gender confines..

Within this altered perspective for gender studies, gender marginalism and polarities do not necessarily provide alternatives to “traditional” human behaviors but provide the embedded metalanguages of the full range of human performance possibilities. This includes a multitude of gender-specific characteristics which ultimately produces insight into the mechanisms of human self consciousness. This is a movement from a seemingly general arena of inquiry (the human experience) to a more cultural specific one (the LBGTQ experience) rather than the reverse which seems to dominate gender research. The result of this anti-directional process affords outcomes which include gender-specific peculiarities into the realm of “acceptable” and undeniably human possibilities, counteracting the very bias of gender marginalism itself.

The task of ritual and liturgical ethnography is not a new endeavor. In fact, for many an ethnomusicologist and anthropologist it is a staple of ethnological research. The research here is among those which attempt to describe the Western liturgical experience in the vocabularies of anthropological and ethnomusicological dialogue. The research is novel, however, as it approaches this experience in several new ways.

First, as has been mentioned previously, the methods assume a descriptive quality which is innovative for liturgical studies. It strives to use knowledge about liturgical practice to inform a method of interpretation based foremost in ethnography. This is a challenge to liturgical studies professionals who have traditionally been preoccupied with prescription and the establishment of right rituals stemming from right theologies. Even

the theological methods which have been illustrated in the fourth chapter of the dissertation focusing on human ontology, though instrumental in informing the relationship between performance experience and human beingness, have been rarely utilized in defining the relationship between personhood and human behavior outside of the realm of ethics and spiritual mystagogy. Traditionally, they have served as a means for describing human consciousness but have never been applied as a method for interpreting ritual/musical behavior.

Second, this leads us to reconsider the breadth of studies by ritologists and anthropologists who strive to describe human communities by analyses of their rituals. Rightfully, it is in the religious rituals themselves where the complexity of human culture is most prevalent. The assertions of this dissertation support this fact. However, the methods employed in this work go beyond the restrictions of field researcher who wholeheartedly accepts the aesthetics and practices of cultural rituals as a blueprint of a consensus operative in religious culture. This may be partly due to an underdeveloped intimacy with a community's struggles, their historical inconsistencies, or simply because of a desire to focus on the apparently overt or exotic qualities of communal performance. Rather, here the blueprint is embossed on the negotiations and tensions which make up the discourses embedded in the ritual structures, using the structures as vehicles for describing the unique qualities of this community's ontological realities. It allows for the possibility that ritual practices are only a means by which greater personal and communal knowledge may develop. Here lie the major differences in approach.

By assuming that the rituals and musics are in themselves “works-in-process”, freely evolving with the ever-changing landscape of the human condition, we may arrive at new expectations about ritual’s ability to communicate communal complexities. This new assumption affects our choices of methods and urges us to accepted already tested theories in a new way, to measure their efficacy, and to recognize the extent of their ability to uncover new realities. Even the application of theories shared between different disciplines (anthropology, ritology, ethnomusicology, theology, liturgics, sociology, and social psychology), when taken out of their host contexts and tested collectively, can only be tested within the human performance itself. As Marcia Herndon had promoted, this type of tertiary analysis supplies a level of abstraction which considers the data gathered in the research, the connections and patterns which these materials illuminate, and moreover the logic which comes out of reorienting our frameworks to include the highest possible depth of understanding (Herndon, 2000: 351). It is the combination of these theories applied to the dynamic nature of ritual and human consciousness where they have the ability to emerge as newly enlivened methods for use in analysis.

These first two approaches affect a last. In a third overarching approach to liturgical ritual we question the very application of belief as grounded in a *gender-religious* identity. If we ascribe to the gathering of knowledge about the human condition in a liturgical context through ethnographic (descriptive) approaches, then create a framework of knowledge based not only on the ethnographic material, but inclusive of the data’s ability to inform us about the latent complexities inherent in the *process* of ritualizing, we are left with a method of interpreting ritual structures which point to the

contribution of human dynamism on performative outcomes. This is the ultimate contribution to liturgical study for it recognizes human dynamism as an aesthetic in ritual action. It allows for continuity and discontinuity to coexist and more so illustrate the process by which human agency and communal expression intersect. This last statement is illustrative of a completely new method for analysis. It includes the historical traditions which make up the contemporary consciousness of a community, offset by personal investment and self-discovery, and uses this matter to describe the intimacy between personal conversion and ritual/musical performance.

All this stated, we may return to our own discipline and assess what these approaches provide for an enlivened ethnomusicology.

The methods used in this research unequivocally stem from an ethnomusicological source. They prioritize fieldwork, ethnography, and the analysis of music as a hallmark for understanding culture. They include the gender question as germane to the construction of cultural descriptions understood through ritual/music performances themselves. They embrace notions about musical change in its many forms and recognize translation of traditions as a transformative entity in culture. These ethnomusicological priorities have been infused with an expanded approach to liturgical study. Transversely, the ethnomusicological stance is expanded to include the phenomenological and ontological stances embedded in the analyses. It questions the limits of perceptions about music's meaning and includes a definition where music and ritual plays a distinct role in the spiritual and psychological conversion of individuals and communities.



This marriage between a phenomenological stance and an ethnographic one points to the very assumptions made about the relationship between human becoming and gender in this paper. It begs many questions. Foremost is the question of our interpretations of ethnicity and gender and the ability to apply theories about ethnicity to *gender-religious* cultures. It forces us to establish insights which stress the similarities between so called “ethnicities” and the characteristics embodied in groups which espouse to gender-defined priorities for performance. The connection is a bold one; however from the research it is clearly conceivable. From an applied standpoint, the research offers an opportunity for the ethnomusicologist to inform liturgical studies in a more intentional way, establishing an ethnoliturgy if you will. With a redirected and redefined approach to ethnicity and gender, ethnomusicologists can break into an arena of research that informs a landscape foreign to our own. It can in turn be enlivened by evolving itself in research beyond a purely humanistic study to one capable of exploring the spiritual and extra-human components of performance. Lastly, this research offers ethnomusicological inquiry a level of ethnographic responsibility which transcends the preconceived biases of its researchers and the stereotypes and misinterpretations sometimes projected onto gender-rich societies. In this research, the tempering of the gender material with a focus on the human dimension has been intentional so to down play the perception that MCC NOVA worship environments breed LGBTQ overt performances. In actuality, under other methodological circumstances, this may have been the outcome. This would have offered a study unable to provide deeper questions about the nature of music and ritual, its meaning, and its role in the phenomenological experiences of its participants. For the

modern ethnomusicologist, the continuation of this sort of analysis is of great consequence. It not only provides for greater insights but it also further expands the mind of the researcher to go beyond the obvious and apparent details of music and ritual and its value in describing communal identity.

I think it is fitting to end with an example from MCC NOVA Sunday worship which ironically seems to sum up both the journey of this community while providing a challenge for modern ethnomusicology. It was offered as a contemporary reading but it speaks to the essence of striving for greater and future awareness in the midst of past experiences in light of the unknown future. It speaks of the “other” as a gift and an invitation for greater becoming. It expresses reconciliation as a human quality allowing one to explore his/her own known and unknown internal and external terrain steeped in the freedom to express them through the activities of ritual. On October 24, 2004 the following was proclaimed and preached at MCC NOVA.

The stranger is our future waiting to happen; the other is the parable and the myth and lesson that looms on our horizon. They are sources of anxiety, fear, contempt, and sometimes violence. They are also necessary, for without the other, without the stranger, we are bereft of the distance and perspective we need to discover the God who is wholly one, and even to glimpse ourselves more clearly...

The other is dangerous, and difference is challenging—but the presence of the other is unsettling also because I am reminded that I, too, am a stranger. When I walk an unfamiliar neighborhood, turn off the freeway too early, or walk into the wrong meeting room, I discover that the stranger is myself. The experience of the other, or myself as the other in unfamiliar settings, also reminds me that I am sometimes a stranger to family and friends, and outsider to my own home or place of work. Ultimately, of course, this experience of the stranger rehearses at close range that sometimes I am a stranger even to myself. Thus we sometimes find ourselves feeling what Saint Paul writes: "I do not understand what I do, for I do not do what I want, but I do the very things I hate" (Romans 7:15). A more contemporary prophet, Billy Joel, says something similar in his song, “The Stranger”; he asks whether you ever see the stranger in yourself.

Learning to embrace the other and honor the stranger is stepping into the unexplored world of reconciliation. It is a world unexplored, because once the other is embraced and the stranger is honored, we are in a place we have never been before...The ordinary is transformed in our seeing...and we are surprised by what we discover in the uncharted space that reconciliation creates.

In order to embody a spirituality of reconciliation, we need the courage to be surprised. If we are willing to live toward reconciliation as victims of violence or abuse, then we will find instances of healing grace in unlikely places from unlikely people. When we experience ourselves being forgiven, we will in turn be surprised by the ways in which God works forgiveness in the lives of others. Our stories and God's stories intersect unexpectedly. Ultimately, it is through the stories we tell and the rituals we enact that the great paradox is exposed: to live, we have to die. In the meantime, we look for courage enough to love the questions and live the contradictions of the stories and rituals that bring them to life. To do so in the spirit of reconciliation does not demand resolution, but allows transformation as we never imagined it and grace where we least expect it. (From Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine by Herbert Andersen and Edward Foley.)

## Appendix A. Institutional Review Board Application and Protocol

### **Institutional Review Board**

University of Maryland  
College Park, Maryland 20742

#### **Renewal Application for Research Project Using Human Subjects**

**Name and Department of Investigator or Faculty Advisor:**  
Carolina Robertson, PhD, School of Music, Division of Musicology and  
Ethnomusicology

---

**Name and Department of Co-Investigator(s) (if applicable):**  
n/a

---

**Name of Student Investigator(s) (if applicable):**  
Gaetano Lotrecchiano, School of Music, Division of Musicology and Ethnomusicology

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**Project Title:**  
"Chasing the Rainbow": The Communal Construction of Identity Through Music and  
Ritual in The Context of the Core Values of the Metropolitan Church of Northern  
Virginia.

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**IRB Number Assigned to Project:**  
01233

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**Date Previous Approval Expires:**  
June 30, 2003

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#### **IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT IRB RENEWAL APPLICATIONS:**

If you wish to continue using human subjects or collecting or analyzing data for the project indicated above, your project must be reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before the date indicated above. Please submit a renewal application 30 days prior to the project expiration date.

All changes to the approved research, which have occurred since the initial review or the last annual renewal, must be reported in your renewal application. University policy and federal guidelines prohibit the use human subjects beyond the IRB approval expiration date indicated above, unless you have received permission to do so by the IRB. Research funds administered by the Office of Research Administration and Advancement (ORAA) may not be released to any project that does not have required IRB approval.

## Who Must Renew?

*Please indicate YES or NO for each of the following questions. This will determine whether you need to seek a renewal of the IRB's permission to use human subjects.*

1. Will future research activities involve obtaining data through intervention or interaction with human subjects? YES  NO
2. Will future research activities involve continuing to obtain private information from human subjects? YES  NO
3. Will future research activities include analyzing or manipulating data previously collected from human subjects in a way **that increases risk to human subjects** beyond the level previously approved for this project? YES  NO
4. Is the principal investigator on the continuing project different from the principal investigator approved by the IRB? YES  NO
5. Is this project currently receiving external funding or do you anticipate receiving external funding for this project? YES  NO

\* If you answered "yes" to questions 1, 2, 3, or 5, please return **three signed copies** of this form, along with **three copies** of the information described under CONTENTS OF THE RENEWAL APPLICATION, to:  
*IRB Office, 2100 Lee Building, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland 20742 -5141*

### IMPORTANT NOTE REGARDING NUMBER OF COPIES TO SUBMIT:

Please submit **sixteen copies** of this material if you encountered any problems involving human subjects during the conduct of your research, if any substantial changes have been made to the project which was originally approved, or if the original proposal received a full board review.

\*\*\*If you answered "yes" to question 4, the new principal investigator must submit an initial application for new research involving human subjects. Please see the IRB Application page (<http://www.umresearch.umd.edu/IRB/IRBAppprocess.html>) for links to pdf and Word versions of the initial application.

\*\* If you do not plan to continue this project and have checked "NO" for **all** of the above renewal questions, please check here  and submit only one signed copy of this form. Your project will be removed from our active files upon receipt of this document.

1. Project Description: The intersection between belief, gender, and performance enacted in the Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia (MCC NOVA) - a gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community of faith, provides an arena for ethnomusicological inquiry into the fashioning of ritual performance and its impact on identity. As a safe-haven for those who are marginalized by religion, MCC NOVA grounds its ritual and musical practices in its core values: elastic theology, inclusiveness, diversity, community, member-ministers, and love and acceptance. These core values are the basis for a variety of performative events which strive to allow for the self-fashioning of gender in the context of spiritual exploration. Affected by a variety of "cradle traditions", this *translesbigay* group draws on a complex assortment of sacred musics and ritual practices in a formation of a unique religiosity as they endeavor to describe and re-invent their collective self. MCC NOVA intensifies the experience of faith through the enculturation of its multi-gendered condition, alternative spiritualities, and idiosyncratic performance events by fashioning a progressive Christian-based *translesbigay* spirituality. This project deals with a series of unexplored important ethnomusicological questions concerning the significance, process, problems, negotiations, and repercussions involved in performing a variety of spiritualities and ritual musics in light of MCC NOVA's central core values.

2. Investigator Information: The principal investigator has been changed from Dr. Robert Provine to Dr. Carolina Robertson soon after the initial approval of the protocol. There have been no additions of personnel since the beginning of the protocol.

3. Project History: This project was undertaken in July of 2002 at which time until the present a majority of the research has been observatory. Within the next months (May-August, 2003) interviews will be conducted which will necessitate written consent. It is expect over the next year of the protocol there may be approximately 30 to 40 interviews conducted requiring written consent.

As a research site for this project, The Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia has proven to be an excellent environment for the study of how this community's search for identity has shaped and is shaped by its musical behaviors and ritual decision-making. In this last year it has become evident that within this community, ritual life plays an important part in the self-fashioning of corporate identity. Furthermore, it is in the process of the negotiations involved in decided how ritual life best defines this corporate self image where one can notice the latent paradoxes of meaning involved in being *translesbigay*, Christian, and having the freedom to express those things freely.

The research data compiled thus far has confirmed that ritual and music act as descriptors of human culture and intermingle with other non-ritualistic human behaviors to provide the links between common behavior, ritual life, musical performance, and cognitive meaning. In this next year of research (July 2003-June 2004) it is hoped that the mechanisms (or patterns of connection) between these various human activities will be researched so as to bring the project closer to understanding how and why these behaviors display an interdependency and ultimately what this interdependency describes about the subject community.

4. Problem History: There have been no problems involving human subjects since the previous year's approval.

5. Approved Changes: There have been no changes which have facilitated the need for approval or any alterations to the data collection process.

6. Request for Approval of New Changes. No changes are being requested at this time.

7. Funding Source. It is not expected that this project will be funded.

8. Data Location: Office Records for this project will be kept in The Ethnomusicology Research Laboratory in the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center.

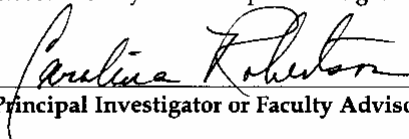
9. Consent Forms: Only ONE (1) consent form is in use for this project.

(a) stamped copy of the previous consent form (SEE ATTACHED)

(b) a blank copy of the consent for which approval is now sought. (SEE ATTACHED)

**SIGNATURE SECTION**

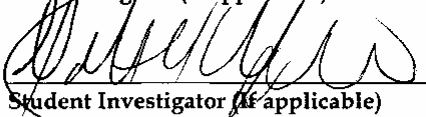
The principal investigator, Co-Investigator, and Student Investigator, in signing this renewal application, certify that they have followed the recommendations of the IRB, that the Office of the Vice President for Graduate research has been notified of all additions of changes in the procedure which took place after this last review, and that any consent forms used in connection with the project have been retained by the Principal Investigator.

  
Principal Investigator or Faculty Advisor

5/7/03  
Date

N/A  
Co-Investigator (if applicable)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

  
Student Investigator (if applicable)

5/8/03  
Date

Appendix B. Sample Informed Consent Form

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Project Title  
Structure and Age of Subject  
Purpose  
Procedure  
Ethical Considerations  
Risks  
Benefits/Withdrawal Options

**“Chasing the Rainbow”: The Communal Construction of Identity Through Music and Ritual in The Context of the Core Values of the Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia”**

I state that I am over 18 years of age, and wish to participate in a program of research being conducted by Gaetano R. Lotrecchiano, Student Investigator, and Carolina Robertson, PhD, Principal Investigator in the Division of Musicology and Ethnomusicology, School of Music at the University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742.

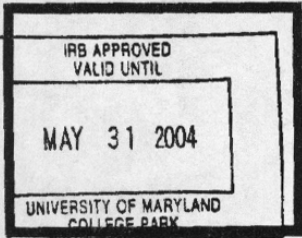
Utilizing both biography and musical analysis, the purpose of this research will be to understand how music, ritual, and gender are informed by, and inform, the core values of the Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia and the ways in which these describe communal identity.

The procedures for collecting information will involve face-to-face interviews, telephone conversations, group discussions, and e-mail correspondence. All interviews will be sound recorded and in some instances, whereby the interviewee agrees, videotaped. All interviews will run for no longer than (2) two hours at a time. Sound or video recordings will be for the sole use of the Student Investigator and the Principal Investigator for the project. The Student Investigator will keep and maintain all data collected, which will be secured in a locked filing cabinet. The duration of this research project will last for a minimum of (1) one year, and no longer than (3) three years. Video and/or audiotapes will not be destroyed upon completion of this project but will continue to be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the event the student investigator wishes to revise, update, or expand the scope of the project in the future.

All information collected for this research is for scholarly and academic purposes. All information collected in this study is confidential and my name will not be identified at any time. The data I provide will be grouped with data others provide for reporting and presentation. This research will be used as part of a doctoral dissertation and will eventually be published for access by other scholars interested in this work. Portions of this research may also be presented at academic conferences or published in academic journals. By consenting to participation in this project, I am agreeing that information obtained may be used for these purposes. I may at any time, however, request that certain information be restricted from use.

There are minimal risks involved in this research.

I understand that this research is not designed to help me personally, but that the researcher hopes to learn more about my background as a member/worshipper as well as my thoughts on issues concerning music, ritual, and gender, I understand that I am free to ask questions or to withdraw from participation at any time without consequence.



Printed Name of Subject \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Subject \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Gaetano R. Lotrecchiano, Student Investigator  
Dr. Carolina Robertson, Principal Investigator  
Division of Musicology and Ethnomusicology  
School of Music/Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center  
University of Maryland, College Park 20742  
Office Phone: 301-405-5502



## Appendix C. Institutional Consent with the Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia

Metropolitan Community Church  
of Northern Virginia  
10383 Democracy Lane  
Fairfax, VA 22030  
Voice (703) 691 0930 FAX (703) 691 0529  
Info@mccnova.com  
www.mccnova.com



April 24, 2002

Gaetano R. Lotrecchiano  
Division of Musicology and Ethnomusicology  
Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center  
University of Maryland  
College Park, MD 20742

RE: Institutional Consent

Dear Mr. Lotrecchiano,

On behalf of the Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia we would like to thank you for your interest in our Church. We are pleased of your intent to conduct an ethnomusicological study entitled, "*Chasing the Rainbow: The Communal Construction of Identity Through Music and Ritual in The Context of the Core Values of the Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia*" to be conducted by you and supervised by Robert Provine, PhD of the Division of Musicology and Ethnomusicology at the University of Maryland, College Park.

With respect to your research interests, we have reviewed the information you have shared with us and understand that our community will be participating in an ethnographic study which includes the following research methods:

- 1) **Participant-Observation** which will require you to become involved in the daily and special events of our church;
- 2) **Interviewing** of the members of our church and Sunday participants in one-on-one or small group settings. Interviews between the researcher and the "informants" may be repeated.
- 3) **Data Collection** which will be conducted through means of sound recording, taped interviews and conversation, video recordings, and internet correspondence;
- 4) **Fieldnotes** will be used to record information pertinent to the project by the research.

We fully understand that:

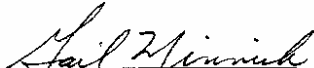
- a) Although we as the Church Board of Directors are granting permission to this endeavor, individual participation in this study is optional and those who wish to participate may only do so after they have been fully introduced to the project as defined through the **Informed Consent Form** and have signed the consent granting their own permission for their participation in the study.
- b) Since selection for participation is random and voluntary, and based solely on a sampling of the church population (those 18 years of age and above, unless granted by a legal guardian), those not wishing to participate will not be pressured in any way to do so. The researcher obtains the freedom, however, to approach individuals as he sees fit, and is expected to


maintain a heightened level of decorum and protocol in instances of decline, maintaining such decline unless otherwise approach by the subjects themselves.

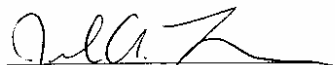
- c) Though individuals will not be identified by their legal name in written discourse (i.e. the ethnographic report), their legal signature is required for the validity of the consent form. These forms will be possessed solely by the researcher and will be stored in a secured environment.
- d) Data collected in private interviews will be obtained and documented with the strictest ethics of confidentiality and anonymity by you, the field researcher.
- e) Data collected through other forms of recorded media will be for the sole use of you, the researcher, and that any other use will require the expressed permission by those represented in the media.
- f) Data collected will be at the sole disposal of the researcher, and that though we are granting permission as a governing body of our institution, our possessing of said data would be in violation of points a), b), c), d), and e) stated above.
- g) At anytime, either during the course of any given data collection process, or during the course of the overall project, individuals may choose not to allow the information they've provided, either in total or in part, to be part of the study, though in the case of the latter, no written documentation of these restrictions will be necessary.
- h) The initiation of the research process can only commence after the approval of the protocol by the *Institutional Review Board of the University of Maryland*. We obtain the right to possess a copy of this approval.
- i) Though we have no physical obligations to you or this research, permission is granted to conduct interviews on the church site.
- j) Lastly, we as a governing body obtain the right at anytime to discontinue the participation of the community as a whole, if observed that the research is affecting the community adversely in any way.

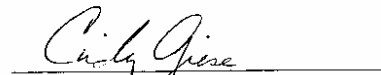
Over the past several months, it has become clear to us that your intentions are genuine and that the research you are proposing is congruent with the sensibilities and decorum which we are entrusted to maintain at the Metropolitan Community Church of Northern Virginia. We are also confident that the ethical responsibilities described above will be maintained by you with utmost professionalism. Again, we thank you for your interest in our community. We wish you the best of luck in your academic endeavors.

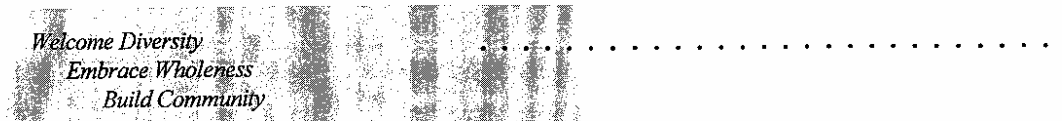
Sincerely,

  
Gail Minnick, Moderator

  
Bryan Jamieson, Treasurer

  
Julie Lecea, Clerk

  
Cindy Giese, Member-at-large



## Appendix D. UMCP Institutional Review Board Protocol Approval

### Institutional Review Board

University of Maryland  
College Park, MD 20742

#### Renewal Application Approval Document for Expedited Review of Non-Exempt Projects

\*\*\*PLEASE NOTE: Institutional Review Board approval of this project expires on May 31, 2004\*\*\*

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Carolina Robertson, Ph.D.  
**CO-INVESTIGATOR:** Not applicable  
**STUDENT INVESTIGATOR:** Gaetano Lottrecchiano  
**DEPARTMENT OR PROGRAM:** School of Music  
**IRB NUMBER & PROJECT TITLE:**

01233---Chasing the Rainbow: The Communal Construction of Identity Through Music and Ritual in the Context of the Core Values of the Metropolitan Church of Norther Virginia

The University IRB reviewed the above-mentioned project on Wednesday, May 21, 2003, in accordance with Public Health Service grant policy as defined in "The Institutional Guide to DHHS Policy on Protection of Human Subjects," 12-1-71, and in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46.

#### University of Maryland, College Park Institutional Review Board

Joan A. Lieber, Professor, Special Education, CO-CHAIRPERSON  
Phyllis Moser-Veillon, Professor, Nutrition and Food Science, CO-CHAIRPERSON  
April Falcon Doss, Non-University Member, IRB SECRETARY  
Denise A. Andrews, University Counsel, Office of Legal Affairs  
Ethelyn Bishop, Non-University Member  
Sacared A. Bodison, M.D., Physician, Health Services, Health Center  
Margaret W. Bridwell, M.D., Director, Student Health, Health Center  
Jude A. Cassidy, Professor, Psychology  
Jane Doussard-Roosevelt, Research Associate Professor, Human Development  
Gary LaFrec, Professor, Criminology and Criminal Justice  
Margaretha S. Lucas, Ph.D., Counseling Center  
Kenneth Jennings, Jr., Non-University Member  
Margaret McLaughlin, Associate Director, Special Education  
Samuel M. Turner, Professor, Psychology  
Eric Wish, Center for Substance Abuse Research

The IRB effected an independent determination of: (1) the rights and welfare of the individual or individuals involved, (2) the appropriateness of the methods used to secure informed consent, and (3) the risks and potential benefits of the investigation. The IRB has concluded that proper safeguards have been taken by the principal investigator, as stated in the research proposal. The IRB approves this project as conforming to University and Public Health Service Policy in protecting the rights of the subjects.

*Phyllis Moser-Veillon*

Phyllis Moser-Veillon, IRB Co-Chairperson OR Joan A. Lieber, IRB Co-Chairperson

The Principal Investigator (and Co-Investigator and Student Investigator, where appropriate), in signing this report, agree to follow the recommendations of the IRB, to notify the Office of the Vice President of Research of any additions to or changes in procedure subsequent to this review, to provide information on the progress of the research on an annual basis, and to report any instances of injuries to subjects and unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others. Any consent forms used in connection with this project must be retained by the Principal Investigator for three years after completion of the research.

Principal Investigator (or Faculty Advisor)

and

Co-Investigator

Student Investigator

PLEASE RETURN ONE SIGNED COPY TO:  
IRB OFFICE, ROOM 2100, BLAIR LEE  
BUILDING, CAMPUS-- 5121. Thank you

## Appendix E. Full Version of Testimonies from Ash Wednesday Service (2004)

I don't want to know what I know. I don't want to know about Matthew Shepherd; I do not want to know about James Byrd and Jasper, Texas; I don't want to know about honor killings, about Haiti, about rocket-propelled grenade launchers.

But I know. My knowledge makes me physically and spiritually aware of the immensity of the suffering of this world, and I grieve for it. Its breadth overwhelms me with both desire to fix it all and despair in thinking of the weight of all this injustice against my small power, my single voice.

Is it so hard to know where and how to begin to fight back—it seems hopeless, and in my sorrow, it becomes enough to close my eyes and be thankful for my life. It is enough to learn a lesson of the scales of injustice and to appreciate that, in this life, they are weighted heavily in my favor. I get caught up in my own struggles—to get through a consuming workday, to take care of my family, to pay a rent, to overcome the things of my past that work against my present peace of mind. There is a strong temptation to take in the cruelties of the world, see them as a lesson for my own life, and move on. Because after all, I tell myself, if I live the best life I can for myself, I haven't ignored the suffering—I've mourned it, I've learned from it. But to settle myself into such a dispassionate compassion makes me complicit in violence, in injustice and in every event that overwhelms me.

I see the futility in this point of view as well as the fear behind it. It is me, trying to find a place of comfort in this world, a way to know all that I do and still sleep at night. But it is a life, as poet Adrienne Rich puts it, "reflecting the 'what is' rather than asking what could be."

I realize that my reluctant knowledge doesn't lessen the weight of my own burdens—my knowledge and my burdens bind me into the fabric of this unjust world. Make me culpable; yet make me capable of affecting it through my actions, through refusing to close my eyes.

So I could spend my time bemoaning the writing on the wall, or I could offer all I have to change the message. Because we are called to struggle against this wall of hate, of violence, and of poverty—to respond from a place of compassion, or faith, and of love.

It is through this action that God creates healing in our selves and in our community. In Isaiah, God calls us "to loose the bonds of injustice/to undo the thongs of the yoke/ to let the oppressed go free/ and to break every yoke." This is a holy and pleasing effort, our commitment as people of faith not only to mourn injustice but to work against it with all we have been given—to ease suffering, to reject violence, to work towards peace in whatever capacity we can, with every capacity we have.

I want to tell you a story of Annalona Tonelli, an Italian woman who, 33 years ago, at the age of 27, left her affluent home and moved to Africa—first to Kenya and later to Somalia—to provide health care to impoverished people suffering from tuberculosis. She also raised awareness of HIV/AIDS and female circumcision, working to change beliefs and traditions dating back many centuries. Not affiliated with a religious order or a relief organization—in fact, nearly alone in her efforts—she established clinics in remote regions, raised the money to run them from the wealthy Italians she left behind. Living and working in an area where the culture is still nomadic, where the sick are believed a danger to the survival of the community and are often left to die, her efforts met with violent opposition. She was beaten, she was kidnapped, and, last October, she was murdered on the grounds of the hospital she built.

When asked about the difficulty of her chosen life, she replied, "I would believe that my life is a sacrifice. It is an idea that makes me laugh. I often felt that there was nobody on earth who had such privilege to be able to live like this." Working endlessly for 33 years among the sick and the dying, often under the threat and actuality of violence, she saw herself not as someone offering blessing, but as someone blessed by the

people she had been fortunate enough to help. She recognized that it was the people that are invisible to most of society, the poor and the sick, that gave her joy and filled her life with love.

But she also acknowledged that to commit to a life of good works is difficult, it is a process of evolving attitudes and responses. As she said: “The reason that more people don’t feel this way is that they don’t try hard enough. You have to give time, you have to be patient; and then year after year, you’ll see that what matters is only love. But if you’re impatient because people are not grateful or you were full of limits you will not be happy. You need time.”

The season of Lent begins today, Ash Wednesday, a day that seems to be one of paradox. A day of mourning and a day of renewal. Of mortality and of redemption. Although it has its roots in pagan rites, the imposition of ashes traditionally has meant many things: a symbol of mourning the crucifixion, of penance, or our own mortality, that we are but dust, and to dust we shall return—and so on. Today, Lent is often marked by why a personal sacrifice of some kind. —from the banal (such as no chocolate for six weeks) to the potentially life-altering (such as giving up smoking or drinking). But in making these sacrifices—although they are often good ones—we miss the point. Lent isn’t about giving up a comfortable habit. It’s about giving of our comfort, giving of ourselves, choosing to fast from apathy, fast from selfishness, put on faith in action, and allow ourselves to be changed by it.

While usually marked by somber themes, Lent is about change. It is no coincidence that the season of Lent falls during transition from winter to spring. During this time, our spiritual lives and actions mirror the awakening earth—the rebirthed plants; the reemerging animals; the longer, warmer days. As the earth breaks the cast of winter and begins the movement of spring, we are afforded the chance to reflect on the burdens we carry in our lives and in our communities and to find ways to relieve them. It is an opportunity to change our view of ourselves in this world, to see ourselves as an integral part of the global community, and to understanding how we can impact it through our commitment to justice—to being true to our selves and working toward it in our world.

Just as the phoenix rises anew from the ashes of its former self, we too can emerge from this season a new community fully committed to changing our world, and being changed by it, by putting our faith in action.

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In 2002, I traveled to Guatemala with a group of 12 women to be a witness to the injustices endured by the people of Guatemala during three decades of civil war. One particularly moving account of the trauma experienced by Mayan people at the hands of the government forces was told to me by a young woman named Feliciana. She was one of the leaders of Conavigua, an organization of Mayan widows. They work to empower other women; to give them back their respect; to teach them about their rights as human beings with the possibility of a peaceful, productive future. Conavigua also educates and trains community health workers who go back into the rural villages to provide services to those who grieve and suffer where their lives were so disrupted. This is Feliciana’s story as I heard it.

“I was the youngest of four children born to a family of Mayan peasants in a small village in the Quiche region. My mother was very sickly following my birth, so I did not know the love and warmth of my mother. It was my sister, the oldest of my siblings, who took care of me and my brothers, while our father worked on the *fincas*, the plantations, in the southern part of the country. Together, we four children maintained the small plot of land, our *milpa*, that our father farms on which grew our (sacred) corn, and the beans and squashes on which we depended.

In 1982, when I was twelve years old, my sister disappeared. My mother was in despair, and I was in despair, and together we traveled to all the neighboring villages to ask “Has anyone seen my daughter, my sister?” We even walked the twelve miles down to the site of the army base in our region, to ask at the gate as to the welfare of the missing one. For two weeks we searched in vain, never finding any clue to my

sister's whereabouts. Then, at 4 a.m. on August 23, 1982, the army came to my village as we slept. They came in their trucks and their helicopters, to a village of 72 people who were peaceful, who weren't organized, who were farmers and weavers. They army gathered the people from their houses, then separated them, and the women were raped and the men were slaughtered. I hid with the animals while my mother and brothers were rounded up, and then fled into the mountains leading my 6 year-old nephew, the son of my beloved older sister, who had "disappeared" during a trip to the market in town to buy supplies. We fled without anything-no shoes, no food, no blankets, no water. We ran high into the mountains all that day and through the night, through that week; up into the mountains, walking over thorns and prickly cactus, scrub and rocks, searching for water, for shelter, for food. And I watched as my beautiful nephew's feet bled and then festered, as he cried from hunger and thirst, then screamed in pain and died. I buried him on that mountain, under rocks so the animals wouldn't eat his body. The beautiful son of my sister.

Only months later was Feliciana able to make her way down from the mountains, back to her village. There, she found the evidence of the massacre, back at the village. There she found the evidence of the massacre, found the ravine where the bodies had been dumped, found the few other survivors from her village. She will never forget what happened on August 23, 1982. To this day, Feliciana believes that the army is intent on genocide, on eliminating the Maya, so that their land could be confiscated. Along with a monetary donation to Conavigua, we gave Feliciana a seedling tree, a token of our hope for the life and future of her people.

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Sometimes we start down a path not fully realizing the impact that we will have. Sometimes we are part of a larger picture and we are too close to see it. Sometimes we are the messengers of hope and agents of change by our actions and our words.

About 10 years ago, I began a journey of self-discovery and awareness, never realizing the impact of what I was about to do. I thought that I was out of the closet having disclosed to my family in 1970 that I was a lesbian. At work, I knew that I was not to talk about my lifestyle. After all, it was nobody's business but my own.

I listened sympathetically when a fellow gay worker would tell me that his partner was laid off, and that they could not afford health insurance on their own. I subconsciously feared reprisal, loss of promotions, ridicule by office mates, and even potential dismissal from my job. I silently watched as friends with AIDS pretended that there was nothing wrong for fear of disdain. And quietly laughed along as gay and lesbian jokes were being told.

Until one day I woke up.

In 1994, I decided that I needed to take a stand, to speak out, and to change my environment at work. I needed to be who I was; I needed full protection and full benefits like everyone else. So, I put a picture of my partner on my desk, I told my boss, and I gathered a few friends together to talk about the issues that we faced on the job. As my passion grew and my determination became stronger, so did the group and our focus. Within 6 months, we had formed an employee organization that asked to be heard, demanded change and formed a community that would not be quiet any longer.

The change would be monumental, and the impact broad. In the 5 years that followed,

- ❖ Our EEO policy was changed to include sexual orientation.
- ❖ The employee group was officially recognized to be the voice of the GLBT community.
- ❖ Pride events and AIDS walks were advertised and financially supported.
- ❖ Advertisements were placed in the BLADE.
- ❖ Programs and services were developed with the LGBT community in mind.
- ❖ AND in 1999, Bell Atlantic (now Verizon) instituted domestic partner benefits.

The group also did presentations throughout the company on what it meant to have a safe work environment. I can remember one face very clearly who came up to me afterwards and said how grateful she was for our work and how much of a difference it would make. She said, "Although I am not able to speak out, you have given me a voice."

One voice can make a difference, one act can change reality forever. God does work through us. God uses us to change ourselves, our community, and the world. Sometimes when we set out to correct an injustice for ourselves, we are paving the way for others.

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There is documented history of gays and lesbians fleeing to this country seeking asylum based on governmental persecution. While grants of asylum have grown in number, it is still extremely difficult for gays and lesbians to get an award of asylum. Perhaps the most important legal-setting precedent grant of asylum to gays and lesbians was the grant to Fidel Toboso-Alfonso on March 12, 1990. In its decision, the US Board of Immigration Appeals was faced with a gay Cuban who had been forced to leave the country during the Mariel boat lift. Toboso-Alfonso has been continually persecuted while in his native Cuba, merely for his orientation, not for any particular act relating to that orientation. After years of persecution involving unnecessary medical examinations and detentions, the chief of police informed him that he could spend four years in the penitentiary for being gay, or leave Cuba for the United States. However, the US Immigration and Naturalization Service had first refused to grant asylum because they did not consider homosexuals as a particular social group entitled to protection under the law. But the Board of Immigration Appeals overruled this and stated that homosexuals were protected under the law as a particular social group subject to persecution by the State. Four years after this decision, in 1994 Attorney General Janet Reno issued an order designating the Toboso-Alfonso case as precedent in all proceedings involving the same issue. This laid the foundation for finding persecution based on sexual orientation as a basis for asylum.

But the worldwide persecution continues. In Egypt, for examples, charges of debauchery and prostitution are being used to criminalize consensual homosexual relations. The latest arrests in 2003 were not a new phenomenon but a police witch-hunt of marginalized lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons. Countries they were fleeing from include Romania, Brazil, Columbia, Jordan, Guatemala, Iran, El Salvador, Peru, Pakistan, Russia, Chile, China, Yemen, Mexico, Turkey, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Singapore, Eritrea, Honduras, Lebanon, Albania, and the Togo-Ivory Coast. Many of these sexual orientation cases involve countries where police mistreatment of gays and lesbians is either officially sanctioned or openly accepted if not encouraged.

Appendix F. Worship Bulletin from A Holy Union (November 1, 2003)

**Holy Union**

Philippians 4:4-9

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers [and sisters], whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

we are blessed by your presence....

love heals

love heals

love heals

**Holy Union**

For  
**Cassie  
& Colleen**

friday, november 1st

at mccnova  
friday

november 1st

love heals

love heals

love heals

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Holy Union</b></p> <p>PRELUDE</p> <p>COUPLE'S ENTRANCE "Air on the G String"</p> <p>WELCOME</p> <p>SONG "Nobody Loves Me Like You Do"</p> <p>READINGS</p> <p>FIRST READING - Jewish/Islam SECOND READING - Native American THIRD READING - Goddess Reading FOURTH READING - Blessing From Rig Veda FIFTH READING - The Apotheosis Wedding Prayer SIXTH READING - A Celtic Blessing</p> <p>HOMILY</p> <p>EXCHANGE OF VOWS</p> <p>EXCHANGE OF TOKENS</p> <p>EMBRACE OF COUPLE</p> <p>PRAYERS</p> <p>Leader: Let us pray. O Creator and Life Energy, we confess that we have often cheapened love. We have sentimentalized it, or equated it with mere physical response, or narrowed it to selfish demands and expectations. We confess that we have often loved only those people who return our love or are like us. May we learn to love regardless of return or condition, as you love us. Forgive us for failing to love as you have first loved us.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Holy Union</b></p> <p>PRAYERS (Continued)</p> <p>Congregation: Dear Creator and Life Energy, we thank you that Colleen and Cassie have invited us to celebrate their commitment of love to each other. In a world frightened of commitment, we admire their courage to covenant together, to give each other the gifts of love throughout their life together. May we honor their invitation to us to join them in this ceremony by honoring and giving support to their growing relationship.</p> <p>Leader: May the glow from their union help light our own way in finding meaning-filled love relationships and in discovering new meaning in the love relationships we already enjoy. May we unite with them in their covenant as we commit ourselves to embrace them as a couple and as individuals of unique value in your sight. In the name of Jesus Christ, the one who taught us how to love, we pray. Amen.</p> <p>COMMUNION</p> <p>LIGHTING OF UNITY CANDLE</p> <p>MINISTERS AFFIRMATION</p> <p>FINAL HYMN</p> <p style="text-align: center;">"And God Will Raise You Up"</p> <p style="text-align: center;">And God will raise you up, on eagle's wings, Bear you on the breath of dawn, Make you to shine like the sun, And hold you in the palm of God's hands.</p> <p>PARTING BLESSING</p> <p>POSTLUDE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Thank you for coming!</p>
<p>Guy Lotrecchiano</p> <p>Guy Lotrecchiano Bach</p> <p>Rev. Stephanie Burns</p> <p>Ren Jamieson &amp; Kelli Butler (originally recorded by Artist: Anne Murray with Dave Loggins)</p> <p>Emma Chattin Janet Avery Ginny Reed Emma Chattin Janet Avery Ginny Reed</p> <p>Rev. Stephanie Burns</p> <p>Cassie and Colleen</p> <p>Cassie and Colleen</p> <p>Rev. Stephanie Burns</p>	<p>Rev. Stephanie Burns</p> <p>Rev. Stephanie Burns</p> <p>Cassie and Colleen</p> <p>Rev. Stephanie Burns</p> <p>Community of Friends &amp; Family</p> <p>Rev. Stephanie Burns</p> <p>Guy Lotrecchiano</p>



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