

Praying at the Edges

Theology of an “Emergent,” Anglo-Catholic Sunday Evening Eucharist

At 5:00 p.m. on Sunday, September 27, 2009, the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels (transferred), St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Seattle, Washington, launched a new weekly celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Dramatic growth in attendance at the principal morning Mass created a felt need for this “third” Sunday liturgy. Equally important, it provided an opportunity to gather new people to the parish, especially young people in their twenties and thirties and those unable or disinclined to worship in an Episcopal Church on Sunday morning. The goal was to create a eucharistic service that neither copied the Sunday morning liturgies nor departed jarringly from the parish’s established pattern of liturgical life. The result, “Sunday Evenings at St. Paul’s,” meets in the more intimate worship space of a refurbished parish hall, with altar at the center of the room, assembly and liturgical ministers seated around. The service features inclusive and expansive language, a distinctive musical style and repertoire, a “shared homily,” engagement with artists in residence, and significant time of fellowship that opens out to the work of justice and peace.

In public communications, St. Paul’s does not use “emergent” to describe its 5:00 p.m. Sunday liturgy. The term has, however, been applied to the service by others in the diocese and wider church. And it sometimes gets used as shorthand in private conversation within the parish. But what does it mean? The titles and subtitles of books on emergent Christianity or emerging (or deep, missional, neo-monastic, hyphenated) church are already suggestive: *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why*, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, *A Christianity Worth Believing*, *Creating Christian Community in Postmodern*

Cultures, The Gospel after Christendom.¹ Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel offer phrases such as these in describing the “deconstruction” of the church they believe “Emerging Christians” practice: “anti-institutional,” “a form of ecumenism that transcends many theological and ecclesial boundaries,” “actively seek[ing] to avoid entrenched power structures by bringing young adults into leadership and decision-making in their local church context,” “experimentation and creativity,” “striving to create a new type of ‘neutral religious space’ that is church-ish without being church-y.”² In one of his twenty “dispatches,” Tony Jones asserts, “Emergents believe that church should function more like an open-source network and less like a hierarchy or a bureaucracy,” and he goes on to speak of the “Wikichurch” because of its accessibility, mutual accountability, agility, connectivity, and messiness.³ And so it seems less inappropriate than it might otherwise be in a scholarly context to cite the Wikipedia entry on “Emerging Church”:

The emerging church was a Christian movement of the late 20th and early 21st century that crosses a number of theological boundaries. . . . Proponents believe the movement transcends such “modernist” labels of “conservative” and “liberal,” calling the movement a “conversation” to emphasize its developing and decentralized nature, its vast range of standpoints, and its commitment to dialogue. Participants seek to live their faith in what they believe to be a “postmodern” society. What those involved in the conversation mostly agree on is their disillusionment with the organized and institutional church and their support for the

¹ Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008); Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004); Doug Pagitt, *A Christianity Worth Believing* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008); Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005); Ryan K. Bolger, ed., *The Gospel after Christendom: New Voices, New Cultures, New Expressions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012).

² Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 27–28.

³ Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontiers* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 180–92.

deconstruction of modern Christian worship, modern evangelism, and the nature of modern Christian community.⁴

Closer to the focus of this essay, in their study of “emergent” communities within the Episcopal Church USA and “fresh expression” efforts in the Church of England, Bishops Mary Gray-Reeves and Michael Perham identify five characteristics of such worship: “every liturgical occasion requires careful detailed planning”; “welcome precedes any sense of either belonging or believing”; “the liturgy expresses indigenous authenticity”; “liturgy needs to be multi-sensory and have complexity”; and “a primary aim of worship is to feed the soul.”⁵

On the other hand, St. Paul’s has long and explicitly claimed the label “Anglo-Catholic.” Textbook discussions of Anglo-Catholicism refer back to the Oxford or Tractarian Movement in England with its emphasis on “the continuity of Anglicanism with ancient Christianity, [the attempt] to reconnect Anglicanism with its medieval Catholic roots . . . [and] the importance of liturgy and traditional Christian doctrine.”⁶ According to its own website:

St. Paul’s is an Anglo-Catholic parish, a more specific expression of the Anglican/Episcopal Church that arose out of particular historical circumstances. Rooted in the retention of Catholic Christianity within the English reformation, Anglo-Catholicism emerged as a dissident movement within an 18th-century church that had so absorbed the rationalism of its time that it had lost sight of the importance of the sacraments and of the centrality of an experience of awe and wonder in the spiritual life. As Anglo-Catholics, our ultimate worship experience is one in which we not only glimpse but enter into and taste something of the beauty and

⁴ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emerging_church, accessed November 17, 2015.

⁵ *The Hospitality of God: Emerging Worship for a Missional Church* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011), 22–23. During their travels for the book, Gray-Reeves and Perham worshiped at St. Paul’s on a Sunday morning in 2010, not as an emergent congregation (although they acknowledge the existence of the 5:00 p.m. alternative service), but as a baseline example of the creative, missional possibilities of “inherited” worship; see 5–6, 38–39, 50, 79–80, and 100–101 for their discussion of Sunday morning worship at St. Paul’s.

⁶ Ted A. Campbell, *Christian Confessions: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996), 129–30. See also David L. Holmes, *A Brief History of the Episcopal Church* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993), 103–12.

mystery of God. About 10% of parishes in the Episcopal Church call themselves Anglo-Catholic. The following are elements that exist in many of these parishes: Sacramental . . . ; Prayerful . . . ; Surrounded by a Great Cloud of Witnesses . . . ; Reverential, Expressed through Music, the Senses and the Body . . . ; Committed to Beauty and Justice Together.⁷

Hence, the initial questions motivating our study: Could an Anglo-Catholic Episcopal parish host a liturgy appropriately called emergent? Would not post-modern liturgical experimentation supplant Anglo-Catholic sensitivities and practices? Or, the other way around: Would not Anglo-Catholic eucharistic traditions make impossible emergent improvisation? These are not simply hypothetical questions. They have been asked at St. Paul’s itself. During a town hall meeting in the spring of 2014 hosted by the Profile Committee as part of the parish’s search for a new rector, someone opined that “Sunday Evenings at St. Paul’s” signals a “fraying at the edges” of the parish’s Anglo-Catholic identity. By contrast, a seminarian interning at St. Paul’s but formed by Seattle’s Church of the Apostles (a high-profile Lutheran-Episcopal emergent community), asked about the Sunday evening liturgy, “Where’s the experimentation?”

While the authors of this essay helped plant and/or cultivate the 5:00 p.m. liturgy and care about its health, our goal here is to marshal a description of “Sunday Evenings at St. Paul’s” and offer an assessment of its liturgical theology. We shall argue that “*praying* at the edges” is more apt than “*fraying*.” *At the edges* to be sure, the edges of St. Paul’s physical plant, of the Christian week and the Lord’s day, of congregational and liturgical leadership as usual. But genuinely *praying* nonetheless: through adaptation and improvisation bringing to the fore countercultural possibilities of catholic worship often suppressed by the tradition itself.

We discern three distinct theologies ingredient in the 5:00 p.m. Sunday Mass: the *prior* liturgical theology operative in the parish that served as generative matrix for its creation; the *aspirational* theology responsible for its specific content and character; and an *alternative* theology discovered after having

⁷ <http://www.stpaulseattle.org/spirituality/anglo-catholic>, accessed November 11, 2014.

worshiped repeatedly in this way on Sunday evenings over time. After briefly noting the first two, we pay greater attention to the third of these liturgical theologies. Gathered community forms the liturgical and theological heart of the Sunday evening service. And a distinctive ecclesiology, anthropology, cosmology, and doctrine of God emerge from gathering around the altar and across from one another. We contend that "Sunday Evenings at St. Paul's" offers a critique of and alternative to cultural values of individualism, consumerism, hierarchy, haste, hatred of the body, of women, and of children. By way of conclusion, we wonder about hidden lessons concerning baptism and Eucharist, as well as the ongoing life of the parish, at the intersection of emergent and Anglo-Catholic liturgical impulses.

ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

St. Paul's began as a log cabin mission in 1892, then constructed a church building at its current location in the lower Queen Anne neighborhood in 1903. A structure housing chapel, church offices, and education rooms was added in the 1930s. By the late 1950s, the parish had purchased property on top of Queen Anne Hill, a more suburban-like, residential area, with the goal of relocating there from its already busy, gritty location. A new rector, however, led the congregation to reverse those plans and remain at 15 Roy Street: staying connected to urban Seattle, recommitted to being a reconciling presence in a place with many challenges, needs, and opportunities. The charge to its patron, St. Paul, to "go into the city and you will be told what you must do" (Acts 9:6) served as an emblem of this decision and adorned parish letterhead for years. A new building for worship was built and consecrated in 1963—in a dramatic Pacific Northwest–inflected mid-century modern style—during the Seattle World's Fair just a few blocks away. The fairgrounds have since become the Seattle Center, a major tourist and artistic destination, today encompassing the opera house, professional theatres, museums, the city's indoor sports and concert venue, and the iconic Space Needle.

The website proclaims: "St. Paul's is an accepting, progressive Anglo-Catholic parish renewing people for their Christian lives in the world through worship, spiritual formation, engagement with the arts, life in community, and acts of

compassion." Other self-descriptions include: "Today, St. Paul's is a growing congregation; a place of prayer where the senses are fully engaged in the worship of God; . . . where ancient ritual speaks to the experience of today's life"; and "We are urban and diverse—a little funky (adults and children, young and old, women and men, gay and straight, single, partnered, and married); . . . exploring how to enact justice and compassion locally and globally; . . . friendly and respectful of the space of those who visit us."⁸

St. Paul's called its first female rector in 2005 and asked her to lead the congregation in securing membership growth (especially among families with children) and greater financial stability, while at the same time strengthening the parish's rich tradition of Anglo-Catholic worship and Benedictine rhythms of prayer.⁹ In addition to the 5:00 p.m. Sunday Eucharist, this effort eventuated in a major renovation of the 1963 worship space. Three pairs of values expressed the aims of the renovation: visibility and accessibility, identity and hospitality, beauty and flexibility. Notable changes included an expanded glass entryway surrounding a new baptismal font with flowing water and accommodating full immersion of adults and children, visibly signaling to the cars and pedestrians on Roy Street the centrality of baptism to Christian life in the world; an accessible bathroom in the entryway; a new ramp down to the parish hall; a free-standing altar designed by the same artist who created the font; new windows in the nave in Northwest blues, greens, and golds; improved lighting in chancel and nave; refinished pews, benches, and credence table; new flooring; and more harmonious paint on the altar wall. The renovated worship space was first used on Christmas Eve 2011.¹⁰ Although this was two years after the launch of "Sunday Evenings at St. Paul's," the two projects were intimately connected.

⁸ "Renewing St. Paul's for the Next 50 Years" [capital campaign case booklet], 2.

⁹ The Rt. Rev. Melissa Skelton is now bishop of the Diocese of New Westminster (British Columbia), Anglican Church of Canada. She served as rector of St. Paul's from 2005 to 2014. Although she was the parish's first female rector, lore has it that St. Paul's was the first parish in the diocese to elect a woman to its vestry and to welcome a female deacon.

¹⁰ The architect for the renovation has published an article on the project: Susan Jones, "The Forest in the City," *Faith and Form: The Interfaith Journal on Religion, Art, and Architecture* 46, no. 2 (2013): 15–19.

Meanwhile, by 2008, after three years of leadership from the new rector, average Sunday attendance at St. Paul's had more than doubled. The 10:30 a.m. Mass was beginning to feel uncomfortably full to some. The parish had also become more intentional about its Anglo-Catholic identity and more confident in seeking to make its spiritual and liturgical gifts accessible to a wider group of people. And so both as response to and catalyst for growth and as a means to advance its mission, St. Paul's embarked on a congregational development process that culminated in the third Sunday liturgy. Town hall meetings were held to discuss the experience of numerical growth. A small group of clergy and laypeople formed a planning team—led by the rector, commissioned by the vestry, and supported by a diocesan grant. Their work fell into four areas: worship space and furnishings, liturgy and music, community development, and communications. The Sunday evening Mass was held for the first time in September 2009. Since then, the average Sunday attendance of the parish doubled again—requiring additional liturgical expansion. So, along with the 5:00 p.m. liturgy, St. Paul's now offers three Sunday morning Masses (at 7:30, 9:00, and 11:15) and hosts the weekly bilingual Spanish-English Eucharist of Our Lady of Guadalupe Episcopal Church at 1:30 p.m.

SUNDAY EVENINGS AT ST. PAUL'S ¹¹

The text of the principal advertising for the 5:00 p.m. liturgy catches up its aspirations through questions provoked and juxtapositions made:

ancient ritual

the holy meal

sacred conversation

open hearts and open minds

silence and stillness

beauty and mystery

¹¹ The Rev. Stephen Crippen, now serving as deacon at St. Paul's, wrote an article on the 5:00 p.m. liturgy for the diocesan newsletter: "Sunday Evening at St. Paul's: The Marriage of Congregational Development and Anglican Liturgical Principles," *Episcopal Voice* 20, no. 11 (November 2009): V1, V3; we are indebted to his account.

Yes, that is how the words appear on postcards, flyers, signboards, and websites. But how does one read them? From left to right, which means from bottom to top? Or, from the top down, which means right to left? Ancient ritual offered to those unfamiliar with Anglo-Catholicism (former evangelical Protestants as well as the unchurched). Conversation juxtaposed to silence; sacred conversation side-by-side with the holy meal. Actively participating in a conversation instead of passively receiving a monologue? Open hearts and open minds: welcome? an invitation to freedom and exploration? Beyond wordy, conceptual certainties, beauty and mystery: palpable, allusive and elusive. A desert of silence and stillness amid the frantic, noisy oasis of contemporary culture and church.¹²

And yet the "new" Sunday liturgy for "new" people and "renewed" mission maintains continuity with existing liturgical practices and values of St. Paul's. Adaptation, not deconstruction is at work. The parish has a long history of demonstrating that faithfulness to ancient patterns held in tension with creative, even daring, innovation provides renewal for the church here and now. Through the Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission, rectors in the 1960s and 1970s lobbied for innovations such as the centrality of baptism and the Eucharist as normative Christian worship on Sunday, innovations authorized later by the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*. In the early 1980s, a documentary film was made of a Sunday morning Mass at St. Paul's to show that Rite II Holy Eucharist in the 1979 prayer book (a service in contemporary American English, reflecting twentieth-century theological impulses) could be celebrated with no loss of beauty and mystery.¹³ Later in the 1980s, St. Paul's was the first religious community in the region to adapt its healing rituals to minister to men with AIDS. For six months in the late 1990s, St. Paul's used and evaluated the alternative eucharistic liturgies of what came to be authorized as *Enriching Our Worship, I*.¹⁴

¹² Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God* (Orleans, MA: Paraclete Press, 2006), 42, 56.

¹³ "Do This for the Remembrance of Me" (New York: Communications Office—The Episcopal Church USA, 1985).

¹⁴ New York: Church Publishing, 1998.

"Sunday Evenings at St. Paul's" takes place downstairs in the parish hall, directly beneath the nave where morning Masses are held. Worshipers access the space by way of a dedicated gate and outside ramp a few dozen feet west of the main doors to the church. As Phase One of the building renovation, the ramp was rebuilt to be smoother, gentler, and safer, while the parish hall itself was repaired, repainted, and refurbished. Floor-to-ceiling windows look east on to the Bolster Memorial Garden where the ashes of departed parishioners are interred. The terraced garden is green all year round with small trees, ornamental shrubs and grasses, perennials, and annuals. A smaller green space borders the entrance ramp and is visible through windows atop the west wall.

A purpose-built wooden altar thirty-eight inches tall and thirty-six inches square stands in the center of the room. At one end of a diagonal axis bisecting the room, a presider's chair is placed; at the other end, a wooden lectern—both facing the altar. Worshipers and assisting ministers sit in an oval (or rounded diamond with four quadrants) around the altar facing in toward one another on new stackable wood and metal chairs. Pillar candles on freestanding black iron candlesticks flank the altar and the lectern. A matching candelabra stands along the west wall, while other candleholders hang on chains by the windows on both sides of the room. A grand piano sits in the northwest corner, a Mary shrine opposite up against the windows to the Bolster Garden. The shrine consists of a large image of the Virgin of Vladimir behind a low wooden table supporting a bowl of sand into which candles can be placed by worshipers. All these furnishings must be set up from scratch and removed completely and placed in storage by the community each Sunday to accommodate the many other uses of the space.

For the first year or so, an urn with water and submersible pump sat outside the entry door at the base of the ramp. A host of difficulties plagued this water feature. With the completion of the new baptismal font upstairs, the giant stoneware garden bowl that had been the parish's font migrated downstairs. It now sits inside the entry door offering a more capacious basin for baptismal remembrance.

That any experimentation connected with "Sunday Evenings at St. Paul's" would occur *within* the parameters of the eucharistic rites authorized by the



The Mary Shrine for "Sunday Evenings at St. Paul's."
Photo: Dot Cellini.

1979 prayer book (and supplements), and not *instead* or *in spite* of them, was a nonnegotiable assumption of the planning team. The order of worship at 5:00 p.m., therefore, is exactly what it is for the morning Masses: gathering, liturgy of the word with homily, creed, and prayers, thanksgiving over bread and wine with communion, and sending.

In terms of ceremonial, the 5:00 p.m. Mass falls somewhere between the poles represented by the 7:30 a.m. service (said Mass, no music, no incense) and the 11:15 a.m. "principal" Sunday service of the parish (entering and retiring processions with cross, torches, and incense; seven vested lay servers, deacon or assisting priest, and priest-presider; a choir of twelve to sixteen members with four paid section leaders; five hymns in addition to a sung Gloria or alternative and other service music; incense at the gospel and offertory; cope for the liturgy

of the word with a change to chasuble for the liturgy of the altar). The goal at 5:00 p.m. was to retain a rich, participatory worship experience engaging the body and all the senses, yet in a simpler, more contemplative mode, with fewer seasonal variations. The presider (vested in chasuble throughout) and two assisting ministers enter informally at the beginning; no procession. Incense is used just twice: first, to cense the gospel book and, later at the offertory, the gifts of bread, wine, and money, the altar, the presider, other ministers, and assembly. Gestures and postures during worship do replicate those upstairs during morning Masses: signs of the cross; simple bows at the name of Jesus; profound bows at the incarnational words in the creed, the beginning of the Sanctus, and following each set of the words of institution.

Much of the liturgy is sung: opening acclamation, song of praise (Gloria or seasonal alternative), collect of the day, psalm, alleluia verse (when used), Nicene Creed, offertory hymn, Great Thanksgiving from opening dialogue through the Sanctus (but no bell as upstairs), doxology, Lord's Prayer, fraction anthem, Taizé-style songs after communion, closing hymn, blessing, and dismissal. A piano accompanies worship at 5:00 p.m.; the pipe organ upstairs is used at 9:00 and 11:15 a.m.

The 5:00 p.m. liturgy features a contemplative, improvisational jazz idiom throughout—piano prelude and postlude music, but also accompaniments. For the sake of commonality, many of the same settings of service music, especially the simpler ones, come downstairs from the morning Masses: the David Hurd *New Plainsong* Gloria, Mason Martens' Plainsong Creed and Ambrosian Lord's Prayer.¹⁵ But they are sung more slowly in the evening and swung a bit. The former rector used to fall into a light-hearted jazz step as she made her counterclockwise circuit around the altar swinging the thurible to the pianist's improvisation on the offertory hymn. The 9:00 and 11:15 a.m. services use the 1982 *Hymnal* of the Episcopal Church with few additions. "Sunday Evenings at St. Paul's" draws on a broader range of recent hymnody. Materials from Hope Publishing, Carl Daw Jr., and Fred Pratt Green are particularly prominent.

¹⁵ *The Hymnal 1982* (New York: Church Publishing, 1985), S277, S104, S148.

While the morning services worship according to Rite II Holy Eucharist from the 1979 prayer book, the liturgy at 5:00 p.m. has been transposed into a more contemporary key, that of *Enriching Our Worship, I*, with its non-gender exclusive language for both God and human beings, as well as expansive metaphors drawing on women's experience. So, for instance, the chanted Opening Acclamation goes: "Blessed be the one, holy, and living God. / Glory to God for ever and ever." After each Scripture reading, the lector concludes: "Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people." A few lines from Eucharistic Prayer 2: "Your Spirit moved over the deep and brought all things into being: . . . You made us in your image, . . . [b]ut we . . . wandered far away; and yet, as a mother cares for her children, you would not forget us." The final blessing might be one from St. Clare: "Live without fear; your Creator has made you holy, has always protected you, and loves you as a mother. Go in peace to follow the good road and may God's blessing be with you always. Amen."¹⁶

More improvisational still, the planning team worked together to compose a eucharistic prayer for the service (and had the bishop diocesan approve it). It is firmly based on Anglican/Episcopal patterns but tried on fresh words and images such as "You made us in your image, male and female, and gave us the freedom to walk in your ways, to live in your love"; "you sent Jesus, your Incarnate Word, born of a woman, . . . He lived among us, fully human, yet free from sin. He proclaimed your gospel of healing and release, of joy and hope"; "Open our eyes to see the Savior in these gifts, revealing in them our new and eternal life"; and a doxology naming "the blessed Virgin Mary, the apostle Paul, and all those who have preceded us in the faith."

Perhaps the most significant and intentional innovation at 5:00 p.m., beyond the physical space itself, is the "shared homily." The preacher, whether priest, deacon, or one of a small group of laypersons (members of the liturgy planning team), offers seven minutes or so of orienting remarks, drawing a single, clear theme or issue out of one or more of the readings. Then instead of wrapping everything up beautifully and symmetrically, she or he poses a wondering question or two about what it all might mean, to which anyone in the room can respond with a brief comment. *Brief* responses, not long disquisitions; *responses*

¹⁶ *Enriching Our Worship, I* 50, 53, 60, and 71.

to the preacher's words, *reflections* on any of the Scripture readings for the evening, or on the occasion in the church year, in the life of the parish, the nation, the world. The shared homily is *not* meant to be free group therapy. Each response is allowed to stand on its own—no crosstalk, no dialogue. The presider calls the shared homily to an end with the ringing of a bell, followed by silence and stillness, before all rise to sing the creed. To facilitate the shared homily, lectionary readings are distributed electronically earlier in the week to all on the community's email listserv.

During some seasons of the church year, the Sunday evening community engages the work of an artist in residence: to date, a photographer, a painter, several poets, actors, and musicians, a dancer, and an installation artist. When an artist in residence is present, the second reading from the lectionary, the epistle reading, is omitted and engagement with the artist's work happens at that point in the service. When the art is visual or tactile, the gathered worshipers stand up and move around the room to stations where the art is displayed. When it is a musician, poet, or actor, the assembly stays put, although the artist may move around. The work of the artist adds one more "word" to the evening. Not the last word, for the proclamation of the gospel and homily always follow.

As soon as the service ends, wooden panels screening off the parish kitchen to the south are opened, revealing a pass through and countertop on which substantial food and drinks are set out. A significant time of fellowship ensues, in the same room as the conversation around Scripture and the sharing of the eucharistic meal. Once a month, this time of fellowship is moved across the street to a neighborhood pub.

Because of its novel and improvisational nature, the 5:00 p.m. liturgy received intense community development. The original planning team committed to attendance every week for the first three months largely in order to model the kind of spoken responses appropriate during the shared homily. Leadership has evolved. In the second year of its life, the rector created and filled the position of "lay pastor" for the 5:00 p.m. community. Five years on, most of the original planning team has been replaced by people raised up into leadership roles from within the community. The same is true of those who serve at the altar. In ad-

dition to regular monthly meetings, the planning team gives special attention to the seasons of Advent, Lent, and Easter. During Eastertide 2014 (Year A), under the broad theme "Meeting Jesus in New Ways," the following specific weekly themes emerged, suggested by the gospel readings: meeting Jesus in the wounded (John 20), at a table that transforms the journey (Luke 24), as a threshold (John 10), where we live (John 14), in "other" places (John 14), as he disappears (John 17). These weekly themes were offered as guidance to the preachers as well as to the artist in residence. Other seasonal themes have included casting off and putting on (Advent 2012), nourishment (Lent 2013), and becoming whole (Easter 2015).

Initially, a time of adult formation after the liturgy was anticipated. We soon learned that following an evening service with fellowship and then formation did not work. Instead, three times a year, evening and morning worshipers come together for "Tapping the BCP [*Book of Common Prayer*]," a combination beer tasting and teaching/discussion of Anglican/Episcopal liturgy and spirituality. Enquirers' classes for those thinking about membership are offered seasonally on Saturdays and bring together folk from all the Masses at St. Paul's (including Guadalupe). In six years, ten 5:00 p.m. worshipers have been baptized, eight confirmed or received, and four couples married. Attendance on Sunday evening has ranged from just under twenty to almost one hundred; thirty-five to fifty turns out to be both typical and optimal.

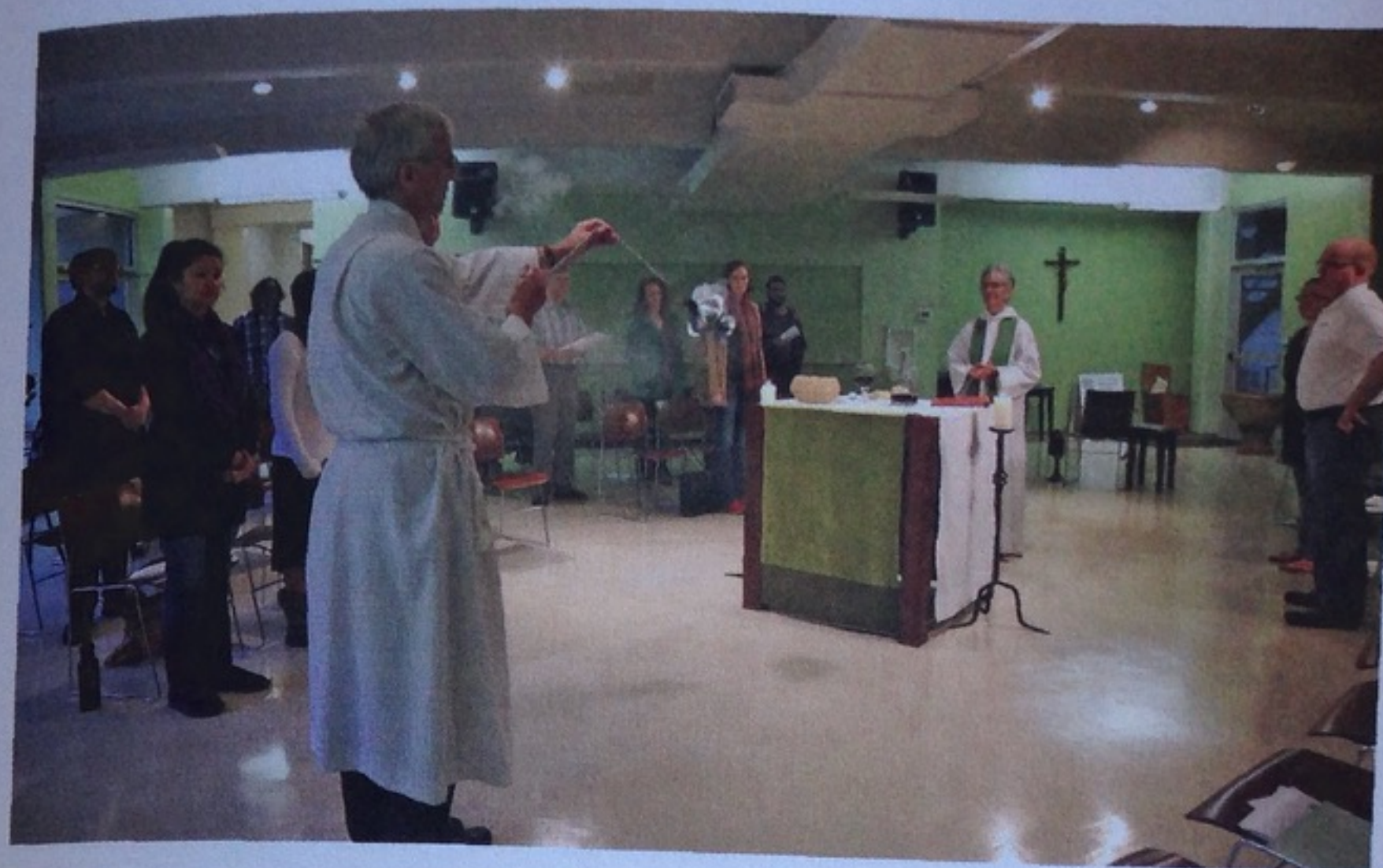
THEOLOGY OF SUNDAY EVENINGS AT ST. PAUL'S
Of course, because believing shapes praying as much as praying shapes believing, St. Paul's possessed an operative liturgical theology *prior* to the creation of the 5:00 p.m. service. Chief features of that theology include the following. Ancient patterns of Christian worship remain life-giving today. Liturgy ought to be deeply communal, participatory, and inviting; all of the parish's Sunday worship aids say: "If you are unfamiliar with the ritual customs of the Episcopal Church, simply relax with the liturgy and let the rest of the congregation carry you in worship." Liturgy resembles a beautiful dance. The foundational form of Christian ministry is baptismal. Ordained ministries should be open to all God's people (women, gays, and lesbians). Because the parish worships according to the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, St. Paul's prior, operative theology is

trinitarian, with strong, experientially rooted images of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, and the Father (even if “he” is spoken of in female terms). It acknowledges both the created goodness of human beings, as well as their sin (compare the Rite II prayer of confession to its predecessor in Rite I: “We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.” / “We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we . . . most grievously have committed against thy divine Majesty”). The theology affirms that the material world matters to God (in Eucharistic Prayer D, for instance, where human beings join with angels and give voice to every creature under heaven in singing “Holy, Holy, Holy,” and Prayer C, where at God’s command “the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses, and this fragile earth, our island home” came to be and from whose “primal elements” God “brought forth the human race”).¹⁷

This prior, operative theology provided a generative matrix for “Sunday Evenings at St. Paul’s.” A second, *aspirational* theology, summarized in those six phrases—ancient ritual, the holy meal, sacred conversation, open hearts and open minds, silence and stillness, beauty and mystery—gave birth to the specific content and character of the service.¹⁸

¹⁷ *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing, 1979), 360, 331, 373, 370.

¹⁸ Without claiming to speak for other members of the 5:00 p.m. liturgy planning team(s)—current or original—we would lift up the following as important sources of our theologizing. First, several feminist, eco-feminist, and womanist thinkers: Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993); Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), and *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001); Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993). Second, in the realm of liturgical theology: Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, 2nd rev. and exp. ed. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982); Bernhard Lang, *Sacred Games: A History of Christian Worship* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), *Holy People: A Liturgical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003). Third, around worship within a specifically Anglican and Episcopal context: Jeffrey Lee, *Opening the Prayer Book* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1999); Louis Weil, *A Theology of Worship* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2002). And fourth, from the new area of “child theology,” Jerome W. Berryman, *Children and the Theologians:*



The intimacy of encounter at 5:00 p.m. supports a theology of relationship and co-agency with God. Photo: Dot Celini.

While it may be a truism with respect to any liturgy in any worship space, nevertheless: we helped build the 5:00 p.m. liturgy and it then turned around and built us. So, now we sketch a third liturgical theology ingredient in “Sunday Evenings at St. Paul’s,” an *alternative* one, discovered only after having worshiped at this hour, in this place, and according to this pattern repeatedly, over time. After all, praying shapes believing as much as believing shapes praying.¹⁹

AROUND THE ALTAR AND ACROSS FROM ONE ANOTHER
Gathered community forms the liturgical and theological heart of the Sunday evening Mass. This liturgy declares loudly and clearly that the primary liturgical reality is the assembly itself. As wonderfully numinous as the “upstairs”

Clearing the Way for Grace (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2009); see our essay, “Playing with Pictures of Paradox: Children and Christology in Kierkegaard and Godly Play,” *Journal of Childhood and Religion* 4, no. 4 (2013): 1–66.

¹⁹ Maxwell E. Johnson’s recent book helpfully complicates the reception of Prosper of Aquitaine’s dictum *lex orandi, lex credendi*: *Praying and Believing in Early Christianity: The Interplay between Christian Worship and Doctrine* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013).

worship space is at St. Paul's, those rows of pews facing forward to that elevated platform can obscure this principle. More emphatically, "Sunday Evenings at St. Paul's" contends that one cannot be a Christian by oneself; Christianity is essentially about joining a circle.

At the center of this circle, one finds the altar, the table for the eucharistic meal. Literally, and figuratively, the pulpit is de-centered, as is the ordained clergyperson. The 5:00 p.m. liturgy resists cultural and ecclesial impulses to focus on an individual person or a specific thing. The focal point is an empty space, the empty space between people, the assembly. The altar is the "thing" that makes the emptiness at the center of the circle apparent, and so, in a sense, is itself no thing.²⁰ For the first half of the liturgy, the table is empty. It promises the meal that is to come. It suggests that the gathering is not complete until the meal. Scripture is read across the empty table. Preaching and the assembly's responses take place across the empty altar. The creed is affirmed, prayers are offered, across the empty space at the center of the circle.

In the circle around the altar and across from one another, shared community actions overshadow shared beliefs and positions, as well as disputed ones. The table and the meal draw to themselves all sources of rest and renewal proffered by the service: shared hearing of Scripture, shared experience of art, shared homiletic space, shared lifting up of prayers, above all, the comfort and discomfort of shared vulnerability within the liturgical circle itself. The intimacy of encounter at 5:00 p.m. supports a theology of relationship and co-agency with God, as well as a high degree of theological and emotional complexity regarding that relationship. We are made comfortable and welcome by the invitation to sit in the circle, to engage in artistic action, to speak at the homily, to eat at the table, to socialize afterward. We are made uncomfortable by how visible we are to each other as we do so. There is nowhere to hide in the space. We must listen to anyone who chooses to speak. Eye contact is hard to avoid, tears impossible to disguise, children difficult to contain as we gather together at the table. Such vulnerability reflects the utter vulnerability of God's welcome

²⁰ To improvise on Rowan Williams, "Between the Cherubim: The Empty Tomb and the Empty Throne," in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 183–96.

of us in Christ. All eat and drink these gifts of comfort and discomfort in the presence of God in/as gathered community.

The hospitality and conviviality of the eucharistic table extends naturally to the food, drink, and conversations after Mass. At 5:00 p.m., worshipers are sent most directly to fellowship with one another; sent from conversation about Scripture to conversation with one another; sent from eucharistic meal to the neighborhood pub. The transformation of the worship space from sacred, solemn, and quiet to ordinary, busy, and loud echoes the communal experience of moving out from sacred space and time into ordinary life, renewed. Fellowship opens out to mission at "Sunday Evenings at St. Paul's." The space around that altar and its eucharistic meal is the same space, on Tuesday nights, where the Fatted Calf Café gathers—an elegant sit-down meal with table service for all in and around St. Paul's, including many homeless neighbors. The 5:00 p.m. community sometimes helps prepare and serve that meal. During the season after Pentecost, just before the blessing and dismissal, a member of the community is invited each Sunday evening to say a bit about their work in the world and be sent with special prayers to that work.

A distinctive ecclesiology, cosmology and anthropology, and doctrine of God emerge from the around and across of "Sunday Evenings at St. Paul's."

Ecclesiology. The authority of Scripture, the proclamation of God's word, and the nature of divine revelation emerge *between*: between people, between people and book, word and meal, meal and gathered community sent into the world in mission. Authority rests neither in the book alone nor with the preacher. The plural voices at the shared homily replicate the plural voices within the canon of Scripture itself, marking the shared homily as apostolic. I cannot fully know what of God is revealed to me until I hear from you all. It has been the custom of the parish that homilies preached at the morning Masses subsequently be posted to the website. The preachers at the 5:00 p.m. Mass have consistently resisted the invitation to do so, arguing that the shared homily renders preaching in the evening improvisational, transient like a sand painting, and not the intellectual property (or theological gift) of a single person. At most, a few 5:00 p.m. preachers have allowed the wondering

questions they asked to catalyze responses by the assembly to be posted on one of the evening community's Facebook pages.

"Sunday Evenings at St. Paul's" enacts in a powerful way the Lukan story of the road to Emmaus. A conversation with and about Scripture occurs, but only on the journey to the meal, across the empty table/altar where Jesus will be fully known in the breaking of the bread. Once recognized as the Lord, Jesus disappears again and we must rise, go back to the city, the place of trauma and of service, to tell others and to find him again.

All ministry within the church is or modifies the common ministry of the baptized. All members of the assembly stand on the same level around the altar and across from each other. There is no raised platform for a few. Even the preacher initiating the shared homily does so seated like the rest of the community. It is clear who presides—s/he is vested in alb, stole, and chasuble. His chair has arms but is otherwise identical to all the other chairs in the room. She is not distant from the assembly but part of the circle centered on the altar. The deacon and vested lay servers literally rub shoulders with the persons seated next to them in the assembly. They too have their distinctive liturgical roles and tasks: setting the table, playing with fire and smoke, leading the prayers, serving a chalice. But these tasks only happen in and around the circle of all.

The real, sacramental presence of the body and blood of Christ is not localized way up *there* at the end of a long, narrow, late medieval chancel, but instead *here*, at the heart of Christ's communal body. Mystery remains, at 5:00 p.m. on Sundays, but it is a different kind of mystery from the one often felt upstairs. Horizontal, rather than vertical, mystery. A mystery burning at the heart of things. A more incarnate, even domestic mystery, like that of Mom's cooking, of being loved by family and friends, of looking out into the ordinary world and finding sparkly bits of the holy everywhere.

Cosmology and Anthropology. One senses the proximity of the natural world—time and space, body and spirit—palpably at this evening Eucharist, in the gardens, the departed, the waning daylight. This gathering occurs, figuratively, at the eleventh hour of the eighth day. The Eucharistic Prayer says: "You ordered

night and day and filled the skies with *stars* and suns, giving light to shine in the darkness" (our emphasis). Gathering in the evening is different from gathering in the morning. Word in the evening and meal and sending have a distinctive character. Like the difference between inhaling and exhaling, stretching and opening one's eyes versus curling up and closing them. The jazz idiom of the music seems fully consonant with the cosmos's invitation to let go, fall asleep, embrace dying as friend rather than flee her as enemy. The community descends to its gathering place instead of ascending. It nestles in the earth, a den, a womb, a tomb; it scales no mountain. The Holy One encountered might better be imaged as earth goddess than sky or storm god.

The human person represents a paradox of grandeur and misery: Essentially relational and communal (the Postcommunion Prayer, "God of abundance, . . . you have united us with Christ and one another: and you have made us one with all your people in heaven and on earth"), yet caught in webs of sin (the Prayer of Confession, "We have denied your goodness in each other, in ourselves and in the world you have created. We repent of the evil that enslaves us, the evil we have done, and the evil done on our behalf").²¹

If a single hymn has taken on signature status for the 5:00 p.m. liturgy, it would be "Now It Is Evening." It enunciates the cosmology and anthropology of the service and forecasts its Christology.

Now it is evening: lights of the city / bid us remember Christ is our Light.
Many are lonely, who will be neighbor? / Where there is caring, Christ is
our Light.

Now it is evening: little ones sleeping / bid us remember Christ is our Peace.
Some are neglected, who will be neighbor? / Where there is caring, Christ is
our Peace.

Now it is evening: food on the table / bids us remember Christ is our Life.
Many are hungry, who will be neighbor? / Where there is sharing, Christ is
our Life.

²¹ *Enriching Our Worship*, I, 69 and 56.

Now it is evening: here in our meeting / may we remember Christ is our Friend.

Some may be strangers, who will be neighbor? /

Where there's a welcome, Christ is our Friend.²²

Trinitarian Doctrine of God. This service privileges Johannine and Pauline images of the Holy Spirit as a watery force, one that wells up and flows among the community during the shared homily. She is indefinable, uncontrollable, dynamic; as delightful, fun, and chaotic as a dozen young children around and under the altar.

An utterly incarnate Jesus Christ appears. He "gather[s] his friends at table," according to the Eucharistic Prayer, at which point the presider gestures to all circling around the altar. Or later: "Gathered at your table now, we remember Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension." Over the past couple of years, taking a further step in this direction, the assembly has been invited to leave their seats and come and stand inside the circle of chairs around the altar for the thanksgiving over bread and wine. While the upstairs worship space is dominated by a larger-than-life image of the crucified Christ, downstairs presents a more aniconic Christology. There is a small, beautiful crucifix in the parish hall, but off to one side near the entry—not prominent. Much more evident is the way the community *is* Jesus, or *does* Jesus, gathered around and across; Christ present in the comfort and discomfort of intimacy and vulnerability.

God reveals God's self as deeply present and accessible, not distant or remote; fully embodied, tangible, smell-able, taste-able, but nonetheless elusive, mysterious, and beautiful: the beyond in the midst of the world, the numinous ordinary, the tremendum of a meal.

HIDDEN LESSONS OF SUNDAY EVENINGS AT ST. PAUL'S?

Most current members of the 5:00 p.m. liturgy planning team are trained *Godly Play* instructors and regularly teach this Montessori-based program of children's Christian formation at St. Paul's. And although it was not planned

²² "Now It Is Evening" by Fred Pratt Green © 1974 Hope Publishing Company, Carol Stream, IL 60188, <http://www.hopepublishing.com/html/main.isx>. All rights reserved. Used by permission. At St. Paul's, the hymn is sung to Rusty Edwards's tune BOZEMAN.

so intentionally, it is not surprising that the evening liturgy has turned out to be more child friendly than what happens upstairs on Sunday mornings. Downstairs, the children receive all of the sensory input of the Eucharist without the barriers, boundaries, and distance from the action built into nave and chancel, communion rail, and raised altar platform. Opportunities are offered to children to engage the liturgy physically: painting on canvas, room to move/dance to service music or hymns, dropping a rock into the font, lighting a Mary candle. The proximity of the nursery to the 5:00 p.m. worship space works well for parents of small children. The circular arrangement of the assembly around the altar and across from one another extends the circle of children, story, and storyteller in *Godly Play*, reinforcing the expectation that children are capable of meaningful theological insight and creativity.²³

Godly Play speaks of a "hidden lesson"—those convictions and values, that worldview, conveyed not through the explicit content of a story but in how the telling of the story unfolds in time and space, with respect for persons and materials, above all by honoring and holding the circle. After worshiping for years in the evening at St. Paul's, we find that this liturgy offers a creative and peaceful theological resistance/reformation. It resists patriarchy through female priest-presiders, artists in residence, the around and across of the assembly, a more accessible liturgy for children and parents. It re-forms hierarchy, again through the physical worship space, as well as intimacy with the altar/table, the shared homily. This liturgical rendering of community, church, cosmos, human being, and God constitutes a nonviolent but subversive critique of, and alternative to, dominant cultural values of individualism, consumerism, hierarchy, haste, hatred of the body, of women, and of children.

Two lessons lie more deeply hidden within "Sunday Evenings at St. Paul's," two nascent areas of learning and renewal. First, we have experienced what

²³ See the following books by Jerome W. Berryman, creator of the *Godly Play* curriculum and methodology: *Godly Play: A Way of Religious Education* (San Francisco: Harper-San Francisco, 1991), *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, 8 vols. (Denver: Morehouse Education Resources, 2003–2011), and *Teaching Godly Play: How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children*, 2nd ed. (Denver: Morehouse Education Resources, 2009). Additional information can also be found on the *Godly Play* Foundation website: www.godlyplayfoundation.org (accessed November 17, 2015).

Gray-Reeves and Perham report about the emergent communities they studied: welcome precedes both belonging and believing.²⁴ That is to say, the primary catechesis at 5:00 p.m. is eucharistic. People join the circle around the altar and across from each other, share word and meal, psalm and creed, prayers and sending to mission—and then, some of them, complete a journey to the font and baptism. This raises questions. What does it mean to speak of the primary ministry of all the baptized when not all are baptized? Episcopal practice and thought since the 1979 prayer book are relentlessly baptismal. We wonder: can, how can, those who are still on the way to baptism be included within and supported by that foundational baptismal covenant? Having worked to recover the early church's theo-logic of baptism leading to Eucharist, do we now need to inquire into its deeper hidden lesson when the arc of more and more people's sacramental lives today involves Eucharist forming for baptism? Although it would turn the tradition inside out, how about the following as a contemporary improvisation on the deep grammar of the early church's insistence that only the baptized (dead to empire—both Satan's and Rome's) are welcome to share the mysteries, the meal, of the alternative Christian society: regular participation in the shockingly egalitarian hospitality of the eucharistic table prepares and enables one to belong to a different world. A radically new and revolutionary society, a baptismal one, is possible because it already exists around the altar and across from one another.

Second, we wonder long-term how the both/and of "emergent" and Anglo-Catholic impulses at 5:00 p.m. will be incorporated into St. Paul's and shape the parish as a whole. Consider that the Sunday evening community joins with the "other" services, upstairs, for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Masses, for Ash Wednesday (the preponderance of 5:00 p.m. worshipers at the "principal" Ash Wednesday service in 2014 was striking), then Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Great Vigil of Easter at 5:00 a.m.! Except that the Agape meal that precedes the Maundy Thursday Mass takes place in the 5:00 p.m. worship space. Except that at 5:00 p.m. on Easter Sunday, the evening folk invite the entire parish to "Fire and Water," a meal and bonfire and evening prayer at Alki Beach on the shores of Puget Sound. Except that some

²⁴ Gray-Reeves and Perham, *The Hospitality of God*, 69–78.

high holy day Masses falling on weeknights, like the feast of the Ascension, have been celebrated downstairs in the 5:00 p.m. worship space, around and across, using evening liturgical resources and altar servers.

Or, consider that during the six months in 2011 when the "upstairs" worship space was unavailable because of the building renovation, *all Sunday Masses*, including the newly divided 10:30 principal service (into 9:00 and 11:15), were held downstairs in the fellowship hall with the 5:00 p.m. altar, ambo, chairs, comfort and discomfort of personal intimacy, and visual access to the garden. Just as St. Paul's gave birth to the 5:00 p.m. liturgy in 2009, the two years of tried and true practice of worshiping downstairs incubated the entire Sunday worship life of the parish during a period of dislocation.

Looking back at the brochure that made the case for the building renovation and associated capital campaign, two changes to the original plan stand out: the evolution of the design of the font from sharp, angular, and sarcophagus shaped, to round and womb-like with living water spilling gently from an upper bowl to a lower one; and the decision *not* to replace the 1960s slip pews with movable cathedral chairs so that the evening Mass might relocate upstairs. We realized with some shock that it would do violence to "Sunday Evenings at St. Paul's" to bring it upstairs even with a version of around and across and flexible seating, the power of the space downstairs to form the community's theology and spirituality was that strong.

So we wonder if it might become apparent to the wider parish that worshiping around and across at 5:00 p.m. de-centers elements of Anglo-Catholicism even as it lives others out more fully and deeply. That is, a (re)discovery of horizontal, domestic transcendence, of the holy and numinous character of communal gathering sometimes overshadowed by default settings of verticality and distance. We wonder if St. Paul's restrained "emergent" improvisation offers a nascent critique of twentieth-century liturgical renewal and its recovery of early church practice of baptism and Eucharist. And we wonder if having 5:00 p.m. juxtaposed to the 11:15 a.m. Mass, for example, might check a kind of Anglo-Catholic exceptionalism, reminding us that all liturgy must remain transparent to the surpassing beauty, work, and play of the one holy and undivided Trinity.