

Introduction

Many of us were young, even very young when we received Eucharist for the first time. Depending on denomination and how long ago it was, it may have been part of a rite-of-passage ceremony or it may have happened organically when so young that it has always been a part of worship. This is how I remember my first time.

I was eleven. I was confirmed at Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Orlando, Florida by the Rt. Rev. Henry Louttit, Sr. I remember what I wore; I remember that my father had scared me a bit by teasing that the bishop (whom I met only that one time) was going to slap my face. I know I received communion, the Lord's Supper – we did not call it the Eucharist in 1969 – but I have no memory of that part of the event. I had been baptized as an infant in a Roman Catholic Church, but I was essentially unchurched until about a year before my confirmation. If reception of Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ, was the completion of my initiation into the Body of Christ then for the most part, I missed it. I suspect – my move from the Roman Church to the Episcopal Church notwithstanding – my experience, my memory, or lack thereof is not untypical.

It stands to reason that those of us who are ordained clergy, especially in so-called liturgical churches (i.e. Roman, Episcopal, ECLA etc.) desire for all who receive the Eucharist to be affected and shaped by it. However, we are also probably realistic enough to know that each experience will not be momentous. The question then is, how might we tip the balance so that, more often than not, our experience of the Eucharistic liturgy is important enough and memorable enough that our individual faith journeys progress? And not just our own, of course, but the faith journeys of those we serve.

The number of possible answers to the question of how to make church more meaningful are as numerous as there are people within the Christian faith community. A simple Google search will provide a plethora of suggestions – nearly 12 million in fact. Narrow the search by asking how to make Eucharist more meaningful and Google provides approximately 3,980,000 responses. The answers run from more global ideas of education to specific ones of using mirrors to serve the bread and “juice.”¹ Because my experience of the Eucharist is different – more significant – when I serve as a worship leader, I suspected that is the case for many if not most.

It is not my suggestion however, that we ordain everyone. There is no need because, as the *Book of Common Prayer* tells us, by our baptisms we are all ministers of the Church. “The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons.”² Instead, it is my hypothesis that one experiences the Eucharist differently (i.e. better) when serving as a liturgical leader than when among the general congregation. Perhaps it has to do with kinesthetic or “hands-on” learning, or perhaps it causes people to be paying closer attention, but whatever the reason, this is my experience. It is surprising there has been almost nothing written on this topic that would confirm or deny the hypothesis. Several scholars have included a sentence or two in books or papers that say something that might be considered supportive, but no primary research was found. Therefore, this project conducted primary research first using a short written survey to which nearly six hundred lay leaders responded. The results of this and further research

¹ “Communion Thoughts #6- Tips for Making Communion More Meaningful | JORDAN RIMMER,” accessed August 11, 2017, <http://www.jordanrimmer.com/tipsformakingcommunionmoremeaningful/>.

² Episcopal Church, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (New York : [Greenwich, Conn.]: Church Hymnal Corp. ; Seabury Press, 1979), 855.

are discussed herein. First, though, a brief review of the theology of the Liturgy of Eucharist, what it is supposed to do for the faithful, and the history and theology of lay participation and leadership.

Chapter One

Across the world at various time of day and various days of the week, but most particularly on Sunday mornings, people of all ages and ethnicities gather together to worship the one true God – the Triune God of Christianity. In many of those worship services, the people will partake in the table liturgy known as the Lord’s Supper, Communion, or Eucharist. For many of the participants, this act, this meal, is the most spiritually profound experience of their daily lives.

When we partake of the body and blood of Christ we not only share in the *anamnesis* – the remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice – but also in the redemption offered by it. Further, we take Christ into ourselves, into our bodies, our hearts, and our beings. We are infused again and forever by the life, love, and forgiveness Christ offered and continues to offer us. We participate in this meal again and again not because Jesus instructed us to, but because it is how we become his body united to each other and to the Godhead. It is the way and the hope of being the people of God - in union with God.

Liturgical Theology

The Eucharist is a loaded topic about which so very much has been written. Read any one of the multitude of resources available and there will always be questions that might begin with “Yes, but what about . . .?” No one text is all inclusive, no one view says it all, and yet it all stems from the actions of Jesus on the night before he died. How then can it be so complicated?

It is complicated because it is a gift to us from God the Father, through God the Son, by the power of God the Holy Spirit. When we partake in the Eucharist, we partake in the body and blood – the food that endures for eternal life. Jesus who knows us; Jesus

the first-born of all creation; Jesus who died on the cross and rose again to sit at the right hand of the Father is the very food that endures for eternal life. When we take him in we are joined with him now and forever. How can we, mere humans, ever begin to understand it?

We might be tempted to make the rite itself the primary focus. Surely we want the rite to be done “right,” but to do it right is to look beyond the here and now of the liturgy on a particular day in order to connect to the creator in such a way as to be changed, to live as Jesus taught, to live as Jesus would have us live.

When we open our hearts, these two things – the liturgy connecting us to Christ and the principles taught us by Christ – can come together in the Eucharist. “It is the sacrament that gives ethics the power to become a ‘spiritual sacrifice’; it is ethics that gives the sacrament the means of ‘veri-fying’ its fruitfulness.”³ The only hope we have to “know” Jesus and “know” God is by living what Bieler and Schottroff call the Eucharistic Life.⁴ Through the Eucharist we do not merely know about him or his teaching, but can know him intimately at the deepest level, in a bond of friendship.⁵

In the Eucharistic liturgy we, again, take Jesus into our very being. Our triune God, who surrounds us like water surrounds the fish, again fills us – mind and body – by word and sacrament. We can rest in the knowledge that he knows and loves us perfectly. He invites us to share in the Paschal Mystery; in his very life, death and resurrection. We are invited to know him in the breaking of the bread. With this action, we can be renewed

³ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2001), 65.

⁴ Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff, *The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread, & Resurrection* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 4.

⁵ Bruce T. Morrill, *Encountering Christ in the Eucharist: The Paschal Mystery in People, Word, and Sacrament* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012), 5.

and “go forth” in His name to do His work. “In other words, *every sacrament shows us how to see and live what transforms our human existence into a properly Christian existence.*”⁶ By the sharing of the bread and wine, blessed and broken in the name of Jesus, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we live renewed in Christ and he in us.

We are, through the liturgy, through Eucharist, brought as close to God as perhaps it is possible to be on this earth. If theology is the study of God, or the way to study/know God, then liturgical theology is to know God through liturgy. Surely this is primary theology – to know God first hand. Fagerberg puts it this way, “liturgy is not the religion of Christians; liturgy is the religion of Christ perpetuated in Christians. The religion Jesus enacted in the flesh before the Father is continued in the Church, liturgically.”⁷

The purpose of conducting liturgy is to provide for this primary theology - to bring the people of God to God. “The liturgy is therefore a work of God wherein human beings are incorporated into the inner Trinitarian life through the mediation of effective signs or sacraments, and human desire is transformed into cooperation with the divine initiative.”⁸ Hence, the physical act of liturgy may not accomplish its goal of bringing us closer to God, if the participant is not seeking closeness to and with God. If the people of God are to be the Body of Christ, they must be together sharing a common experience of the body and blood of Christ.

Brief Historical Review

⁶ Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 145. Emphasis original

⁷ David W. Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima: What Is Liturgical Theology?* (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publication, 2012), 14.

⁸ Joseph C. Mudd, *Eucharist as Meaning: Critical Metaphysics and Contemporary Sacramental Theology* (Collegetown, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2014), 288.

In the early church, especially in the first century following Christ, Eucharist was an *agape* meal. The “last supper” of Christ had taken place during a Passover meal with all the tradition that implies. To continue that meal atmosphere and connection to tradition was obvious for early followers. It was the way and the purpose for which the community of Christ gathered. As evidenced by Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, already in the mid-first century it was necessary to instruct the people of Corinth (1 Cor 11:17-34) in the proper attitude for sharing the bread and the wine.

As time went on, the focus shifted from the gathering, the community, and the process of the meal to the veneration of the elements of the meal – the bread and wine. Initially, the people had gathered to “feel” Christ among them as he promised; “For where two or three are gathering in my name, I am there among them” (Matt 18:20). Their purpose was to be together as the people of God to support one another, to offer praise to God, and to celebrate the redemption they received from Jesus. Eventually however, they lost some of the community aspect of the meal and the celebration of Eucharist morphed into the sacramental reception of Jesus’ body and blood through the bread and wine as food for the individual soul. “The sacraments, . . . came to be considered predominantly as means of individual salvation and stimulants of individual devotions.”⁹

Between the fourth and the early thirteenth century – admittedly a long time – there was a great deal of change in how the average Christian participated in and experienced worship. With Constantine’s 313 edict of religious tolerance for Christianity

⁹ E. L. Mascall, *Corpus Christi, Essays on The Church and the Eucharist* (London, New York, Toronto: Logmans, Green and Co, 1953), 37.

many people became Christian, but perhaps more often in name rather than in deed.¹⁰ In the early church, Eucharist began as Christians gathered together and celebrated the replication of the last supper with bread and wine that they themselves had brought. Lay participation in these weekly sacrificial meals diminished even in the first few centuries, perhaps because Paul's caution about unworthy participation created some level of fear. "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord." (1 Cor 11:27) There was enough of a decrease that the synods of Elvira and Sardika in 306 and 343 felt the need to "prescribed punishment for those who failed to fulfill this duty for more than three weeks."¹¹

Possibly it was the legitimization of Christianity in the fourth century that took away the need to stick together so closely or perhaps it was inevitable as the increased number of Christians caused the church institution to emerge, but another development was the forming of a clear line of demarcation between the clergy and laity. The clergy took over worship in a way heretofore unknown causing further barriers to participation in the Eucharist by laity. "The priesthood and its life were designed as closely as the Eucharist, since like it they supported the church's claim to exclusive and universal mediation of grace, of super-natural power."¹²

Although for hundreds of years, Christian scholars debated and feuded over the theology of doctrinal issues such as "real presence" and the divinity of Christ, most of the

¹⁰ Godefridus J. C. Snoek, *Primary Readings on the Eucharist*, ed. Thomas Fisch (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2004), 58.

¹¹ Snoek, 57.

¹² Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 49.

laity were unaware and/or did not care. However, some developments did cause direct changes for the laity. “Having shaped a ritual in which Christ’s body was sacramentally made present through the words of a priest, theologians continued to weigh the new design and its implications, and to convey the new ideas of transubstantiation.”¹³ As consensus was reached that the bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Jesus at the time of consecration, the elements – bread and wine – became sacred and were withdrawn from the view of the people. Lay participation in the service decreased further as clergy and choirs took over all the duties of the Mass. “The situation thus came about that the priest celebrated Mass no longer with the faithful present but in their name.”¹⁴ Paradoxically, “[b]y the fifteenth century, the participation of laypeople in services within the choir had become so widespread and so fervent that – ironically enough – it was the clergy whose proper performance of rituals was hindered.”¹⁵

The majority of the people no longer understood Latin, the language of the Mass. “Being in touch with the text of the liturgy as a corporate exercise ended as soon as Latin was no longer the common language of the people.”¹⁶ Further, the position of the priest was shifted such that he stood with his back to the people, between them and the altar. It was then a logical move to put the altar against the east wall which only served to create additional physical distance between it and the laity. By the tenth century, because the words of institution were the most sacred part of the rite, the priest whispered or recited the Canon silently so that as a result, the laity could not see, hear, or understand the

¹³ Rubin, 53.

¹⁴ Snoek, *Primary Readings on the Eucharist*, 50.

¹⁵ Jacqueline E. Jung, “Beyond the Barrier: The Unifying Role of the Choir Screen in Gothic Churches,” *The Art Bulletin* 82, no. 4 (2000): 628, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3051415>.

¹⁶ John F. Baldovin, *Reforming the Liturgy: A Response to the Critics* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2008), 25.

words of the liturgy. In addition, the provincial synod of Agde in 506, had “uncoupled the duty to attend Mass on Sunday from the duty to receive communion, which had to be received at least at Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost.”¹⁷ So the faithful were not doing anything wrong by not receiving, they were safe from the risk of receiving unworthily, and yet fulfilling their obligation. No wonder many, in fact most, did not receive.

Ironically, so many of the laity – having done their attendance duty – disrupted church by leaving as soon as communion happened, that in time distribution of communion was withheld from the people until after the Mass. This took away even the hint of it being a shared meal. It does not mean however, that the laity were treating their religion disingenuously. For laypeople, the church and religion were unavoidable. It was as much a part of day to day life as the air.¹⁸ It was the way of living, speech, and routine. “Because Christianity provided one of the contexts against which normality was set, that normality was often defined in relation to Christianity as a religion and a set of social practices.”¹⁹

Another issue was that consecration – the process by which bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Christ - could only be achieved by an ordained priest. Priests received the power to consecrate when they were ordained through the anointing of their hands. “The clergy was increasingly set apart in life-style, duties, clothing, training, language, from its ‘community’ and drew its authority from a central source.”²⁰ Therefore only a priest, by virtue of this ability and special relationship to God,

¹⁷ Snoek, *Primary Readings on the Eucharist*, 57.

¹⁸ Of Course we do not know what percentage of the people, especially those in rural areas, participated in organized religion in these times.

¹⁹ R. N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c.1215-c.1515*, Cambridge Medieval Textbooks (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 103.

²⁰ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 51.

was worthy to touch the consecrated elements. Since it was thought unacceptable for the people to touch this most precious body when they did receive - the priest would place the bread on the tongue of the receiver. Gradually, the laity also lost the privilege of touching the chalice holding the blood of Christ. In some cases consecrated wine was mixed with plain wine in a separate chalice which the laity could touch to receive the diluted wine. Also used for a while was a reed or a straw made of precious metal to suck a sip of the wine. Another common method for reception was intinction, where the bread was dipped in the wine by the priest for the laity. This practice was discontinued with the emergence of the theory of concomitance – an understanding that the body cannot exist without its blood. Therefore reception of the body was also reception of the blood. It was also thought to be too similar to Jesus' actions with Judas on the night of the last supper.²¹

By the time of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, the chasm between clergy and laity was vast. Clericalism had become an impediment to the involvement of the laity, so much so that the laity received communion only rarely; instead the clergy received on their behalf. The laity had come to understand just how undeserving their sinful behavior made them to receive Christ's body and they therefore resisted it.²² Hence, the Council felt the need to rule that laity were required to make a full confession and reception of Eucharist at least once per year at Easter. A byproduct of the yearly obligation was that it allowed clergy, by virtue of the questions asked during the confession, to provide some catechetical education to the laity.²³

²¹ Snoek, *Primary Readings on the Eucharist*, 46.

²² Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 148.

²³ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England ; c. 1400 - c. 1580*, 2. ed (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2005), 58.

In western Europe, by the year 1200, the Church functioned through parishes. How the clergy operated varied somewhat from parish to parish depending on those in local power and the patronage available, but generally they were ordained priests. However, the training and quality of parish clergy was an on-going issue. In some areas, England for instance, the priesthood was a fairly popular career choice. In others the demand exceeded supply. This was especially true after the crisis caused by the plague. “The impact of the Black Death in 1348-9, with a massive fall in population and consequent social and economic transformations changed this [popularity].”²⁴ It took nearly two-hundred years, until about 1530, for the numbers of available priests to reach the pre-Black Death levels.

Training for secular priests – those who were not also part of a religious order – was inconsistent and rarely strongly academic. What was available to both clergy and laity were instruction manuals. Although many were written in Latin, some were available in vernaculars and could be used by literate laypeople. These manuals laid out the role of parish clergy as intermediaries between God and the people. The manuals helped the clergy understand their pastoral responsibilities and how to avoid committing heresy in their sermons. Similarly, they were to be used to instruct the laity on the basics of the faith and how to avoid sin, thus preparing them for the annual confession. After all, through confession, “[p]erhaps more important than eliciting information on wrong-doing was the function of the process to communicate awareness of Christian morality by defining behavior which was socially unacceptable.”²⁵ Certainly, the required annual confession served to foster a culture based on guilt. While this may have been a goal,

²⁴ Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c.1215-c.1515*, 53.

²⁵ Swanson, 62.

surely more important was the instructional benefits of knowing the faith and of developing a sense of remorse and contrition.

Also by the Fourth Lateran Council, the consecrated host – the actual presence of Christ – had such a premier position of importance, that another ruling of the council was to lock it up to protect it. “Depriving the laity of communion from the chalice contributed in no small way to eucharistic piety being directed almost exclusively towards the host. Outside the Mass eucharistic devotion became, in fact, devotion to the host.”²⁶ The host had, in the minds of the people, special powers that could aid and/or protect whoever had it. As such, the laity revered the host to an extreme. By adding accoutrements such as, the burning of incense, the lighting of candles around the altar, and the timely ringing of bells to the Mass, clergy helped to alert the laity of the moment of consecration and the anticipated elevation of the host so that it could be gazed upon. The laity were expected to respectfully bow and kneel in their adoration of and devotion to their Lord. This elevation of the consecrated host – Christ himself – became such an important event that in larger churches or in urban settings it was not uncommon for people to move from altar to altar, or from church to church arriving just in time to witness the elevation of the host and move on to the next. “The Host, then, was far more than the object of individual devotion, a means of forgiveness and sanctification: it was the source of human community.”²⁷

Obviously, the traditions surrounding the Eucharist had changed significantly from the days of the early church. Being left out of participation in the liturgy, one might think the people would simply give up and not bother. But no, the desire to be joined to

²⁶ Snoek, *Primary Readings on the Eucharist*, 46.

²⁷ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 93.

Christ had not left the laity. So, instead of connecting to Christ by reception of the Eucharist, the connection was made in adoration of it. The worship was aided by the crucifix which often hung from the rood screen that separated the nave from the chancel. Hanging high above them, the laity could see it when they gazed upon the consecrated host. “The clerical notion that the lay role should be purely passive, and spectative, may not have been matched by lay attitudes.”²⁸

The church had become clergy-centric, and lay people, the ordinary non-ordained Christian people, receive communion infrequently hardly participating in the *anamnesis* in any significant way. Although there was not a loud outcry from most of the people about missing out on receiving communion, surely they must have felt the loss because, as creatures of God, we crave a level or method of connection with our maker that cannot be satisfied through an intermediary; we seek personal contact with God.

In fact, the lay people refused to be left out. “[O]ften the church’s spirituality was generated at a ‘grass roots’ level, in cults, in devotions, in demand for indulgences and privileges. Ultimately, the devotional practices of the medieval church were demand-led, by the spirituality and desires of the laity.”²⁹ Then, like now, piety is individual; still it can be and often is influenced by collective experience. While the laity was largely ignored by clergy during Mass and the people had few corporate responses to contribute to the service, it was still at the center of Christian devotion. Further it was, especially on Sundays, a community activity – the people were together in worship. Together in worship they greeted one another and shared unanimity with each other and with God. In

²⁸ Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c.1215-c.1515*, 100.

²⁹ Swanson, 9.

other words, true to his word, Jesus was still among them and, no doubt, they felt his presence.

Both daily and Sunday Masses were intended to be spiritual experiences for the laity, only with a different emphasis. The daily Mass was ideally suited for an individual experience while the Sunday Mass was for the corporate experience. “Eucharistic ritual was felt to be well suited to the demarcation and endorsement of social hierarchy as well as social bonding.”³⁰

Two sacraments, confession and Eucharist were the most significant in the lives of the medieval laity, and they were “inextricably entwined, for the consecration of the elements made them available for communion, which officially could only be received after confession.”³¹ Even though the laity did not often receive Eucharist, and while it is true that the high altar used for Sunday Mass in most churches was usually a substantial distance from where the laity gathered, still many had other devotional habits including attending Mass daily. Hearing the Mass and seeing the host was of prime importance to many because of the benefits to be obtained for body and soul. “Mothers in labour [sic] could secure safe delivery, travelers [sic] safe arrival, eaters and drinkers good digestion by gazing on the Host at Mass.”³² Being witness to a Mass was like putting on a life vest – it added a buoyancy to one’s life and might even save it. Mass was fundamental to the course of salvation and done well it would shave off time to be spent in Purgatory.

Daily Masses were important to many if not most people, but they were not the same level of community event as was the more dramatic Sunday Mass. On Sunday,

³⁰ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 127.

³¹ Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c.1215-c.1515*, 33.

³² Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 100.

attendance was expected and vital to the whole of the community, as was appropriate behavior – at least as far as the clergy was concerned. In fact, “many clerics complained about the way the laity ignored everything except the elevation, and generally misbehaved in churches.”³³ There also seems to have been some differences in behavior of urban versus rural dwellers. Those in the more remote mountain areas seem to have been worse or “less Christian” in their behavior and practices.³⁴

One important factor in the growth of lay piety was the “spread of literacy down the social scale, even to many women.”³⁵ There were small books available to assist and instruct the laity on the proper posture and behavior during Mass, the best known of which was the *Lay Folk’s Mass Book*.³⁶ These books provided prayers and meditations relating to the Scripture, especially the passion of Christ. They were designed to accompany what the priest was saying and doing at each point in the Mass. Use of these books encouraged the devotion of the individual reader. Thus, during the service, each person was expected to be at prayer and aware of the Host as the body of the crucified Christ.

Other books in common use by laity were the Books of Hours. These books originated from monastic orders. Devout laity sometimes tried to emulate monastic piety through the use of their prayers and schedule. The books included parts of the Psalter in addition to prayers from the liturgy and devotions to be used. As literacy grew so did the use of these devotional manuals. Books of the Hours were among the first books to be

³³ Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c.1215-c.1515*, 102.

³⁴ S. K. Cohn, “Piety and Religious Practice in the Rural Dependencies of Renaissance Florence,” *The English Historical Review* 114, no. 459 (1999): 1126.

³⁵ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 68.

³⁶ Duffy, 118.

mass-produced.³⁷ The books were most often printed in Latin, which made them largely incomprehensible to most of the laity, but often they had sacred pictures, so they themselves became objects of reverence. “They were often conceived as channels of sacred power independent of the texts they accompanied.”³⁸ The books’ popularity demonstrates the laity’s devotion.

While reception of the consecrated host was infrequent, a substitute loaf of bread was often in play on Sundays. An ordinary loaf, provided by alternating members of a parish, was blessed, cut, and distributed to the people. As such it was what was used to break the Sunday fast. It was also, by virtue of being blessed, believed to possess protective powers. Another substitute was the “paxbrede” a small disk or platter on which a sacred picture or emblem was displayed. The priest would kiss the “pax” at the time of consecration and it was then presented to the laity be kissed by each person in turn.

Weekday Masses were often conducted at side altars where, unlike high Masses, the distance between the priest and the laity was minimal. Daily Masses were often “private” in that they were arranged and paid for by laity with special intentions. These Masses tended to be simple rituals, much more accessible for the laity, and more importantly, as the altars were sometimes owned or controlled by the laity, they had more involvement and influence over the prayers and readings.³⁹

Votive Masses were said for a variety of purposes including for the souls of the departed, for relief of time in Purgatory, and special celebrations (i.e. for the Holy Spirit or the Virgin Mary). “The endowment of a mass, while often a search for a private

³⁷ Duffy, 211.

³⁸ Duffy, 214.

³⁹ Duffy, 114.

reconciliation with God, was also a means of establishing a memorial.”⁴⁰ An unintended consequence of this type of Mass was that one could come to believe that there was a “payment for service” arrangement with God. A Mass might be said for the repose of a particular soul, and/or days off a person’s penance time to be spent in Purgatory. The cost of the Mass is paid by an individual and a benefit is received.

Although these daily Masses might have been labeled as “private,” since every Mass is for the benefit of God’s people, anyone could attend even when held in private chapels. Whoever had paid for the Mass, however, was expected to receive the lion’s share of the spiritual benefit. There was even such a thing as a *dry mass*. This is one that was held in the afternoon hours, past the acceptable time of day for a legitimate Mass, and did not include a consecration event. A dry mass was an expression of devotion usually held, but not exclusively, as part of a wedding or funeral.⁴¹

Mass attendance and reverence for the consecrated host demonstrates that medieval laity were strongly devoted to being in relationship with their God. The climate of the day was one of guilt, of being “kept in line” by fear of sin and unworthiness. But they did not give up – they kept coming back to be with Jesus.

Lay people simply did not want to let go of the meal. Whether it was hard-wiring or because of the handing down from one generation to the next of the mystery and love of Jesus – people did not want to be kept from God even if they were kept from or were afraid of sharing in his Body and Blood. So they adapted and learned to adore the host, which they understood to be their Lord and their savior. And when that too was not

⁴⁰ Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c.1215-c.1515*, 101.

⁴¹ Swanson, 139.

enough of a direct connection or when that did not do enough to satisfy their craving for relationship with their creator, they found other ways.

Meanwhile, the Church seemed almost to want to keep God from the people by substituting clergy. The clergy said the Mass in a language the people could not understand, in a tone of voice that could not be heard, and put themselves between the laity and the elements. The clergy did not allow the people to touch the Body, but instead would only allow them to adore it from afar. Further, because the Council required the laity to make a full confession at least once a year in order that they might receive the Eucharist, their yearly obligation, it is unsurprising that the people were cowed. The church was, in effect, telling the laity that they could not be trusted, that they were not “good enough,” and that for their sins, even when absolved, they would spend an indeterminate period of time in the horror of Purgatory. It is a wonder that any Christians remained devout.

Indeed, the laity and surely also some clergy, developed a confused theology.⁴² “Clearly, spirituality and superstition, depth and superficiality, faith and calculation are contradictions that run to the core of any description of the spiritual climate on the eve of the Reformation. Indeed, they may be the best way of characterizing it.”⁴³

That the people seemed to work to maintain a relationship with God, often in any ways they could invent – odd and wonderful ways – demonstrates that they craved a relationship with their creator. When in the Middle Ages, the laity came to be disengaged from a direct relationship – they were forced to go through the intermediary of clergy –

⁴² Indeed part of the reason for clericalism was that some people tended to try to use the sacraments and/or Holy water for “magic” purposes. Things like improving their crops, etc.

⁴³ Anne Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose: The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 134.

they sought other routes that would provide a direct conduit to their Lord because they too desired a direct, transcendent experience of God as it is described in Scripture.

“Religious experience is a response to that which is perceived as ultimate, involving the whole person, characterized by a peculiar intensity, and issuing in action.”⁴⁴

While it is true that people of the Middle Ages and beyond were often uneducated and many had a transactional concept of theology, it is also apparent that they were devoted and went to great lengths to be in relationship with God and with each other as members of the Body of Christ. Even though they could not or did not frequently partake in the Eucharist, they were at Mass at least weekly and often daily to witness the Host. They were left out of the steps of the Mass, so they joined the choir to be closer to it as it took place. They could not hear or understand the words of the liturgy so they joined guilds and confraternities where they supported the church and each other in financial and prayerful ways. They sought after God’s blessing and expressed deep remorse when they thought they should. They prayed to God directly and through the communion of Saints, especially the Blessed Virgin Mary. They spent a great deal of time in daily prayer often using the rosary as their guide – all the while they went about their daily lives, living as best they could. They prayed for each other, for those who had gone before, and they kept candles burning and gave of their precious few resources even at the times of their deaths. In short, while they missed the transformative experience of celebrating the Eucharist, they creatively found ways to make their worship of God personally meaningful.

⁴⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity: A Missing Dimension in New Testament Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 60.

Some say that the more things change, the more things stay the same⁴⁵. This thought can be applied to many arenas including the church. The 16th century Reformation generally attributed to Martin Luther set off a domino effect whereby the Church has been splintered time and again. The publication of Luther's famous 95 Theses in 1517 is typically credited with being the first domino knocked over in a long and contorted sprawl that continues even today. From Luther, to Zwingli, to Calvin, to Knox, to Cranmer and beyond, the church has been forever changed. Among the changes were worship style, church architecture, and leadership authority. Although Luther gets the credit (blame?), his beliefs stayed much closer to that of the Roman church than did most of the other reformers including Cranmer the best known of reformers in the Church of England.

What did not change is lay participation in Eucharist. Though most of the above mentioned reformers wanted and/or encouraged frequent celebration of Eucharist, lay people resisted. By this point in history, much of the laity had embraced the worry that they were unworthy and therefore at risk when they received. In addition, the reformed denominations leaders in various degrees reduced the meaning of Eucharist from the actual body and blood of Christ – transubstantiation – to a mysterious real presence, or even further to simply a memorialization of the last supper of Jesus. In other words, these reformers reduced the importance of the Eucharist. At the same time, they increased the importance of the sermon given by the ordained leaders. In the more “liturgical” churches such as the Anglicans and Lutherans, though Eucharist typically occurred more frequently than in the more reformed denominations, it is still fair to say that the laity of

⁴⁵ Origin of this statement or one like it is commonly attributed to French writer Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr

those denominations only intermittently participated in the Eucharist by receiving it and rarely if ever by helping to lead it.

Chapter Two

Modern Liturgical Movement

The Liturgical Movement, arguably the most important thing to happen in the church in the last 200 years, was initiated from within the Roman Catholic Church. Eventually it spread across and/or affected nearly all western Christian churches to one degree or another. The movement continues today. Liturgical renewal has not stopped since the 1830s and particularly after the 1960s and the second Vatican council.

The movement bubbled up from multiple sources; first from monastics and scholars, then from church leaders and the people. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, much in the world had changed politically, culturally, and technically since the sixteenth century reformations. As we have witnessed throughout history, change in the church, although perhaps behind the curve, does eventually follow the world's currents.

Topics within the Liturgical Movement were multivalent including worship history and its practices, the idea that worship could be more foundational for the people, and even hopes for reuniting the church which had splintered during the reformations. One issue over which the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches were divided was the language to be used in liturgy. Protestant churches had moved to include the ordinary worshiper in several ways, but a key way was that services were held using the local vernacular. Surely hearing the service in their own language allowed the average person to be more fully present to the sacred experience of worship.

Although it took more than a century, those in the Roman Catholic Church who wrote about and pushed for reform in liturgy eventually carried the day. Once the Roman Catholic Church allowed for substantial updates and changes in the liturgy - changes that

include use of vernacular and the participation of lay persons, even women - the flood gates were open and, try as some might, they are not be closed again.

In the Roman church Prosper Louis Pascal Gueranger OSB, the founder and Abbot of Solesmers Abbey in France, was instrumental to the beginning of the Liturgical Movement beginning in the 1830s. He was a scholar of the history of liturgy and in particular he hoped to return to liturgies used in the middle ages because he thought them somehow more authentic. Although eventually this notion was left behind, it was he, ahead of his time, who advocated for the Eucharist to be the primary liturgy and for it to be a shared worship within his monastic community rather than one conducted in private masses. It took well over a century for this idea to come to fruition, but he was successful in his lobbying for a more universal use of the Roman Rite as opposed to the locally grown and far more complicated diocesan versions typically used outside of Rome. Gueranger's most well-known contribution, aside from use of Gregorian chant, was his decades long work on a liturgical calendar. Incorporating elements from both Eastern and Western liturgies, the calendar is something around which a person of faith could organize their life. In it he provided church history, commentaries of early church liturgies, and explanations of how and why the church celebrates as it does. Although imperfect, by this calendar, any follower of Christ could participate in the church in a way previously unavailable to all but the most diligent scholar. By its use, followers were better able to partake in the life of Christ.

As will happen, scholarship encourages scholarship. While Gueranger was working in France, in Germany, some Roman Catholic theologians were focusing on biblical and patristic models of liturgical renewal. At least one, Johann Adam Mohler,

had been influenced by Protestant scholars such as Friedrich Schleiermacher. Mohler went on to influence a young Anglican scholar, Edward B. Pusey, during his time studying at the University of Gottingen. Pusey in turn carried his thoughts of liturgical renewal back to Oxford where he became intimately involved in the fledgling Oxford Movement, the early Anglican branch of the Liturgical Movement. Thus, the Liturgical Movement is inextricably linked to the Ecumenical Movement.

Reform was slow and not necessarily steady, but it did keep going. Pope Pius X encouraged progress in the Liturgical Movement with the 1903 publication of a *motu proprio* on sacred music. In it he supported liturgy as the center piece for the life and mission of the church. Just two years later in *Sacra Tridentina sinodus* he reaffirmed the Council of Trent's call for more frequent reception of Eucharist. The average worshiper was encouraged to participate in the life of Christ by partaking of communion. At the parish level, not much actually changed, but at least there was some leadership support for renewal.

A few years later in Belgium, Lambert Beauduin OSB published *Liturgy, the Life of the Church* (1914). In it he suggested that if liturgy was at the heart of the church's piety it would serve to improve private devotionals. This concept was contrary to much of the "accepted wisdom" of the day. In a later book, *Liturgy, the Life of the Church*, Beauduin presented his own six goals for the liturgical movement which included active participation by all people in the Mass by understanding and following the rites. This meant that the liturgy had to be in the language of the people. He also began to study the Eastern Church and communicated with theologians in the Anglican Church as well. For all of this he was exiled from Belgium for twenty years.

Meanwhile, German scholars including Professor Anton Baumstark, continued the process. Baumstark published *On the Historical Development of the Liturgy* in 1923 and *Comparative Liturgy* in 1939. These two texts reached church scholars far and wide. They argued that evolution in liturgy is organic rather than through radical innovation and that the changes that take place are in accord with customs particular to an area. The influential forces include language, literature, politics, and culture.

Another critical player in the movement is Odo Casel OSB. Like other pioneers in the grass roots movement, he was a brilliant scholar and Benedictine. He stands out because his influence was so lasting. Casel, mostly a theoretical theologian, taught the then fairly radical concept that Christ, the paschal mystery, is present in the whole of the liturgy rather than just the bread and wine, and that the liturgy is an act of the whole church and not simply of the clergy. Though his work was controversial, it is evident throughout *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. In the Constitution it is clear that the liturgy is for all assembled people and that Christ's presence is in the whole of the liturgy in various ways rather than only through the bread and wine. Further, Casel's understanding of the sacraments as the self-revelation of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and that by our participation in them we are in relationship with God, can also be felt today in the theology of the Episcopal Church's Book of Common Prayer.

As one result of the Oxford Movement, worship practices in the Anglican Church shifted to be more like those of the Roman Church. However, although services were in English, the English was more Elizabethan than common. Morning Prayer was the typical service and lay participation was minimal. But here too, change was being suggested. In 1935, nearly a century after the Oxford Movement, Anglican priest A. Gabriel Hebert

published *Liturgy and Society*. In this book and his pamphlet “The Parish Communion” of 1936, Hebert preached against individualism in favor of participation in a common life in the parish. He encouraged lay participation, weekly Eucharistic, and a simple altar with the priest facing the people.

Gregory Dix also contributed to the Anglican portion of the Liturgical Movement. He too supported sharing in the Eucharist as key to the Christian life. In his 1945 *The Shape of the Liturgy*, Dix described the Eucharist as being a particular “shape” - an imitation of Jesus at the Last Supper: to take, bless, break, and distribute. To Dix, this mattered more than did the words used. He was also strongly in favor of reuniting the Anglican Church with the Church of Rome.

In the United States, in the Episcopal Church, it was William Ladd who was instrumental in bringing the Liturgical Movement to the fore and to forcing a conversation that put liturgy, ecumenism, and social justice in the same room. Ladd felt that the church needed to both reinterpret the past and look to the present in order to meet the needs of the future. He was a strong proponent of lay participation in liturgy. His influence as church history professor and then dean of Berkeley Divinity School (1904 to 1941) extended to other scholars, including Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., and is ultimately evident in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.

To this point in the Liturgical Movement, momentum was building for some sort of overhaul of the way people “do church.” The Episcopal Church revised its Book of Common Prayer in 1928, but the theology was not yet focused on Baptism and Eucharist. At the parish level, the typical weekly service was Morning Prayer. Lay participation was minimal in the pews and nearly nonexistent at the altar. Although Pope Pius XII deserves

recognition for his contribution to the Liturgical Movement (he established a commission for the study of liturgical reform in 1948), and there was some limited experimentation going on with things like lay participation, Roman Catholics had it no better and their services were still mostly in Latin. In both denominations, women were to be seen - head covered - and not heard. But popular culture was changing rapidly. The Church, whether they realized it or not, was in danger of being left behind. It was then that Pope John XXIII called the Vatican Council in 1962 and the Liturgical Movement hit its stride - the result of which is the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.

Liturgical Reform in the Roman Catholic and Episcopal Churches

Following Vatican II, a metamorphosis of huge proportions took place in the Roman Catholic Church. Sweeping changes, some prescribed and some as a byproduct, were made. Changes included liturgical services being translated to the local vernacular, the priest facing the congregation, lay participation at a whole new level, new Eucharistic prayers, and the presence of Christ throughout the Eucharist rather than only within the bread and wine. Though there was resistance in some locations, largely the changes were implemented so rapidly that many of today's Roman Catholics have little or no memory of the way it used to be.

Before Vatican II in the Roman Catholic Church, it was common to see people praying over their rosary beads while the priest, in a low voice, said the Eucharistic prayer in Latin with his back to the congregation. People might only look up when the ringing of the *Sanctus* bells alerted them, and when they received communion it was typically only the bread.

The Episcopal Church, like all other major denominations, was heavily influenced by the Liturgical Movement and Vatican II. In the Episcopal Church, before the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, (which was much more than a revision to the previous book of 1928) liturgy was in theory “corporate worship.” The normal Sunday service was most often Morning Prayer, where the ordained, mostly priests, not only officiated, but also read the Scripture. Priests were the dominate players in the liturgy and the laity participated mostly by responding – as in the invitation to pray: “*And with thy spirit.*” Like the Roman Catholics, in the Episcopal Church liturgy was done by the ordained and the people were mostly there as witnesses. “In a sense, piety was understood as a private act on the part of an individual Christian; a private act which might take place in the context of public ceremonial.”⁴⁶ In non-liturgical Protestant denominations, people sat passively and listened to the (relatively) long sermon. The result was that the laity was left out – possibly to the point of being alienated.

For the liturgy to be a bridge between God and the people, it has to touch the people. It seems obvious, but perhaps it is not; the purpose of liturgy is to nurture and sustain the people of God. “If the rites are not to be merely a religious façade, they must be connected to the lived experience of the members, not as isolated individuals but as members of one body, the Body of Christ.”⁴⁷ When one is not involved, when one is disconnected, mere presence is not enough. After all, the vast majority of the Church, the Body of Christ, are laity. Something needed to change, and it did.

⁴⁶ Louis Weil, *Liturgical Sense: The Logic of Rite*, Weil Series in Liturgics (New York: Seabury Books, 2013), 46.

⁴⁷ Weil, 62.

First with Vatican II and then with other denominations following along, the ministry of the baptized was rediscovered. Rediscovered is the correct term. Church father Justin Martyr wrote that some of the Eucharist was taken by those present – members of the laity – to other members of the faithful who were absent. This was common practice until at least the fourth century. Eventually it was phased out in favor of only the ordained doing so not, it is thought, because the laity were incapable but because it consolidated power to bishops and priests.⁴⁸

It is important to understand that the essence of the rediscovery of the ministry of the baptized does not have to do with the clergy needing help, or an extra set of hands. In fact, in some (many?) cases priests would just as soon keep their roles unchanged. The essence is that each person benefits by every other person's participation. It builds the Body of Christ when the Body works together. "The prophetic office of the ministry of the laity, like its antecedents, is the prerogative and command to bear witness to what has been seen and heard. The lay prophet tells the story."⁴⁹ The story the prophet tells is spreading the Good News of Christ and an *active* lay participant is in a much better position to spread that news.

Along with making the Eucharist the central liturgy of worship within the Episcopal Church, the 1979 *Prayer Book* also brought about a change of theology – to one of Baptism. With the Apostles' Creed as its underpinning, the newly developed baptismal covenant was meant to reflect its time and what it means to be a Christian now. While there may or may not be a cause and effect relationship between the two, prayer

⁴⁸ Marianne Engelmann and Jane Cors Smith, "Re-Member Me," *Liturgy* 22, no. 4 (August 6, 2007): 13–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/04580630701551305>.

⁴⁹ Gabriel J Fackre, "Ministries of Identity and Vitality," *Theology Today* 36, no. 3 (October 1979): 379.

and belief are surely related, which is why the liturgical calendar suggests that the entire congregation reaffirm their baptismal covenant several times a year. Through these changes we are witnesses to the theology that “just by virtue of our baptism into the ministry of Christ, we are all worthy ministers of the pastoral care of the church and also worthy recipients of that care.”⁵⁰ Of course, with this worthiness, comes a level of responsibility. “The Body of Christ gathers to be shaped by the Holy One.”⁵¹ We Christians believe what we believe because of what we do, and we do what we do because of what we believe. As Christians, it is our responsibility to do – so that we may believe. It is our responsibility to believe – so that we may do. “Baptism–confirmation–eucharist, the sacraments of initiation, are the basis of a common Christian vocation and call to be ministers and to minister.”⁵²

It has been said that one cannot be a solo Christian. Perhaps what is meant is that one cannot practice Christianity by oneself. Proverbs 27:17 says: “Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another.” After all, our God is Triune – in relationship within Godself – a relationship that is love itself. If this is the God we worship and to whom we are devoted, how can we possibly do so in isolation? Paul said it another way in his letter to the Thessalonians, “Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.” (1 Thes 5:11) What is being said in these two Scripture passages is: to be our best selves, and therefore the best followers of Christ that we are capable of being – we need each other on the journey. We are “hard-wired” to be in

⁵⁰ Sylvia Sweeney, “Baptism as the Gateway to Episcopal Liturgical Renewal,” *Liturgy* 26, no. 4 (October 1, 2011): 39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2011.586585>.

⁵¹ Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima*, 117.

⁵² Robert W Hovda and inc Liturgical Conference, *Strong, Loving and Wise: Presiding in Liturgy* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1984), 3.

community, as the Godhead is always in community. “Into the community you were called, the call was not meant for you alone; in the community of the called you bear your cross, you struggle, you pray. You are not alone, even in death, and on the Last Day you will be only one member of the great congregation of Jesus Christ. If you scorn the fellowship of the brethren, you reject the call of Jesus Christ, and thus your solitude can only be hurtful to you.”⁵³

Of course not everyone was in favor of “active participation” in the liturgy as called for by Vatican II. Many critics contended that the Latin *participation actuosa* referred not to “external activity but rather an internalized engagement with the liturgical action.”⁵⁴ Baldovin argued that Pope Pius X was clearly making an effort to encourage more than simply prayerful observation of the liturgy. Further, he points out that the pastors are to see to it that their flocks are “actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects.”⁵⁵ Although, it is nonsensical to think that everyone should do everything at every service, it is certainly reasonable to believe that “active engagement” would include participating in the liturgy with voice and action. “The goal of the liturgical movement has been to get the Christian people to participate in the prayer of the church in the most active and conscious manner possible.”⁵⁶ Perhaps the most important achievement of the liturgical movement is that it has allowed, even led Christians back to the table, to stand side by side and receive Eucharist together.

⁵³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (New York, N.Y: HarperCollins, 1954), 77.

⁵⁴ Baldovin, *Reforming the Liturgy*, 142.

⁵⁵ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (4 December 1963).” In Austin Flannery, OP, ed., *Vatican Council II. Vol.1: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*. Northport, NY: Costello, 1975, 1-36.

⁵⁶ Bernard Botte, *From Silence to Participation: An Insider’s View of Liturgical Renewal* (Washington, D.C: Pastoral Press, 1988), 165.

Lay Liturgical Leaders

Fortunately, in most places, active lay participation is no longer limited to spiritually observing the liturgy along with visiting the sick or teaching Sunday school. Happily, it can no longer be said that the priest does something in liturgy that is independent of the people of God. We, the church, have come to understand that liturgy is of God, from God. It is *a work done for the people*; a gift from God that demands response and contribution from the people.

Now, more than in the last millennia, when attending a Roman Catholic or Episcopal Eucharist, one is likely to find a lay person reading Scripture and perhaps leading the Prayers of the People. The choir is usually made up completely of laypersons, unless the deacon or priest can figure out a way to sing the anthem and set the table. Some lay persons are “licensed” to preach and often a Lay Eucharistic Minister will assist in the setting of the altar for the Eucharistic prayer and then with the distribution of the consecrated bread and wine. In other words, lay persons are active participants as liturgy leaders. I contend that through these forms of lay leadership the Eucharist is made more meaningful to the participants.

The presider of a Eucharist is, as Stephen Burns writes, “privileged”⁵⁷ because of the opportunity they have to be in the position of being with the people of God as they relate most intimately with God. “Those who have the ministry of presiding will be continually invited to take joy in the circumscribed and yet immensely important tasks.”⁵⁸ They, in fact, lead the process of adoration and of building the Church. After all, “[w]e

⁵⁷ Stephen Burns, “Yearning without Saying a Word: Unembarrassed Presiding in Liturgy,” *Worship* 86, no. 1 (January 2012): 3.

⁵⁸ Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 201.

receive Christ into our bodies and Christ receives us into his body – the Church, which is sacrament in the world.”⁵⁹ This action of reception is, hopefully, a significant one in the life of the receiver. Therefore, the act of distributing the body of Christ to the Body of Christ has the possibility of being a powerful event in the lives of both the giver and the receiver – lay or ordained. Of course, the giver is Jesus: the person doing the actual distribution is never only him or herself. But they are not lost either – they too are present in the moment. The receiver experiences the reception of the body of Christ from a different perspective too. In receiving from a lay minister, the receiver has the opportunity to see him or herself in a new light as they can, perhaps, more easily identify with a lay person than with an ordained one.

This means that part of the role of the presider is to be inclusive of others in ministry/leadership for the good of the whole assembly. The presider must “yield the floor” so to speak, to allow for others to serve the gathering. For some this may not be easily done, but it is important because to do otherwise is to ignore the gifts of others. “When the presider does everything except those parts of the liturgy which belong to the entire congregation, we have a kind of liturgical barbarism.”⁶⁰

Anecdotally, many church goers will report that being and seeing lay leaders in the liturgy is a positive change of the last several decades. In 1988 Hovda wrote, “The reappearance of many part-time, community-commissioned musicians, readers, ushers, acolytes and eucharistic ministers, has been one of the most immediately successful of

⁵⁹ John F. Baldwin, *Bread of Life, Cup of Salvation: Understanding the Mass*, Come & See Series (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 158.

⁶⁰ Hovda and Liturgical Conference, *Strong, Loving and Wise*, 17.

the liturgical developments.”⁶¹ The reason for this success seems clear – with the turn that took place in the Liturgical Movement toward active participation of the laity, the focus for individual worshipers shifted from a personal piety to being a part of the whole Body. If that participation in the Body of Christ is a major purpose of being in church, this must be exactly what the leaders of the Liturgical Movement had in mind.

From this shifted focus, the Eucharistic liturgy is more than ever a common prayer of the whole Body and is foundational for the members of the Body. “Liturgical experience is unquestionably formative: it shapes an understanding of the meaning of a rite.”⁶² If we accept that the liturgical experience is formative, and that adding lay ministers has been a positive result of the Liturgical Movement, it stands to reason that if “the Sunday liturgy is largely a clerical affair done by the priest for the people, so that the people are mere responders or observers rather than key actors, the chances that the parish will grow into a group of integrated, self-starting, empowered ministers is greatly decreased.”⁶³

Let us then draw these threads together. One focus of the Liturgical Movement was to encourage the ministry of the baptized, the active participation of the laity. This led to a shift toward inclusion of lay persons, even in liturgical leadership roles. The liturgy is foundational and formational in the lives of all participants. The liturgy has to connect somehow to the people, to touch them at some base level in order to nurture them. Presiders, who have control of the liturgical rite, will hopefully recognize the

⁶¹ Robert W. Hovda and John F. Baldwin, *Robert Hovda: The Amen Corner* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1994), 131.

⁶² Weil, *Liturgical Sense*, 105.

⁶³ Patrick Malloy, *Celebrating the Eucharist: A Practical Ceremonial Guide for Clergy and Other Liturgical Ministers* (New York: Church Pub, 2007), 4.

advantages of sharing the leadership duties for the benefit of the liturgical experience of all.

Chapter Three

All of our experiences are singularly individual. Even when two people standing side by side witness and/or take part in the same event at the same time, the experience is not identical, because the two people are not. Therefore, when two persons participate in a Eucharistic service, their understanding of and feelings about the experience will differ at least slightly. However, since the time shared in the celebration of the paschal mystery is how we best come together as the Body of Christ perhaps our shared experience is more similar than one might think. Further, for the laity; is the experience different, better or worse, more or less meaningful, more or less intense, more or less memorable, when one is participating as a leader?

In conversations with other priests, I have heard it said that sometimes, personal prayer is difficult when presiding, so I wondered about that for all worship leaders. I wondered too if serving as a lay leader required a different focus and therefore more engagement in the service, and I wondered if serving as a leader resulted in a better experience of worship.

Using my contacts with Episcopal priests throughout the United States, I sent an email survey to more than 40 parish priests. I explained my project and asked them to forward the survey with its cover letter to the laity in their parishes who serve in a leadership capacity at the Eucharist. The survey responses were received and compiled through the use of the software SurveyMonkey®. 596 people from 40 Episcopal parishes in 16 states responded. All survey respondents are lay leaders in their own parishes. They are Episcopalians, though not necessarily confirmed, and self-reported as being 18 years old or older. The respondents were categorized into five strata: choir members,

musicians, lectors, Lay Eucharistic Ministers (LEM), ushers or other leadership roles. Some serve in more than one role, i.e. a choir member who is also a lector. The “other” category was provided so people who serve in less typical roles (i.e. verger) would not affect the responses of the more common leadership roles; the “other” responses will not be addressed at a specific level.

I asked the participants to provide the name of their church home, and its city and state. Then they were asked to respond to seven statements about their experience of Eucharist when serving as a liturgical leader versus when in the general congregation. I framed the statements from both a positive and negative perspective. I used a Likert-type scale, asking the respondents to strongly agree, agree, remain neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree with the given statements. Finally, the respondents were given the opportunity to make any comments they wanted to about their experience as lay leaders at the Eucharist. (See Appendix for a copy of the survey)

The responses were analyzed and will be discussed in two ways. First in the aggregate and then with a more sophisticated analysis to determine what, if any, difference the particular leadership position or combination of positions (i.e. usher, choir member, etc.) made on the responses.

Following the survey, I selected six participating churches and discussed their survey results, both church specific and the aggregate, during phone interviews with their rectors. The six participating churches were selected for diversity; specifically: 1) they are from different states and from different parts of the country, 2) three of the rectors are male and three are female, 3) they matriculated at four different seminaries, 4) they have

served their parishes from just over a year to seven years, 5) they have been ordained for from five to twelve plus years, and 6) their congregations are of different sizes.

Analysis in the Aggregate

The first two questions were demographic in nature. In the first, the respondents were asked to provide the name of the worship community where they serve as lay-leaders, and its location by city and state. Nearly all answered this question, and those few who did not seem to have had a problem with the survey instrument or the application software.

The second questions asked what lay-leadership role the respondents serve in. Here there was a great deal of overlap. Many people serve in more than one capacity – some in several. These results and their ramifications will be discussed in detail in the next section. Again, the remaining “questions” were a series of statements to which the respondents were asked to react.

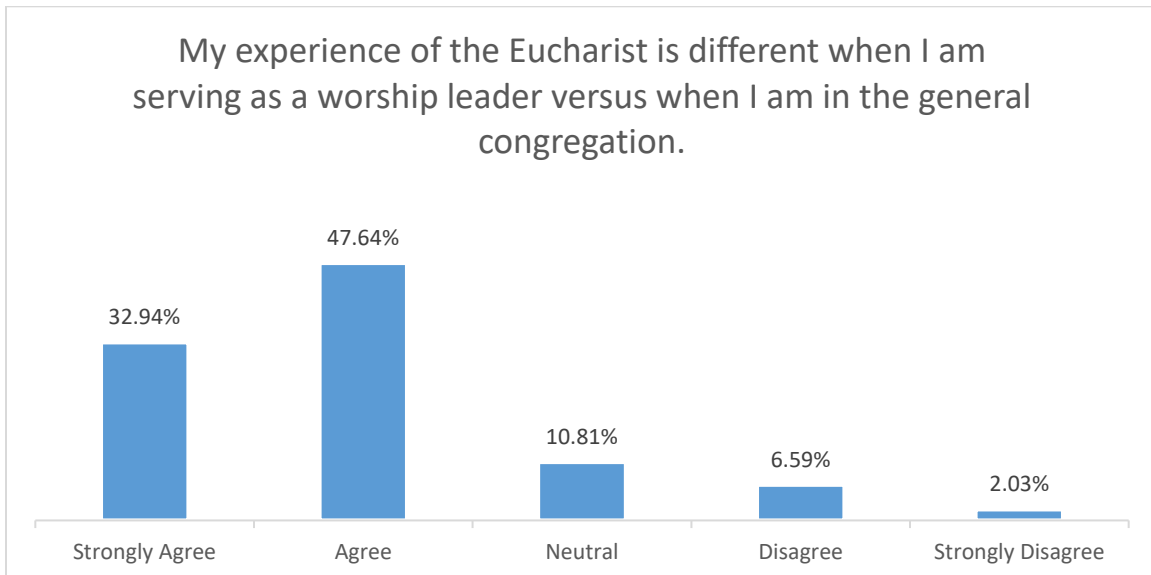


Figure 1

Statement one, the first of the non-demographic statements was very straight forward: *My experience of the Eucharist is different when I am serving as a worship leader versus when I am in the general congregation.* (Figure 1) A striking 80.58 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. This was hardly surprising, in fact what is surprising is that over 19 percent disagreed or were neutral to it. After all, the view, the seating arrangements, the required actions of all liturgical leaders are different from that of the general congregation. But of course, different does not necessarily mean better.

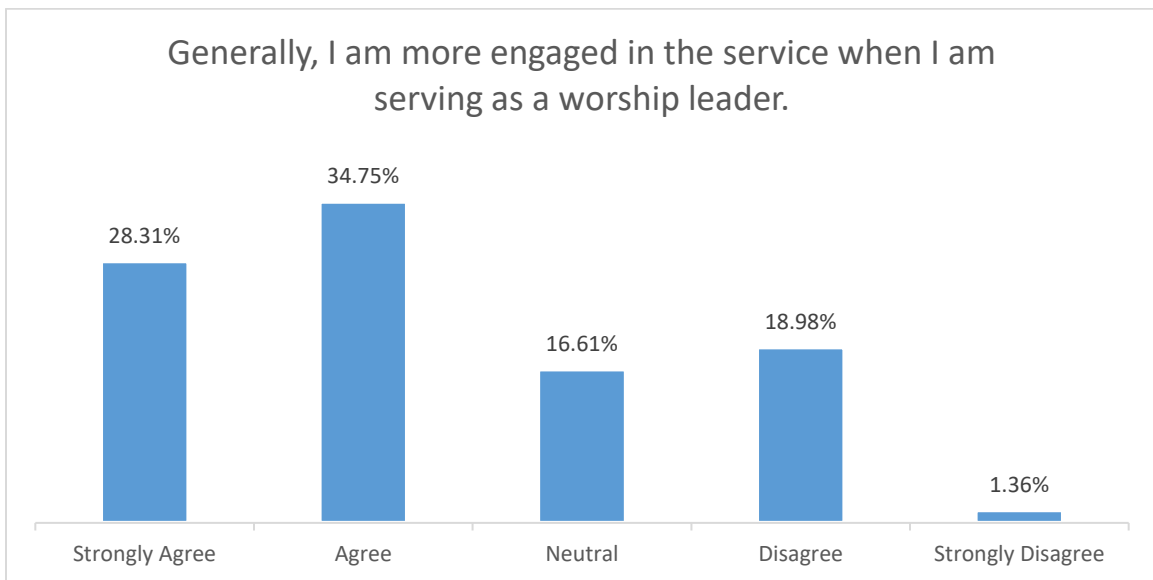


Figure 2

The second statement was: *Generally, I am more engaged in the service when I am serving as a worship leader.* (Figure 2) A less definitive but still a majority of 63.06 percent agreed or strongly agreed that serving as a worship leader means increased engagement in the service. 16.61 percent of the respondents were neutral this statement, this percentage is similar to 20.34 percent who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, suggesting they are equally as attentive both when serving and when not. What

we cannot be sure of is exactly how attentive that is or is not. Further, to be neutral to this statement or to disagree does not mean that one is harmed by participation, only that one is not helped. There is also the possibility of “reverse causation.” That is, the reason that they are a liturgical leader is that it makes them more engaged in the service. In other words, it is the engagement that makes them volunteer to serve, not the volunteering that makes them engaged. Still for the 63.06 percent, serving as a lay leader at the Eucharist encourages paying attention, and I think we can all agree that that is positive.

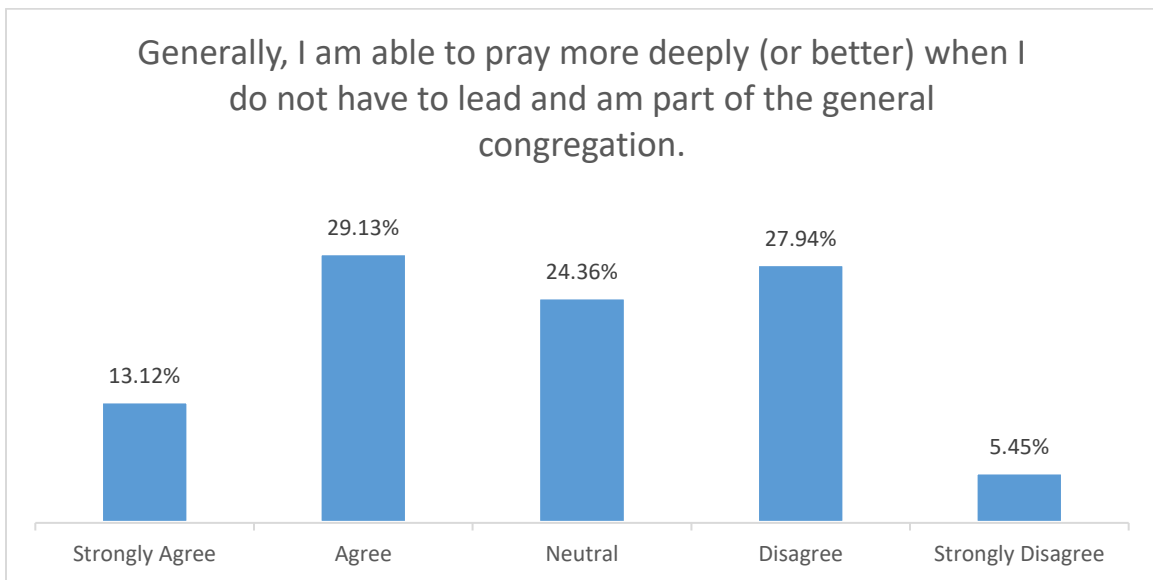


Figure 3

Does this engagement affect personal prayer, I wondered. The fourth statement was: *Generally, I am able to pray more deeply (or better) when I do not have to lead and am part of the general congregation.* (Figure 3) For this the respondents were fairly split. 33.39 percent disagreed, or strongly disagreed meaning that they seem not to have problems with personal piety when serving as a leader, while 42.25 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they pray better when in the general congregation, and 24.36 percent

said it did not matter. Because of the large percentage of those who are neutral, we see that a majority of these lay leaders, 57.75 percent say that their prayers are not adversely effected by serving at the Eucharist. Although unfortunately, the statement did not specifically refer to personal (i.e. private) prayer, it seems likely that those who agreed or strongly agreed understood the statement that way and it does cause concern for them. Are they able to make up for the disturbed prayer or is the opportunity completely lost, and is that loss worth it?

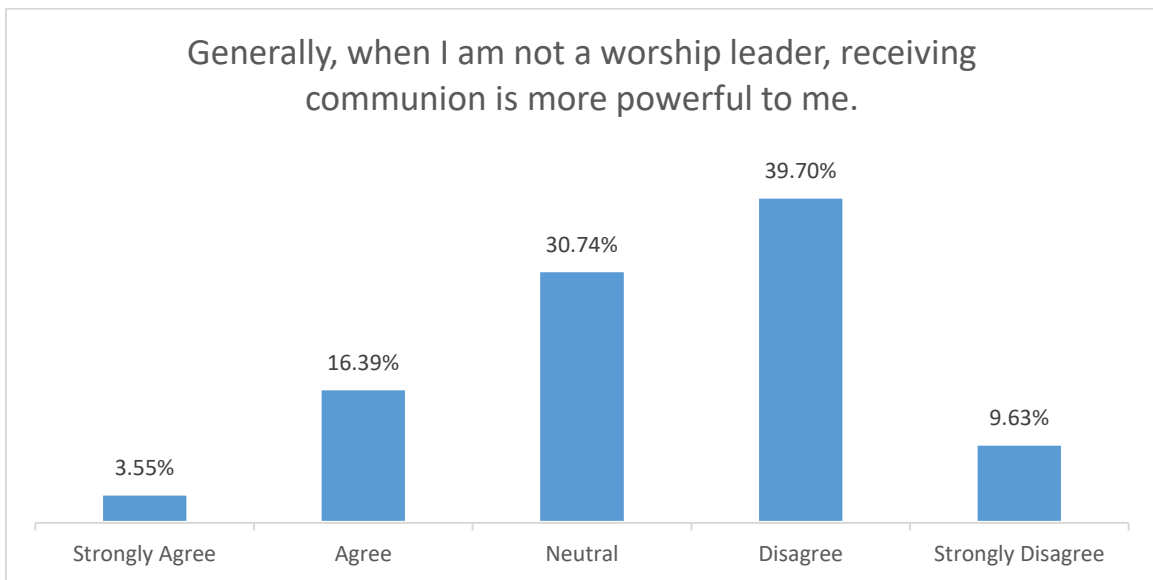


Figure 4

Similarly, I wondered if receiving communion is more powerful (i.e. better) as a worship leader. The sixth statement was: *Generally, when I am not a worship leader, receiving communion is more powerful for me.* (Figure 4) Only 19.94 percent agreed or strongly agreed with this statement while 49.33 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 30.74 percent were neutral to it. These responses indicate that serving as a worship leader at best neither makes communion better or worse. At worst it does not interrupt

personal piety and nearly half the people have a more positive experience of communion when serving. Again though, the concern is about the nearly 20 percent of lay leaders who agreed, leading to the question; does leadership at the Eucharist compromise their experience? Or is it simply not significantly different when leading – therefore, not better, but also not worse?

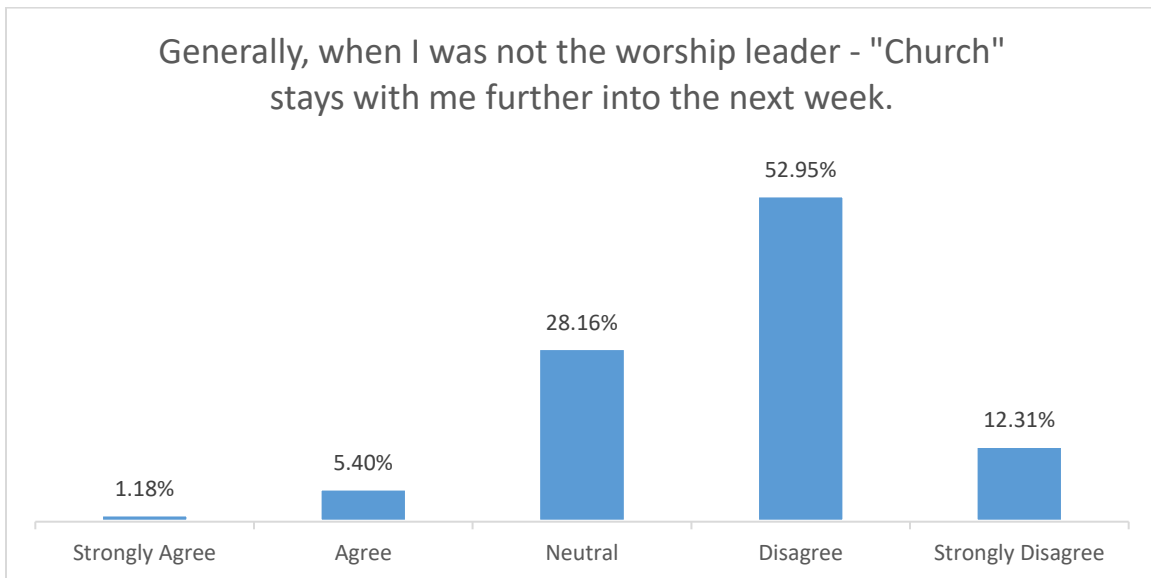


Figure 5

Also with piety in mind, I thought it possible that not having to “work” the service might mean that the totality of the service could be more memorable, something that the congregants would take with them into the coming week. The seventh statement was: *Generally, when I was not a worship leader – “Church” stays with me further into the next week.* (Figure 5) Only a paltry 6.58 percent agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, while 28.16 percent were neutral to it and a whopping 65.26 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. Apparently, serving as a worship leader adds to one’s memory of the “Church” experience or at the very least, does not detract from it. Perhaps what this

indicates is that as a leader, one is forced to pay attention at least enough to carry out one's duties in a timely manner. If so, that attention may cause the content of the service, which may include all parts – Eucharist, sermon, Scripture, and prayers – to be better retained.

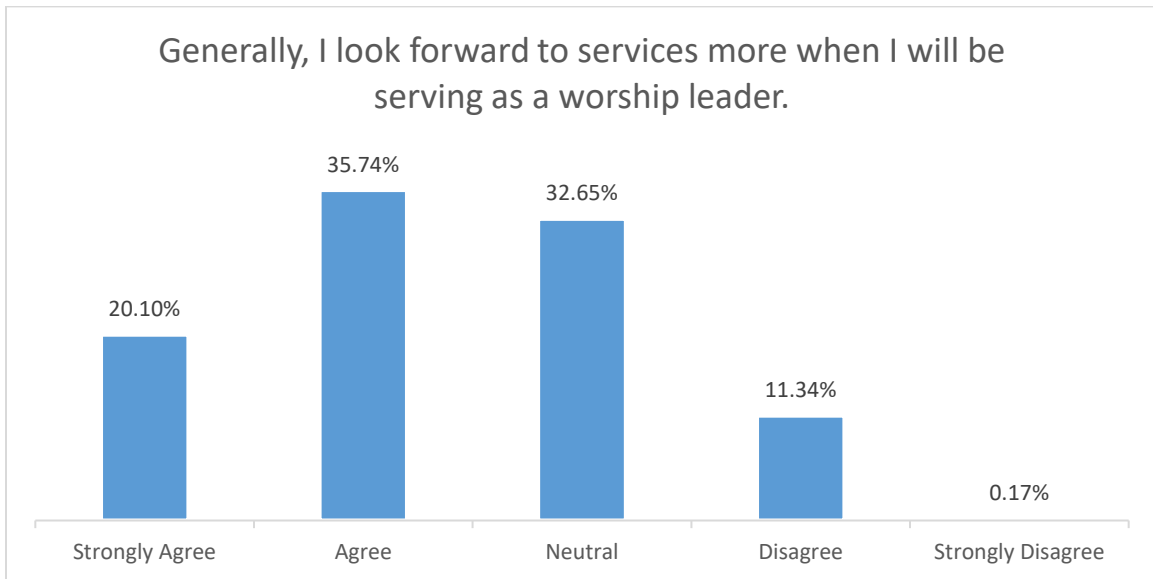


Figure 6

The remaining two statements were forthright. The third statement was:

Generally, I look forward to services more when I will be serving as worship leader.

(Figure 6) Over half, 55.84 percent agreed or strongly agreed with this, which might be a bit disappointing, but 32.65 percent were neutral to the statement. The remainder, just 11.51 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. This could mean that being a worship leader promotes desire to want to attend Eucharist, or that they look forward to Eucharist whether or not they are serving. It is certain, however, that serving at the Eucharist does nothing to dampen their desire to attend. What we cannot determine from this question is if those who are neutral to the question look forward to the services because they are serving or if they are indifferent to their service.

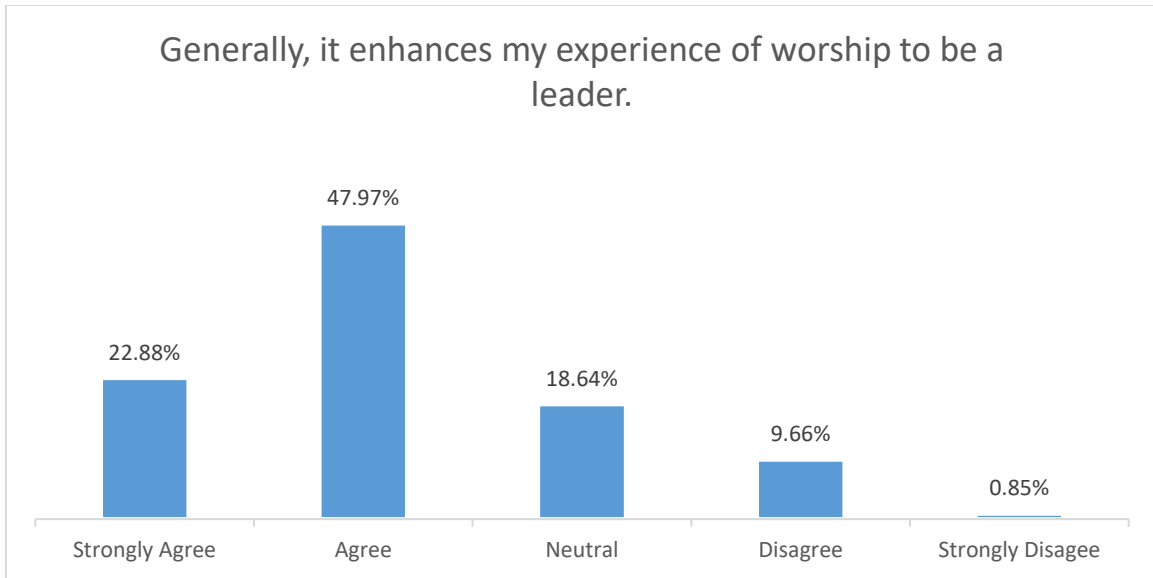


Figure 7

The fifth statement is perhaps the most telling. It was: *Generally, it enhances my experience of worship to be a leader.* (Figure 7) 70.85 percent of the respondents agreed with this statement, and 18.64 percent were neutral to it. This leaves just 10.51 percent of the lay leaders who specifically disagree that being a worship leader is in no way an enhancement, but it does not automatically mean that these 10.51 percent therefore feel that serving diminishes their experience. Although theoretically that could be the case, still for a full 89 percent of those who serve in leadership roles, serving as a leader is a positive or neutral factor to their experience. Further, from the large majority of nearly 71 percent who responded that serving as a worship leader enhances their experience, we can conclude that one reason to encourage the laity in our parishes to prayerfully consider becoming a worship leader is because it is likely to enhance their worship experience.

When lay ministers participate in liturgical leadership, not only does the assembly again have the opportunity to draw closer to God, but they also are more fully “being the church” by involving the whole of the community. It makes clear the concept of

baptismal equality, and uses and demonstrates appreciation for the gifts of the individual members of the community.

Inferential Assessment

Using additional and more sophisticated statistical analysis techniques⁶⁴ to look at the data, Table 1 indicates the frequencies and percentages for the responses for each outcome. There is a minor variation in the number of responses for each outcome, as respondents apparently skipped or missed a question. The number of responses range from 582 for Statement 3, *Generally, I look forward to services more when I will be serving as a worship leader*, to 593 for Statement 7 *Generally, when I was not a worship leader – “church” stays with me further into the next week.*

Table 1 also provides a continuous analysis of the mean (average) score, where the outcomes have been scored in the following manner: 2 for strongly agree, 1 for agree, 0 for neutral, -1 for disagree, and -2 for strongly disagree. This method of scoring gives the mean value for each statement. Mean values of greater than 0.0 indicate that on average the respondents agree with the statement. Conversely, average scores of less than 0.0 indicate on average those who participate disagree with the statement.

Finally, Table 1 presents the results of a Wald test (the p-value) for each of the statements. With survey results such as these (one sample) the Wald test, a type of “inferential statistics,” is used to test the “null hypothesis”. The goal of the inferential assessment is to evaluate if, on average, individuals were more likely to agree or disagree with the statements. The approach assumes that the respondents were neither more likely to agree or disagree, then calculates what difference was observed, and then assess the

⁶⁴ I am deeply grateful to George Howard, DrPH, Professor and statistician at the University of Alabama at Birmingham Department of Biostatistics, for his help with this analysis.

likelihood that a difference (to either be more likely to agree or more likely to disagree) as large as that observed could have happened by chance alone. A P-Value of less than .05 indicates that there is a less than 1-in-20 chance that the difference from being neutral observed in the data was a chance happening. As the Table 1 shows, the P-Value of the mean for all seven statements is far less than .05 (in fact, 0.0005 or less), meaning that it is remarkably unlikely (less than a 5-in-10,000 chance) that the respondents were neutral in their opinion, but rather there is clear evidence of an “average” agreement or disagreement with the statements. In other words, these results can be trusted.

Because the responses were scored -2 for strongly disagree, -1 for disagree, 0 for neutral, 1 for agree and 2 for strongly agree implies that the mean scores are interpretable where (for example) the mean score of 1.03 for Statement 1 (the Eucharist is different) because this is close to the score assigned for agree, this can be interpreted as “on average, respondents agree with this statement.” While statements 2, 3, 4, and 5 are all significantly toward agreement, the small means for these statements reflects a lower strength of agreement. But statements 6 and 7 had significant disagreement with the statement; however, the strength of disagreement was stronger for Statement 7 (average score of -0.70, almost to an average disagreement score of -1.0) than for Statement 6 (with an average of -0.35).

Looking at the mean of statements 1, 2, 3, and 5 all of which were presented in the positive, reinforces that the respondents significantly agree that serving as a lay leader at the Eucharist is different, results in more engagement, causes them to look forward to the service more than otherwise, and enhances their experience of the Eucharist. As noted above, the strength of the agreement is particularly strong for Statement 1,

somewhat less for Statement 5, then somewhat less for statements 2 and 3. Conversely, the means of statements 6 and 7, which were presented in the negative confirm that the respondents significantly disagree with the statements that communion is more powerful when NOT serving and church stays with one longer when NOT serving. Again, this is particularly true for Statement 7 and slightly less strongly for Statement 6.

It is the mean of the respondents' reaction to statement 4 that is perhaps most thought provoking. The statement reads: *Generally, I am able to pray more deeply (better) when I do not have to lead and am part of the congregation.* The mean of 0.17 (still significantly above 0.0) indicates that on average the respondents agree with the statement, but not by nearly as much a margin as the reactions to any of the other statements. While I anticipated agreement with this statement, I expected it to be more. This relatively low mean indicates that a good number of the respondents do not agree.

		Scale							
		Eucharist different Stmt 1	More engaged Stmt 2	Look forward more Stmt 3	Pray more deeply Stmt 4	Enhances Experienc e Stmt 5	Communio n more powerful Stmt 6	Stays longer Stmt 7	
Number of Respondents		592	590	582	587	590	592	593	
Response Frequencies and Percent	Strongly Disagree	N	12	8	1	32	5	57	73
		%	2.0	1.4	0.2	5.5	0.8	9.6	12.3
	Disagree	N	39	112	66	164	57	235	314
		%	6.6	19.0	11.3	27.9	9.7	39.7	53.0
	Neutral	N	64	98	190	143	110	182	167
		%	10.8	16.6	32.6	24.4	18.6	30.7	28.2
	Agree	N	282	205	208	171	283	97	32
		%	47.6	34.7	35.7	29.1	48.0	16.4	5.4
Strongly Agree	N	195	167	117	77	135	21	7	
	%	32.9	28.3	20.1	13.1	22.9	3.5	1.2	
Continuous Analysis		Mean	1.03	0.70	0.64	0.17	0.82	-0.35	-0.70
		Std	0.94	1.11	0.93	1.14	0.92	0.98	0.80
		P-Value	<0.0001	<0.0001	<0.0001	0.0005	<0.0001	<0.0001	<0.0001

Table 1: Frequencies of the outcome scales. Note that the number of respondents varies from 582 for “Look forward more” to 593 for Stays Longer.” The continuous analysis assesses the average score on a scale from “Strongly Agreeing” (scored as 2) to “Strongly Disagreeing (scored as -2), so that scores above 0.0 indicate an average agreement and less than 0.0 indicate an average disagreement. The p-value assess whether the observed differences are above or below neutral on average.

Further Analysis Accounting for Leadership Role

On the survey, the 596 respondents were asked to indicate which leadership roles they routinely held. Many, 284 or 47.65 percent, are leaders in more than one role. The survey gave leadership role choices of Lay Eucharistic Minister, Choir member or musician, Lector or reader, Usher or “Other” which they were asked to specify. Table 2 indicates the distribution of the various lay leader activities, the most common of which is as a lector.

Activity	N (%)
Chalice or lay	244 (40.9%)
Choir or musician	160 (26.8%)
Lector	303 (50.8%)
Usher	185 (31.0%)
Other	109 (18.3%)

Table 2: Univariate distribution of activities in 596 respondents

Because so many of the respondents participated in more than one activity, it was quickly apparent that analysis should be performed to determine how the specific activities or combination of activities affected the responses, if at all. Specifically, the intention of this analysis is to determine what, if any, variation from the aggregate analysis is linked to specific leadership roles or combination of roles, and to test for bias and statistical correlation between the roles and their responses to the survey statements. This analysis also indicates how much, if any, random variation might be found.

Table 3 provides the distribution of the 29 unique patterns of how the respondents serve as lay leaders, many of whom participated in more than one capacity. Interestingly, the most common leadership role was to serve only as an usher and in no other leadership activity at the Eucharist (n=88 or 14.8%). A Lay Eucharistic Minister (LEM) who also

serves as a lector was the next most common pattern at n=73 or 12.3%. A choir member or musician only (n=71 or 11.9%), a LEM only (n=59 or 9.9%) and a choir member/musician and lector (n=32 or 5.4%) were the next three most popular patterns. No other combination exceeded 5 percent of the total number of respondents (596). Five respondents (n = 5 or 0.8%) did not participate in any of the listed lay leadership roles, and only one respondent serves in all five of the activities.

From these patterns, I wondered how it is that lay leaders are recruited and/or chosen. Are those who serve in more than one role doing so because there are not many in their parishes who can or will serve or conversely, is it because serving is so meaningful and special that they volunteer frequently? It is not difficult to imagine why a member of the choir or a musician might assume only that role. In it, they are probably called on to participate every week or nearly so, and the architecture of many churches makes it at least a bit inconvenient to both sing or play with the choir and take an additional role in the same service.

Perhaps the most unexpected question is: why so many ushers do not take on other roles? Being an usher is not usually a prominent role; the duties of an usher can be done almost anonymously. However, an usher who is truly paying attention to their responsibilities usually must be aware of what is happening both in the service and in a wider focus – including parts of the facility that are outside the nave or worship space. Why would a person be willing to be an usher but not willing to serve in another role, and does that impact their experience of the Eucharist? Or put another way, why is a person who is willing to be a LEM (or one of the other non-usher roles) more likely than an usher to also serve in another role, and does that impact their experience of the Eucharist?

Lay Eucharistic Minister	Choir or musician	Lector	Usher	Other	Frequency	Percent
No	No	No	Yes	No	88	14.8
Yes	No	Yes	No	No	73	12.3
No	No	Yes	No	No	72	12.1
No	Yes	No	No	No	71	11.9
Yes	No	No	No	No	59	9.9
No	Yes	Yes	No	No	32	5.4
Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	23	3.9
No	No	Yes	Yes	No	20	3.4
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	19	3.2
No	No	No	No	Yes	17	2.9
Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	17	2.9
No	No	No	Yes	Yes	14	2.4
Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	13	2.2
Yes	No	No	Yes	No	12	2.0
No	No	Yes	No	Yes	10	1.7
Yes	Yes	No	No	No	9	1.5
No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	8	1.3
No	Yes	No	No	Yes	6	1.0
No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	6	1.0
No	No	No	No	No	5	0.8
Yes	No	No	No	Yes	5	0.8
Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	4	0.7
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	4	0.7
Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	3	0.5
No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	0.3
No	Yes	No	Yes	No	1	0.2
Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	1	0.2
Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	1	0.2
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1	0.2

Table 3: Distribution of involvement in the listed activities

Using this data of the 29 unique patterns we can determine the statistical correlation, if any, between the various leadership roles. Table 4 illustrates the correlations between those serving in multiple leadership roles. The positive correlation between participation in the different roles is modest with very little indication that participating in one type of role is a function of one of the other roles. Only two roles are positively related (shown in green). LEMs are more likely to be lectors and vice versa. Specifically, 63 percent of those who are LEMs also serve as a lector, compared to 43 percent of the respondents who were not a LEM. Similarly, 51 percent of those who are a lector are also a LEM, compared to 31 percent of the respondents serving as a LEM were not a lector. Those shown in orange indicate a negative correlation, so lectors are less likely to be an usher; individuals in the choir are less likely to also serve as an usher or in other roles; ushers are less likely to be a LEM, less likely to be a lector, and less likely to be in the choir; and finally, if someone is involved in other activities they are less likely to be in the choir. As an example, those who are serving in the choir are quite unlikely to be an usher (only 6 percent), compared to 40 percent of those not in the choir serving as an usher.

Table 4 displays the association between participating in more than one leadership role.

		What is the chance that you are a:				
		LEM	Lector	Choir/Musician	Usher	Other
If you are (versus not) a:	LEM		63% vs 43%	17% vs 34%	21% vs 37%	19% vs 18%
	Lector	51% vs 31%		23% vs 30%	21% vs 41%	20% vs 16%
	Choir/Musician	26% vs 46%	44% vs 43%		6% vs 40%	11% vs 21%
	Usher	28% vs 46%	35% vs 58%	5% vs 37%		23% vs 16%
	Other	42% vs 41%	57% vs 49%	17% vs 29%	39% vs 29%	

Table 4: Percent participating in each role are for those who do, and do not, participate in each role. For example, 63% of those who participate as a LEM also participate as a lector, compared to 43% serving as a lector among those who do not participate as a LEM. Associations that are significantly ($p < 0.05$) positive are shown in green, those significantly negative in orange, and those that are not significant in white.

From the data above, it seems probably that serving in the choir is in conflict with all other leadership roles, with the moderate exception of that of lector. This is a reasonable conclusion since in most Eucharist services the choir is not actively engaged musically when the readings are done. Of course in many, if not most, Eucharistic services in the Episcopal Church, there is a musical service component immediately following the readings from both the Old and New Testaments. Perhaps this correlation, which is not significant either positively or negatively, simply means that some are willing to shift between the roles in order to do both.

Next we will look at the agreement with each of the outcome measures (statements) for each leadership role. Figure 8 below presents this data graphically, with the dot being the average level of agreement, with the bars being the 95 percent confidence levels (can be thought of as a reasonable range that the “true” mean falls, with narrow confidence bounds reflecting greater confidence in the mean score), on average,

participation in any of the five leadership roles was associated with “agreement” that the Eucharist is different when in a leadership role. LEMs feel stronger about this being almost half-way to “strongly agree.”

Statement 2 is about increased engagement when serving as a leader. Of the five leadership roles, ushers were the least engaged although they were still significantly above being neutral. Similarly, all those in all five leadership roles agreed that they look forward to the service more when serving (Statement 3), but the ushers were at the lowest level of agreement. And again for Statement 5 about participation as a leader enhancing the experience of Eucharist, all five roles agreed, but the ushers trailed the pack. Statement 6 was presented in the negative: *Generally, when I am not a worship leader, receiving communion is more powerful for me.* As with the other statements, the ushers again stood alone. They were essentially neutral to this statement. Apparently, communion is not more or less powerful when serving in their roles as usher. Statement 7 is also worded in the negative: *Generally, when not a worship leader – “church” stays with me further into the next week.* Although there was significant disagreement with the statement from all leadership roles, again the ushers were not as firm in their disagreement as were the other roles.

Perhaps the most telling finding here is regarding Statement 4: *Generally, I am able to pray more deeply (better) when I do not have to lead and am part of the general congregation.* Here again the ushers were the only group to deviate from the general opinion. The other four types of leaders were neutral to the statement, meaning that for them participating in the service does not adversely affect their personal piety, the exception being with the ushers. Ushers agreed with this statement, they apparently find

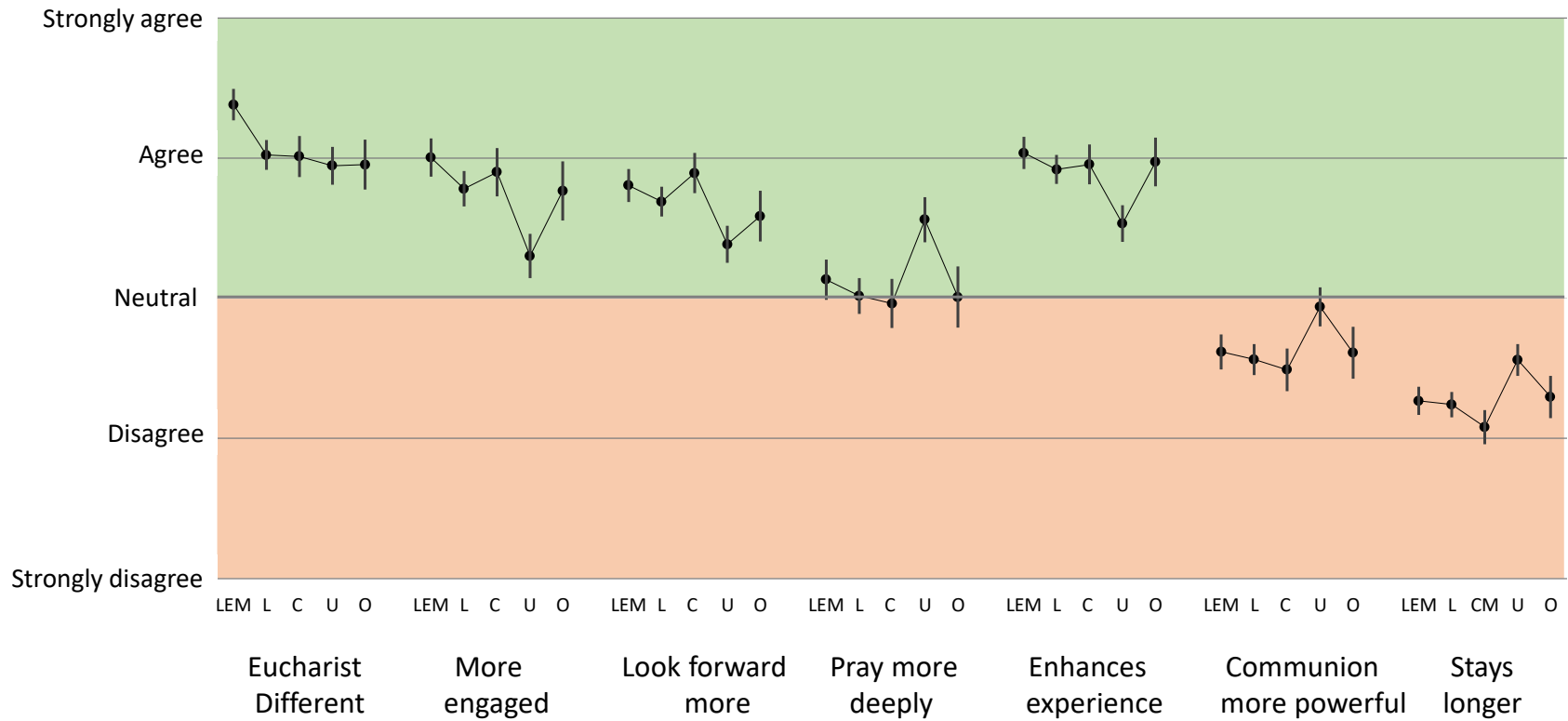


Figure 8: Univariate association between activities and agreement with service involvement.

Activity Codes – LEM: Lay Eucharistic Minister, L: Lector, C: Choir/Musician, U: Usher, O: Other

it difficult to pray while serving in their role. I was not surprised by this finding since in many parishes the role of usher causes the persons to be in and out of the nave during the service. Ushers often have the responsibility for locking and/or checking doors beyond the nave, they may patrol hallways or look in on other simultaneous activities. Naturally then, it would be more difficult to follow the thread of the service, to stay in the moment, so to speak. It is possible then, that this difficulty in prayer when serving as an usher is what keeps those participants from serving in other roles. It is conceivable that they expect that all leadership roles would interrupt their worship and they therefore do not want to add to their leadership duties. Looking more deeply, we can adjust these findings for participation in other roles. Figure 9 shows the results adjusted for association between participation in other roles.

The general pattern of the adjusted association between participation in roles with agreement is generally similar to the unadjusted results in Figure 8. Again, it is the ushers who are the exception. In the univariate analysis (not controlled for the other leadership roles), there was statistically significant agreement to Statement 2 about being more engaged when serving as a leader by all five of the leadership categories, although the ushers less so. However, in the multivariable association (controlling for the other leadership roles) with regard to that same statement about engagement, the ushers' response is essentially neutral and therefore is statistically non-significant.

The data analysis generally supports my hypothesis that one experiences the Eucharist differently (i.e. better) when serving as a liturgical leader than when among the general congregation. However, those who serve as ushers, especially when they have no other leadership role, are not as strongly in agreement as those in other leadership roles.

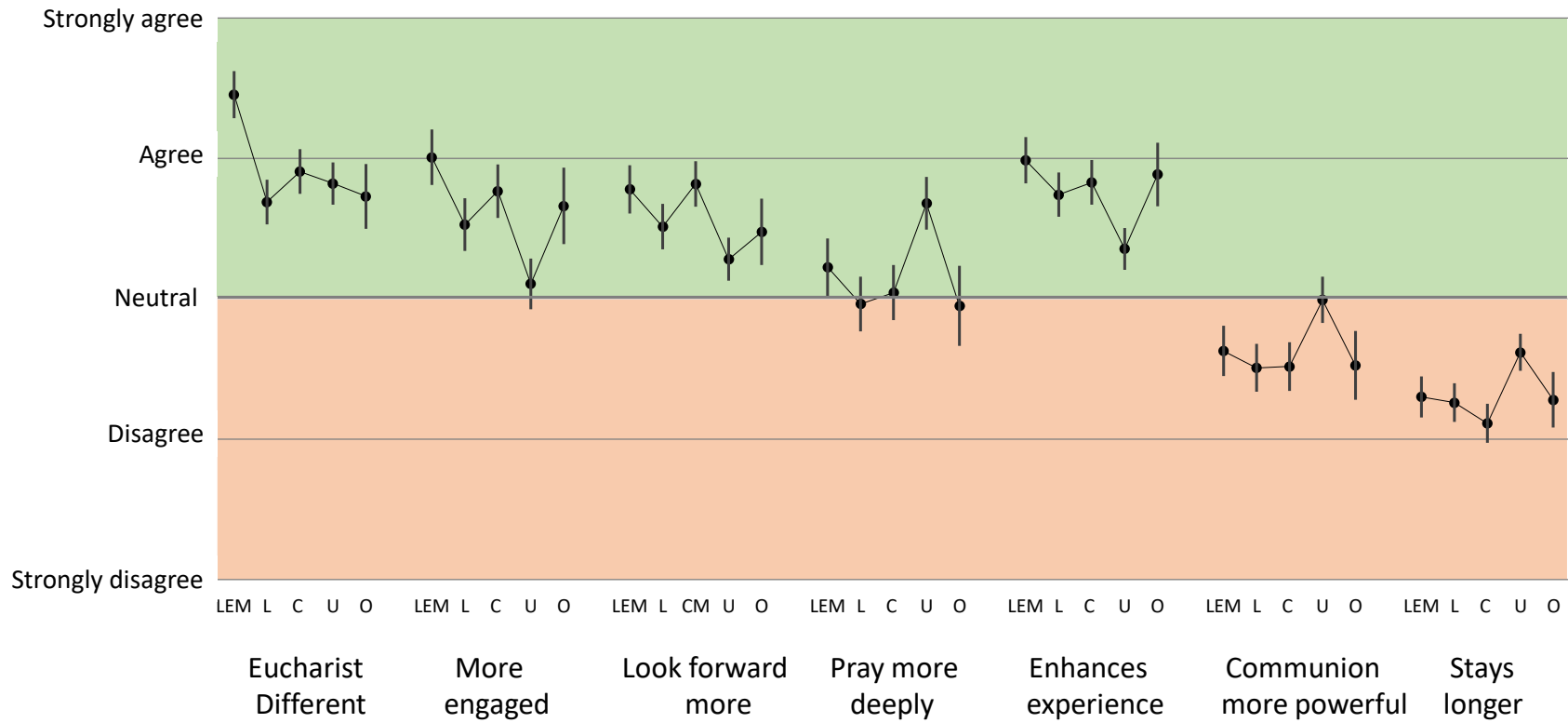


Figure 9: Multivariable association between activities and agreement with service involvement.
 Activity Codes - LEM: Lay Eucharistic Ministry, L: Lector, C: Choir/Musician, U: Usher, O: Other

Chapter Four

Statistical analysis is necessary and informative when conducting a survey, however the nuances can be difficult to tease out from the data when only numbers are examined. For this reason, the last item on the survey was an open ended opportunity for the respondents to share their thoughts and feelings.

The cover letter accompanying the survey hopefully made very clear to the respondents what I was hoping to learn. The first line of the letter was a question: *Does serving as a liturgical leader during the Eucharist change the leaders' worship experience?* Because the letter stated that the survey was a part of my final project for the Doctorate of Ministry program, and because those to whom the survey was forwarded, by their rectors, have already demonstrated, by their roles as lay leaders, that they have a level of dedication to their church life, I expected and was rewarded by an excellent number of responses. This probably also aided in the large number of comments that were made – 306 – of the respondents took the additional time to leave comments. Further, I wanted to interview six of my clergy colleagues, whose lay leaders had participated in the survey. All six of those that I approached readily agreed to be interviewed.

Discussion of Comments by Respondents

Fifty one percent of those who took the survey went the extra mile by offering comments. Of those 143 are LEMs, 85 are choir members or musicians, 98 are lectors, 74 are ushers, and 53 serve in other duties. Again, there was crossover in these roles, some serving in several capacities. Ten of the comments offered good luck wishes, or thanks without addressing the survey statements. Interestingly, the largest percentage of

respondents to the survey were lectors at 303, but the smallest percentage of them left a comment – only 32 percent, while the largest percentage (59) of comments were given by those who serve as a LEMs.

The comments give insight as to why the respondents answered as they did, and how they feel about their leadership duties. In addition, some of the answers provide a small window into the respondent's faith journey. With the exception of the ushers, the comments expressed nearly all positive or neutral feedback though some did critique the survey as they did not think the survey instrument gave the respondent a way to respond in a satisfactory manner. This general comment came from a few folks who serve in more than one capacity. It seems they wanted me to know that the different roles produced different experiences and they apparently feel somewhat differently depending on which leadership role they are serving in at the time.

Some of the respondents gave suggestions on what else might have been asked. For example, one respondent thought I should have asked about how the families of the leaders feel about them serving. A fair number of folks commented that they had never thought about the effect of their service on their experience of worship, and some of them expressed thanks for being given the opportunity to do so. Several of those who commented made an apparent effort to impress upon me their feelings that being worship leaders while not necessarily making their experience of the Eucharist "better," is in fact different. Some respondents who are lectors expressed nervousness at having to read aloud in front of the congregation, while others said they had been doing it for so many years that they no longer got nervous. On the whole, it was clear to me from the

comments that, as I expected, the respondents are all (or nearly all) already dedicated to their churches and to worship. Their service as lay leaders is a labor of love.

Although the survey did not ask for comments to any one of the specific statements, from their content, I am able to apply some of the comments in that manner. For example, one Lay Eucharistic Minister seemed to speak for many in response to the first statement, *My experience of the Eucharist is different when I am serving as a worship leader versus when I am in the general congregation*, when they wrote: “Worshiping as a leader is totally different from worshiping in the pew as I am doing a job that I have to focus on instead of focusing on being one with God. However, the job is something I believe enhances others [sic] worship allowing them to become closer to God and those around. This to me is certainly worship, but of a different type.” Again, this was the expected reaction as, with the exception of lectors, at the very least being a lay leader usually means a different seat location, this changed perspective in and of itself would likely cause the experience to be different.

The second statement, *Generally, I am more engaged in the service when I am serving as a worship leader*, led to some interesting comments. This one from a LEM for example: “It may be that I am connected more to the church when leading. It is with love for the people of the church that I lead, not my own satisfaction. So it is such a deeper experience.” And this from a lector: “When I am the Lector, I am more engaged and thoughtful, perhaps because I receive the bulletin a few days prior to the service so I have time to read quietly and think about the lessons.” However an usher suggested otherwise: “[F]or me the days I usher I am ‘on duty’ and don’t feel as engaged to the service.” Also from ushers: “I have found ushering is especially a distraction in worship” and

“[p]articularly as usher, the many requirements and details during the service can distract my mind from the liturgy.” These responses demonstrate and reinforce the difference between leadership roles. The ushers are certainly lay leaders, but their role can cause their focus to be diverted. On the other hand the distraction is not necessarily limited to ushers. This person feels distracted in both of their service roles. Perhaps for them the need to do the job well causes the interference.

Serving as an usher definitely changes the experience because I am acting more as a facilitator than participant during the service. However, I feel more connected since I greet everyone when they enter and smile and acknowledge everyone at eucharist. As a lector, again, I am a bit removed from the service initially as I tend to focus on when to go up and what I will be reading. I like reading and try to read in a way that brings understanding. It certainly helps me understand much more deeply. However, it may take me a few minutes to settle back down into the worship service.

Statement three said, *Generally, I look forward to services more when I will be serving as worship leader.* Just over 70 percent of the total respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. The comments mostly not only confirm the respondents’ agreement, but also help us to see why, as in this from someone who serves as a LEM: “I have a true passion for serving God and his people as a Lay Eucharistic Minister. It brightens my entire day and I anxiously anticipate the service. I consider it an honor and a privilege to be able to serve the Church in this manner.” This person’s rector would, I am sure, be thrilled to hear this comment. This person has such a positive attitude, it must surely come across to those whom they serve.

Another response suggests similar passion for leadership. From someone who is both a member of the choir and a lector:

Music fills my soul and I love my choir family. I feel I am serving my church family, as well as my Lord, when I share my voice in singing. When I am scheduled to read a lesson I feel like I am ingesting and living with that part of the scripture for several days prior to reading it in the service. I am sharing my interpretation of it by my inflection and choosing which words to stress or not to stress. I am more engaged with the sermon when it involves a passage I have read.

One lector's response shows an obvious level of dedication and is particularly interesting, as it makes comparison between preparing for church to that of an athlete preparing for an event.

Serving as a lector gives me a heightened awareness, as I am psychically primed to perform, and a deepened awareness, as I have pre-read and processed some of the readings. This awareness is not only on Sunday morning, but starts the day I get a notification that I am to serve the next Sunday. I feel like I do going into an athletic contest: primed, psyched, eager, and balancing on a performance edge. Naturally, in that heightened state, I take in what is going on around me more fully: the Word, the sacrament, the relationships with the people around me. I also hold high standards for my 'performance,' not solely to reflect on me, but to carry the message effectively and meaningfully to the people.

From these responses, we can see that preparation is perhaps a contributing factor to the respondents' feelings of anticipation. While all, or nearly all choirs rehearse immediately before a service, most also rehearse mid-week, and often that preparation includes working on pieces that won't be sung for several weeks. In addition many, if not most, lectors practice their readings before the service, again, often mid-week. Apparently this practice, well in advance of the service is helpful not just in their performance, but also in their subsequent experience of worship. In addition, at least for the choir members, this extra time helps the "small group" of the choir to bond more deeply in their shared devotion for singing for the church.

The statistical results to the Statement four: *Generally, I am able to pray more deeply (or better) when I do not have to lead and am part of the general congregation*

showed that people were about evenly split on this issue; the comments demonstrate that split as well. For example, one LEM and lector said this: “I do take seriously the role I do when asked to serve. My experience of worship is not more enhanced or lessened if I am sitting in the congregation or serving on the altar. Coming to church to worship and have fellowship are important to me each and every week. My prayer life doesn’t change either. I do feel that the beauty of the chancel is appealing, but does not lend itself to making me feel holier at the time.” On the other hand another LEM said this: “Overall serving as a worship leader is a positive experience except for those times when I am burdened by an internal problem and need a quieter time to communicate with God . . . there are times, such as NOT serving as a worship leader, when I need to ‘listen’ to what God is trying to tell me. I can’t ‘listen’ as well when I am a worship leader.” An usher agreed by saying: “As an Usher/Greeter I sometimes get very distracted from what is happening in the service. For me it’s much easier to be prayerful and engaged as a member of the congregation.”

Others, such as this choir member felt the loss of prayer, but considered it worth it: “Though my time for personal prayer is curtailed when I am serving, I feel that serving keeps me more engaged during the service as a whole which I see as a positive.” Finally, no one was more enthusiastic than this person: “Being called upon to serve as a crucifer and acolyte and doing both for the first time were transformative experiences for me. I am a fairly recently baptized and confirmed convert. Serving for the first time made me feel so connected and privileged. It helped me not just to pray in an ‘active’ way but also leave space to truly feel the presence of god [sic] in a way that I had not experienced before.” From these comments, it is apparent that personal prayer during a service is

affected by more than whether or not one is a lay leader. Evidently, what is happening in the person's life and at what point they are on their spiritual journey are also factors.

Like Statement five, Statement six: *Generally, when I am not a worship leader, receiving communion is more powerful for me* was presented in the negative. The vast majority, just over 80 percent, of respondents disagreed or were neutral to the statement, meaning that for only about 20 percent of the respondents is their experience of receiving communion is reduced as a byproduct of serving as a lay leader. Although very few people left comments in reference to this statement, the few were telling. From an usher: "Communion is a little more challenging when being an usher – but kneeling at the altar [sic] is the same good experience as if I was in the congregation." Another respondent agreed saying: "I enjoy being a church leader and I am more involved in the service when I serve. But the Eucharist remains the same whether I'm on the altar serving or in a pew."

From the statistics and comments in reference to Statement six we can see that the experience and importance of receiving the Eucharist is mostly not adversely affected for those who serve as lay leaders. And as this LEM describes, being a lay leader can positively connect them to God and each other. "Administering the cup at communion is a beautiful and at the same time reserved experience for I know 1) my church family and it's meaningful to serve them, 2) I know what it is to receive the cup, and being an instrument for the remembrance of Christ is a humbling yet rewarding experience." There were no comments made in support of the statement.

Statement seven was also stated in the negative: *Generally, when I was not a worship leader – "Church" stays with me further into the next week.* Here too, a large majority, over 65 percent, disagreed. One LEM reacted to the statement this way. "When

I serve as chalice bearer I feel more connected to Christ. A bit less distracted by what may go on in the congregation. Either way though my week remains the same as long as I have attended church.” An usher made this comment. “The overall experience is more powerful during the following week if I have been a leader but during the actual service I am somewhat preoccupied.”

I find this result and the comments noteworthy. Perhaps then, it is simply being in church that makes the difference in the week ahead for these lay leaders. It seemed a reasonable thought that when one has focused on a task during a service, that focus will cause the memory to be stronger. However, perhaps the focus one gives from the general congregation is equally helpful. Also, more than one person commented that because of today’s world of very busy schedules, being a lay leader is what gets them to church in the first place. Since one must be at church to have the Eucharist, nearly any reason for getting folks there is going to result in a better experience than if they are not present.

Finally, Statement five: *Generally, it enhances my experience of worship to be a leader*, asks for support of my hypothesis. Statistically, the respondents did just that with over 70 percent either agreeing or strongly agreeing with it and only just over 10 percent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. The comments were equally as supportive and help explain why they feel that way. For example, “Serving in a leadership role brings the service to life for me – I pay better attention and feel the true meaning of what is happening around me.” Or this, “As musician, chalice bearer, and lay reader I am much more involved in the Eucharist and in my part in it. I get a deeper understanding in each task and a chance to go more deeply in my own spirituality.” Or this, “Accepting a service role in my church reminds me that God employs imperfect workers for the

harvest. However, because of my service roles, I try harder to be more Christ-like. I pray that God uses me effectively to advance His Kingdom. I listen more and pray more earnestly.”

Clearly, for many, the experience of service as a lay leader allows and/or encourages these respondents to further their own relationship with God which they consider an enhancement to their worship. But for some it is even more than that. For some, serving brings them closer to those whom they serve. “I find my experience as a lay leader (verger, lector, or intercessor) enhances my connection to God and fellow congregants, even when I am not serving. I’m closer to my fellow worshipers than I was when not taking the opportunity to serve them.” In another example, “The interaction between the server and the one receiving communion is a powerful one. I did not realize that would be the case when I became a lay Eucharistic minister. There are times when I am brought to tears by this interaction. It can be a close friend, a family member, someone who is sick, a small child. It’s always a tender and unexpected moment.” This comment sums it up nicely, “When being a leader, LEM, often puts me into a heightened state of consciousness as I have assumed some responsibility for the worship experience of those I serve. I want them to be in total communion with me, other worshipers and Christ.”

However the few that disagreed with the statement have their reasons too. This is a prime example. “As an usher I definitely do not get as much out of the service. Mainly because I feel that I need to be paying attention to others and my surroundings even during the service – in case there is an emergency or even in case some nut job showing

up to disturb the service.” Clearly, even when ushers are glad to serve, their role can be detrimental to their experience of the Eucharist.

We saw that a member of the choir is the least likely lay leader to serve in more than one capacity, and if they do it is usually as a lector. Aside from the time overlap, it may be because singing and joining others who sing seems to be so spiritually uplifting. One choir member said this, “Music is not just a part of my worship; it IS my worship. It is my prayer, my sacrifice, my gift, and my responsibility. Without music, I would be just going through the motions.” And this person said it very well, “Providing music to support the worship experience for others is the primary function of music leaders. This engages us more as we strive to give others a deeper worship experience. However, when the music comes together and we can briefly lose ourselves in the music, that takes us to another level of worship. We just hope these feelings take the congregation to the same place as we sing/play.”

Overall, the comments back up the statistical findings. As shown by these last few comments, in general, being a lay leader is a positive and helpful experience to the spiritual life of the respondents. “Singing in the choir enhances the spiritual aspect of church services for me. I am much more conscious of the words of the hymns, having sung them in practice and at home to prepare for the service. In addition, I stay engaged with the service so as to be prepared to sing at the right time! In the years that I have been in the choir, my relationship with God has become personal and perpetual. I can only thank God for the gift given me.” Another, “Serving in our church services make me feel I belong and that I am participating in the liturgical ritual of our worship. I am so grateful for the opportunity which always brings me a sense of joy and contentment.” Or this,

“While serving as a leader I find a greater sense of community. Serving at the Eucharist at the altar is overwhelmingly emotional at times.” Or this, “Sometimes being a Worship leader means you get bogged down in details and miss things. Conversely, sometimes you are ‘keyed in’ more deeply and have a deeper experience. I think it’s personal and on a case-by-case basis. Overall, though, being a worship leader has greatly benefited my life.” And finally, this comment brings it all together, “Serving at the altar in any of the various capacities available to me is always profoundly engaging and moving. It is always a sublime and mystical experience of the presence of Christ in my life. It sustains me and inspires my faith.”

If, as I believe, the chief goal of a parish priest is to bring people to God; to help people know the loving nature of God, and to nurture and help them deepen their spirituality, their relationships with God and each other; and if the Episcopal Church has decided that the Eucharist is one way, the primary way, of achieving that goal, then clearly, we can see from these results and comments that serving as a lay leader is beneficial to that end.

Interview of Participating Rectors

I wanted to look at the role of lay leaders from the perspective of the parish priest as well. Of course, as the rector of a church whose lay leaders were invited to, and did participate in the survey, I have my own experience and thoughts. But I did not feel that those represented a large enough portion of the respondents. Therefore, more rectors had to be given the chance to react to the results. To that end, I selected six rectors whose lay leaders had taken part in the survey. Further, because I specifically hoped to gain insight into their parish practices and suggestions for improving the process of recruiting and

training lay leaders, I wanted the rectors to be from separate areas of the Episcopal Church in the United States. My hope here was that since these rectors were not from the same area, they were unlikely to have already shared their practices.

I selected the six rectors from among the 40 whose parishes participated. Three are women, and three are men. Their parishes are of different sizes and different dioceses and states. The parishes are in Alabama, California, Colorado, Kentucky, North Carolina and Pennsylvania. Two are in rural areas, one is in a small town, and the others are in mid-to-large size cities.

I do personally know all of those interviewed, but some better than others. We met through seminary, Clinical Pastoral Education, or CREDO. I initially contacted all of them by email and asked if they would please send the survey to those of their lay leaders who serve at the Eucharist. After the results were received, I selected my hoped for interviewees and again contacted them by email to ask if they would be willing to be interviewed by phone about the results of the survey and their practices in regard to lay leadership in the Eucharist.

While about 95 percent of those rectors I initially asked to invite their lay leaders to participate did so, each of the six rectors I contacted to ask for an interview readily agreed. With each one, we arranged a mutually convenient day and time for a phone call. Then, with one exception, at least the day before the appointment, and again by email, I provided to them a copy of the survey with their parishes' results as well as the aggregate results from the entire body of respondents. The one exception received the data several hours before the interview but on the same day. I did not provide any information to them that would allow them to identify the individuals who had participated, and for that

reason, I did not share with any of them any of the comments made by their parishioners or any of the other respondents.

All of those interviewed were asked at least the following questions:

Demographic information including how long they had been ordained and how long they have served in their current cure, where they went to seminary, the Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) of their parish and number of pledge units.

Further they were each asked:

What is your reaction to the results?

Does your parish actively try to involve folks in lay leadership? How soon for newcomers?

How does your lay leadership recruit new members?

What sort of training is done with newcomers?

Do you have a feedback loop for lay leaders? How does it work?

What has worked in the area of lay leadership and what has not?

Do your Diocesan Canons or does your bishop put restrictions on how many LEMS, Lectors, and/or Visiting Eucharistic Ministers (VEM) your parish may have licensed?

Are your folks properly licensed and do you have them “sit out” a year after the license period?

Sometimes, from these standard questions others arose, and each interviewee was asked to make any comments they felt pertinent.

It is important to note that because some of the interviewee churches are small, their statistical data is of less value by itself in respect to its statistical significance. However, it can be used to compare how the lay leaders at that church feel in comparison to the whole. Further, the participating rectors were all very interested to see their results and discuss the possible differences between their data and the whole. See Table 5 below.

The first interview was with a female rector of a parish in a rural part of Colorado. The parish ASA is 51 with about 35 pledging units. She has been ordained for six plus

years and is in her third year of service to this parish. She attended the School of Theology at the University of the South. It is notable and commendable that even at this small size, 14 lay leaders responded to the survey.

The comparison of this church's respondents to the whole is very interesting. For all three of the negatively worded Statements, numbers four, six and seven which are about prayer, the power of communion and church staying with them respectively, the results are not substantially different. However, the results for the other four statements are noticeably below that of the aggregate. Only 64 percent of the parish's lay leaders felt that the experience of Eucharist is different when serving as compared to 80 percent of the total. 50 percent from this church are more engaged when serving versus 65 percent of the total. In the biggest difference, while 58 percent of the aggregate look forward to the services more when serving, at this church that is true for only 36 percent. And perhaps most telling, while 72 percent of the total feel that serving as a lay leader enhances their experience of worship, just 57 percent of the lay leaders of this parish agree. While this is a majority of the lay leaders, it does cause one to wonder why. Perhaps the reason is as simple as the fact that 43 percent of the responders are ushers.

The rector said she was not surprised by the results but did think them interesting. They use an annual ministry fair to try to recruit new lay leaders, and do not restrict new comers to the church from volunteering. However, she said there is some "territorialness" in the various ministries, which may discourage new members. She does the training for new altar servers herself, and there is an element of job shadowing along with a customary to be read. They do not have a formal feedback loop, but she does try to have informal conversations.

When she was fairly new to the parish, they tried to institute a Greeter ministry, but it was not successful; people failed to “show up.” She did not offer an explanation for the apparent lower level of satisfaction for the lay leaders of the parish except to say that it is her opinion that the church is filled with conservative, traditional people who do not welcome change or things that are new. However, she said their youth is very involved. In her Diocese there are no restrictions on LEMs and she does not make them sit out a year.

The second rector is a male priest in a small rural town in northern California. He is the dean of his convocation, has been ordained for eight years and has served at this parish for seven. He attended Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. The parish has an ASA of 71 and about 45 pledging units. Nine of his lay leaders responded to the survey, two of whom are ushers. The reaction of these nine lay leaders was considerably different for three of the statements.

For Statement three, *Generally, I look forward to services more when I will be serving as worship leader*, 58 percent of the aggregate look forward more to services where they will serve as a worship leader, but at this church that number is only 22 percent. However, much more of this parish’s leaders are neutral to the Statement than the total 44 percent compared to 31 percent. Nearly 40 percent of the total agreed that they pray more deeply when not serving, while at this church 56 percent agreed, however, those who disagreed the Statement was substantially similar, still we may conclude that here, for a majority, serving precludes private prayer in some way. Similarly, for Statement six while about 19 percent of the aggregate agreed that communion is more powerful when not serving, for this parish a full third agreed. This

means that at this parish, the majority do not feel that receiving is more powerful when not serving, but it is a much smaller majority than for the collective.

This rector was surprised by the differences between in his lay leaders' thoughts and the whole. He stated that the parish has a Deacon who is "very directive" which may account for some of the difference. This church regularly has three Sunday services and according to the rector, the people are very tied to "their" service, resulting in very little cross over. In essence, they have "three congregations" and the lay leaders also stick to "their" service. He reports that they are not intentional in cultivating lay leadership, nor do they have a process for inviting folks to join the ranks. When there is a new lay leader the Deacon oversees the necessary training and invites the veterans to attend. They do not have any sort of feedback loop, but by their results the rector thinks it is needed and would like to know how other places go about it. Although this rector reports that his Diocese has no limits for the number licensed at any one church, licenses are required to be renewed every three years and the lay leader must provide proof of continued education and a written statement about their call to their ministry. They do not have a requirement to take a year off. The rector said it is possible that some of his lay leaders have expired licenses.

When asked about what has worked or not worked in the area of lay leadership, he said that connecting lay leadership to stewardship has worked and as a part of their annual ingathering they put on a ministry fair which has helped to build that connection and opened folks to the possibilities of lay leadership. In addition, they are intentional about "giving permission" to people who want to retire from a role which in turn encourages folks who may want to try something without being afraid of being "stuck"

there forever. According to the rector, what has not worked in this parish is the distinctive difference between himself and the Deacon. He said he uses invitation while she is authoritative which seems not to have worked as well.

My third interview was with the female rector of parish in a city in Pennsylvania. The church has an ASA of 80 and about 40 pledging units. She has been rector for just under 18 months but has been ordained for five years. She attended the School of Theology at the University of the South. Ten lay leaders from this parish responded to the survey and only one is an usher.

She was pleased with both the participation of her lay leaders and by their indicated engagement. Her lay leaders' reactions to Statements two and three were considerably higher than the aggregate (80 vs 65 percent and 70 vs 58 percent) showing that they are both more engaged when serving and look forward to serving more than average. They also felt more strongly about their leadership enhancing their experience, but not by as wide a margin (80 vs 72 percent). Still these results were, in her mind and mine, positive. This parish recruits lay leaders mostly when needed, as opposed to waiting for a ministry fair. They especially encourage new comers to consider joining the choir. Their recruiting methods are informal, mostly using email or putting notices in their parish newsletter. She prefers to invite individuals personally to be LEMs. Their training is done when there is a need, and as soon as possible for someone new to the task. They do not have any formal feedback loop, but she does try to check in with folks.

This rector indicated that what has been most effective is when she has a personal conversation with a potential lay leader, because "no one reads the material provided, i.e. the vestry handbook." She has also noted that there is a generational difference between

effective communication technics. For example, she said the 19 year olds do not read an email. For her parish, the “mechanism for communication is a hiccup.”

She also said she thinks licensing and training requirements may have been instituted at the Diocesan level recently, but that they are not enforced and therefore are still not limited by number.

The fourth interview was with a male priest serving in a parish in a small town in North Carolina. He is in his fifth year there, but he has been ordained nearly eight years. He attended Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta. The parish’s ASA is 100 with approximately 66 pledging units. From this parish 19 lay leaders responded, three of whom (16 percent) are ushers. This parish’s results were significantly different from the whole on four of the seven statements. For Statement two about engagement when serving, this group was more than 10 percentage points below as they were in Statement three about looking forward to the services. The difference was even greater with regard to Statement four and five. Only 40 percent of the total respondents agreed that they are able to pray more deeply when not serving as a worship leader, at this parish 63 percent agreed. And for Statement 5, where of the total respondents 72 percent agreed that serving as a lay leader enhanced their experience of worship, at this parish only 53 percent agreed. Admittedly this is a majority, but the difference between this parish and the collective does raise questions as to why.

The priest indicated that he was not surprised by the survey results but he was surprised and pleased that 19 of his folks responded. At his church they actively try to involved parishioners in lay leadership, however they wait about a year before involving a newcomer, especially if that person is not confirmed. They recruit lay leaders by

personal invitation for Visiting Eucharist Ministers (VEM), and otherwise put announcements in their bulletin. When the need arises, they offer those to be trained two dates and ask the new lay leaders to pick one. The experienced lay leaders are also invited, but not required, to attend. They have only an informal feedback loop, but have considered doing something more formal. This rector said the only thing that had not worked well is that because they have a Deacon, the LEMs do not serve regularly, and therefore they sometimes forget what they are supposed to do. The rector reported that his Diocese does not restrict licenses and that all of his folks are properly licensed. They do not currently require a “gap year.”

The fifth interview was with the male rector of a bigger church in a medium size city in Kentucky. Their ASA is 220 and they have about 160 pledging units. He has been rector there for three years, but has been ordained for more than 12. He attended Virginia Theological Seminary. His church was the largest single group with 57 respondents, 29 of whom (51 percent) are ushers.

It is likely that this large sample size is the reason his parish’s results are so close to the aggregate. They are 5 percent less engaged than the total (60 vs 65 percent) but all the other responses are within 3 percent of each other. He said he was “somewhat surprised” that his folks were not as engaged as the whole, but he suspected it is because many of his lay leaders are ushers and “security shepherds” which takes them out of the nave for a great deal of the service.

They activity work to try to involve folks in lay leadership. One way is the newcomer class that he teaches several times a year which offers conversation about each individual’s spiritual gifts. In addition, he has a scheduled meal and meeting with the

leaders of each lay leadership group every other month. Their formal recruiting is at their annual ministry fair at the beginning of each program year. Their training is annual for those who serve at the altar, LEMs and acolytes, and for ushers it is every other year. They do not do any training of lectors.

When I asked about a feedback loop, he expressed real disappointment that they do not have one, but thinks it is needed. On the other hand he believes the every other month meal and meeting is an informal feedback loop of sorts. He has also tried to make sure every leader knows that their assignment is not a “lifetime appointment.” He does not want folks to be afraid that they can never step away from a form of service. What has not worked for them is their effort to reinvigorate their 8:00 AM service. The people who attend that service apparently were not interested in change or updates to their worship practices.

He had to “dig” around for the Diocesan information about licensing and found that the “general rule” is for three LEMs per regular Sunday service, but they “have blown way past that.” He believes that his folks are properly licensed, but they do not follow the “sit out one year guideline.”

My final interview was in my own state and Diocese of Alabama. The female rector of this parish has been there for just over a year and ordained for 6 plus years. The ASA is 230 and they have 175 pledging units. She attended the School of Theology at the University of the South. She expressed delight that 22 of the lay leaders at her parish responded to the survey, and surprised that their results were somewhat “better” from those of the total. When I reported that no ushers had responded, she explained that their

Head Usher had recently been preoccupied by a personal situation and it probably kept him from sending the survey to the group.

This parish's results were significantly different from the whole on three of the statements. Their response to the statement about the experience of the Eucharist being different when serving was ten percentage points above the aggregate. Further they were much higher about being more engaged when serving (82 vs 65 percent) and looking forward to the service more when serving (86 vs 58 percent).

Of the six interviews I conducted, this rector sets the highest barrier to entry for those who might wish to be lay leaders. She requires all LEMs to be licensed and to sit out a year at the end of their three year license term. Both the LEMs and lectors must be confirmed. Anyone is invited to audition for the choir, but she said the program is "tough enough that self-selection takes place."

Their recruiting is done mostly on an as needed basis. When needed, she and the Head Verger review the suggestions for new lay leaders from their Worship Committee. Those chosen are then invited to become a lay leader. All lay leaders are trained every year. It is required for lectors while LEMs are invited. The lectors take part in an annual elocution class and from that she and the head verger decide who will read the passion narrative on Palm Sunday.

The Worship Committee of this parish is chaired by the Head Verger and is made up of all the vergers, the Head Usher, the Head of the Altar Guild, the Head of the Flower Guild, and the Music Director as well as the Rector. They meet three times per year and discuss any "growing edges" as well as share feedback on how things have gone and they also make plans for the next liturgical season. Like other places, they too have an annual

ministry fair, but she said it has not proven to be all that successful at generating interest in lay leadership; personal invitation works best. In fact she said it is “part of their DNA.”

She feels that their Worship Committee is working well, but it is also clear that she, the rector, is in charge. Having the Head Verger as the Master Scheduler for LEMs, vergers, and lectors is very successful. On the other hand, they have had some “fall out” with their acolyte teams. For example, these sixth to twelfth graders are not always responsible about getting substitutes and attendance is “spotty.” She believes that will improve when the next group comes in.

Interviewed Parishes compared to Aggregate														
State	ASA	Barrier to entry	Feedback loop	Level of training	Number respondents	Number of ushers	Percent Ushers	Eucharist Different	More engaged	Look forward to	Not pray deeply	Enhanced experience	Not more powerful	Not Stays w/ longer
CO	51	low	Informal	Medium	14	6	43%	below+	below +	below +	below	below +	slight above	slight above
CA	71	low	no	Formal	9	2	22%	above	below	below +	above +	below	above +	above
PA	80	low	Informal	Informal	10	1	10%	above	above +	above +	below	above	slightly above	below
NC	100	low	Informal	Medium	19	3	16%	slightly below	below +	below +	above +	below +	slightly above	below
KY	220	medium	Informal	Annual	57	29	51%	above	below	slightly above	slightly above	slightly above	above	slightly above
AL	230	high	yes	Formal	22	0	0%	above +	above +	above +	below	above	below	below
									+ ≥ 10 percentage points difference from aggregate					
									slightly ≤ 3 percentage points difference from aggregate					

Table 5 compares the interviewed parishes’ statistics to those of the aggregate. The two parishes in green compare favorably, the parish results in orange compare somewhat favorably. By that I mean their lay leaders seem to have a more enhanced or slightly more enhanced experience of worship than the average of the whole as well as comparisons in other statements.

Interestingly the Pennsylvania and Alabama parishes had a much lower percentage of ushers respond to the survey. Size of the parish, level of training, barrier of entry, and gender of the rectors do not seem to make a difference. The three parishes in white compare somewhat unfavorably which I might have blamed on the ushers, but their percentage of responding ushers is below that of the Kentucky parish.

The rectors in the Pennsylvania and Alabama parishes have each been in place under two years, but the Kentucky and Colorado rectors have been in place almost exactly the same amount of time at about three years. The other two, the North Carolina and California rectors have been in place for five and seven years respectively. Perhaps that makes a bit of difference but it is uncertain. It is possible that lay leaders from North Carolina and California have become complacent because their rectors have been in place longer, but we would have to do a longitudinal study to determine if lay leadership level of satisfaction diminishes over the length of a rector's tenure.

Two of the three favorably compared parishes' rectors attended the School of Theology at Sewanee and the third is a graduate of Virginia Theological Seminary. Two of the three unfavorably compared parishes' rectors matriculated at non-Episcopal seminaries, but the third attended the School of Theology at Sewanee, so again, seminary training is unlikely to have made a difference. In light of the other findings, it is most likely that number of usher respondents is a key factor in the comparison.

What of my own parish? Compared to the parishes of the six rectors I interviewed, my parish is right in the middle of size with an ASA of 95; 24 of my lay leaders responded and of that 7 or 29 percent are ushers. The comparison between my parish's results to the aggregate is only slightly favorable. My folks feel more engaged in the services when they are serving, but curiously (to me) they look forward to serving less than does the aggregate. We too hold a ministry fair, but only every other year. However, other than ushers, we rarely need to recruit. Folks who want to be a lector or LEM come to me seemingly without hesitation.

Interviewed and Author's Parishes compared to Aggregate														
State	ASA	Barrier to entry	Feedback loop	Level of training	Number respondents	Number of ushers	Percent Ushers	Eucharist Different	More engaged	Look forward to	Not pray deeply	Enhanced experience	Not more powerful	Not Stays w/ longer
CO	51	low	Informal	Medium	14	6	43%	below+	below +	below +	below	below +	slight above	slight above
CA	71	low	no	Formal	9	2	22%	above	below	below +	above +	below	above +	above
PA	80	low	Informal	Informal	10	1	10%	above	above +	above +	below	above	slightly above	below
Author's	98	low	none	Medium	24	7	29%	above	above +	below +	slightly above	slightly above	below	slight above
NC	100	low	Informal	Medium	19	3	16%	slightly below	below +	below +	above +	below +	slightly above	below
KY	220	medium	Informal	Annual	57	29	51%	above	below	slightly above	slightly above	slightly above	above	slightly above
AL	230	high	yes	Formal	22	0	0%	above +	above +	above +	below	above	below	below
									+ ≥ 10 percentage points difference from aggregate					
									slightly ≤ 3 percentage points difference from aggregate					

Table 6

I asked the question about licensing of LEMs because Eucharistic ministers are to be licensed per the 2003 General Canons, Title III, Canon 4, according to the guidelines established by the diocesan bishop. In my diocese, the guidelines are that the “norm is no more than one (1) Eucharistic Minister per 50 baptized members of the parish. In the case of parishes with 150 baptized members or less, there may be five (5) EM’s appointed. These numbers are subject to negotiation if such additional assistance can be justified.”⁶⁵ The rules go on about how long the license term is to be, how it can be renewed etc. I suspect some of these rules are in place to “protect” the parish rector. That way he or she can fall back on the rules when it is time for someone to retire. Even so, these are arbitrary limits and I believe the use of lay persons should be encouraged, and the rector should be able to make the call “on the ground” so to speak.

I have been in place five plus years and we have made some changes to our lay leadership program in that time. For example, when I first arrived there were five lay lectors (one per week of the month, the person with the fifth week only read four times per year). Each one read the Old Testament lesson, led the responsive reading of the Psalm, and read the New Testament lesson. If someone else wanted to be a lector, they had to wait for someone to retire or die – literally. The changes we made were in order to

⁶⁵ “Dioala.Org/Policy.Html,” accessed August 12, 2017, /policy.html.

open it up to more readers. Now, we have two readers per Sunday – Old Testament, and New Testament. The Psalm is chanted – giving the choir a chance to interact with the congregation in a different way – and we now we have thirteen lectors. We do not have a Deacon, so we use two Eucharistic ministers per Sunday and we have – well – more than our limit on the Rota. Our children are invited to acolyte in third grade. We are not a parish filled with children, but those who are here enjoy their duties for the most part – although truthfully, staffing the acolytes is our biggest of these battles. Adults step in cheerfully when needed.

The overall survey results support my hypothesis. What I had hoped to learn from the interviews were ideas for recruiting and training of lay leaders. But that is not what I gathered. In fact, I learned that the tried and true Ministry Fair is alive and well in parishes all over the country, but is successful only to varying degrees. Personal invitations to potential lay leaders seem to work best everywhere. Training is probably better when done formally, but it does not seem to matter in satisfaction or enhancement of worship when serving.

Not one of the rectors who were interviewed was surprised by the overall outcome of the survey; instead their surprise centered on the results of their own parishes. Further, all but the one in Alabama that does have a formal feedback loop recognized that it would be beneficial to have one, but had not yet done anything to institute one. At the Alabama church, each group (i.e. usher, LEMs, etc.) have periodic meetings in which they discuss any issues or concerns. These are then addressed and rolled up for discussion when the Worship Committee meets. More basic than that though, before even feedback

loops, my surprise is that if this idea that we all “knew” lay leadership enhances the experience of worship, why then are we not capitalizing on it?

Chapter Five

Christian leaders all over the world, and especially in Europe and the United States may be fearful of the future based on research and expected demographic changes. Two research reports (2015) by the Pew Research Center present somewhat dismal findings related to the number of people who identify as Christian and the projected growth rates of the same. Although the number of Christians as a percentage of the world-wide population is projected to stay about the same through the year 2050, the number of Christians in the US is predicted to drop “from three-quarters of the population in 2010 to two-thirds in 2050.”⁶⁶ Further, it is expected that by then, 60% of the world’s Christians will live in sub-Saharan Africa.

Islam is the fastest growing of the world’s religions, and the growth is not limited to one part of the world. Their growth is due in part to the relatively youthful population in the Islamic culture and their higher than average birthrate. Conversely, the birthrate for Christians, Jews and Hindus will help keep their growth at or close to the rate of population growth while all other religions are expected to lose ground as a percentage of population.

Another key factor in the size of religious bodies is those people who “switch.” For example, in the US it is not uncommon for someone who grew up in one religious tradition to switch to another. More than that and, for this Christian leader, the most disconcerting finding is that people are more and more likely to leave all religious traditions behind. Switching, whether to another religion or to “none,” is in fact what accounts for most of the loss of the number of Christians in this country and beyond.

⁶⁶ “The Future of World Religions: Populations Growth Projections, 2010-2050,” Pew Research Center, April 2, 2015, 1, <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

“Globally, about 40 million people are projected to switch into Christianity, while [an astounding] 106 million are projected to leave, with most joining the ranks of the religiously unaffiliated.”⁶⁷ However, the “religiously unaffiliated” do not always leave religion behind completely. In 2014, about 30% of those in the United States who describe themselves as “nothing in particular” still indicated that religion “is either ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ important to them.”⁶⁸ This indicates that there is a possibility that they will come back to the fold from the “nones.”

While the US has always been a country of individuals, the western world has also been largely secularized. “Secularism is primarily an idea, an experience of life having its meaning and its value in life itself, without any reference to anything that could be termed ‘otherworldly.’”⁶⁹ Secularism is therefore not the same as atheism or even a denial of religion; instead, it is the pursuit of individual happiness and self-fulfillment.

Similarly, “religious individualism” is where people put together their own belief system. These people will switch streams as their world-view changes which often includes “the view that the individual believer does not need intermediaries, that he has the primary responsibility for his own spiritual destiny”⁷⁰ It is not out of reason therefore, that this “individualist turn in the United States is commonly thought to be an aspect of a religious secular divide or ‘God gap’ in American culture and politics.”⁷¹ Whether due to

⁶⁷ “The Future of World Religions: Populations Growth Projections, 2010-2050.”

⁶⁸ “America’s Changing Religions Landscape,” Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015, <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

⁶⁹ Aleksandr Shmeman, *The Liturgy of Death: Four Previously Unpublished Talks* (Yonkers, New York: St . Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2016), 45.

⁷⁰ Dominika Motak, “Postmodern Spirituality and the Culture of Individualism,” *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 21 (2009): 132.

⁷¹ Jeremy A. Uecker and Paul Froese, “Religious INdividualism and Moral Progressivism: How Source of Religious Authority Is Related to Attitudes About Abortion, Same-Sex Marriage, Divorce, and Premarital Sex,” *Politics and Religion* 12, no. 2019 (n.d.): 285.

secularism or individualism or any other 'ism,' what we know is that "Americans change religious affiliation early and often."⁷² Add to this the concept of being "spiritual but not religious," the gist of which is people seeking an "inner experience of deity as contrasted with blind faith in a dogma."⁷³ It is little wonder that Christian churches are concerned for their existence and way of life.

Perhaps though, changing the way of life of our churches is not an altogether bad thing? This paper has argued that serving as lay leaders in worship, and particularly at the Eucharist creates a better experience for those leaders. Not only do the survey results support the hypothesis, but the six rectors who were interviewed were unsurprised by the results – they "knew" this already. Perhaps all of this seems intuitive and there need not be an argument in favor of lay liturgical leaders – we have them after all. The argument should be made if for no other reason than that, as stated above, we are a shrinking church. We need to be doing every appropriate thing to encourage our people to be an active member of the Body. When one is active, one is more likely to share the joy of the experience. We can, through encouraging participation, encourage lay prophets.

Yes, we need good training and good liturgy planning. All that takes time, and perhaps for many of us in smaller churches time is what we do not have, so it is easier to keep it small. In addition, sometimes, as noted about, we are not encouraged from the Diocesan level to expand the level of lay participation. An example would be limiting the number of official licenses. It is my belief, however, that we should consider involving more people as lay leaders, and particularly at the Eucharist.

⁷² "Faith in Flux," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, April 27, 2009, <https://www.pewforum.org/2009/04/27/faith-in-flux/>.

⁷³ Motak, "Postmodern Spirituality and the Culture of Individualism," 133.

In my experience, when someone I know from the Methodist or Baptist traditions has limited time and has to choose on Sunday morning between attending their church service or their Sunday School, they will pick Sunday School nearly every time. That does not happen in the Episcopal Church – we typically do not want to miss church. One might guess that this is because we are “liturgical, and our services are so pretty” and we have Eucharist every week. I do not think this is wrong, but I think there is more to it. In the Methodist and Baptist traditions, their Sunday school classes are where they actively participate while

their services tend to be passive participation – listening to the sermon. But in the Episcopal tradition, the Eucharist is an active participation, especially when there are lay ministers. Of course, this may also point to a deficient Christian Education program, but that is for another paper.

Most of us have probably heard the term “muscle memory.” The idea behind it is that when one performs some physical action again and again, the repetition will eventually create a memory such that the task can be performed without having to think about it. Similarly, if you have ever spent the day on a boat in the open water where there has been rolling and you have had to adjust your stance to maintain balance, often when you next lie down, you will continue to “feel” the rolling of the water, even when on dry land. Further, many of us know what it is like to be able to close our eyes and feel transported back to a specific time and place. Hearing music is particularly evocative of memories. In other words, our brains are quite capable of storing memories of physical as well as emotional experiences. Worship experiences can be embodied in the same way.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ David A. Hogue, “Sensing the Other in Worship: Mirror Neurons and the Empathizing Brain,” *Liturgy* 21, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 31–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/04580630600642742>.

In fact, “the mere act of imagining oneself or another performing [gestures and postures of worship] activates some of the same brain systems.”⁷⁵ This implies that once someone has been a worship leader – has had their worship experience enhanced by being a leader – they carry that with them into future worship. Because of the memory ingrained in our brains, when we are at worship and witness another person performing a leadership role, we can relate to the liturgy as if we ourselves are the leader.

In most services at most Episcopal churches, music plays a big role in liturgy and connects to both brain and soul. “Research into the neuro-physiology of our experience of music shows that more parts of the brain light up when making music than when doing anything else.”⁷⁶ In 2013 National Public Radio reported that when choirs sing together, their heartbeats synchronize.⁷⁷ Further, in corporate worship, the connections we make with each other, because of a collective piety, and of serving each other actually bring our nervous systems in tune with one another. All of this allows us, once we have had some time at being a worship leader, to experience each subsequent liturgy at that same level and in closer communion with those with whom we worship. We are formed individually and collectively by the Eucharist in this way. The survey results and the comments bear this out, and it seems we clergy already know this intuitively, even if we have not taken the time to ask or talk with the lay leaders in our parishes about it.

The most interesting and, for me, unexpected finding is that ushers on the whole feel differently than do other lay leaders. And these different experiences led to different

⁷⁵ Hogue, 32.

⁷⁶ Daniel J. Levitin, *This Is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession* (New York, N.Y.: Dutton, 2006), 84.

⁷⁷ “When Choirs Sing, Many Hearts Beat As One,” NPR.org, n.d., <http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2013/07/09/200390454/when-choirs-sing-many-hearts-beat-as-one>.

results than I anticipated on the whole. It seems obvious to me now, of course; ushers are often out of the nave during parts of the service so it must be easy to lose concentration on the Word, both Scripture and sermon. In addition, their experience of Eucharist is often rushed as they are usually the last to receive and then only after they have carefully shepherded the whole congregation through the process. Like LEMs, lectors, and those in the choir, ushers have a level of responsibility during the service, but their responsibility is much more about safety and traffic flow than it is communicating with each other as fellow members of the Body of Christ. No wonder! Still, this experience of serving each other does, even for the ushers, help to build the community of the parish and of that particular part of the Body of Christ. This can be labeled as “horizontal church.”

Early Christianity grew even when it was perilous to be Christian. The community of believers heard the Good News and they took the risk to be a part of something counter-cultural and remarkable. They voluntarily, eagerly spent years learning and living the proscribed behavior which allowed them to belong to the community and to embrace the Christian belief. And because it meant everything to them, they shared the Good News causing this community, this horizontal community, to grow. Of course the Church grew even more – vast swaths of people became Christian and either never questioned it, or knew to keep their questions to themselves, but it was mostly (except in religious communities), no longer a horizontal community. Instead the church became very clergy-centric. The people were at best left out and at worst ordered what to think and believe.

When Martin Luther spoke up in 1517, people again had the impetus to break from the expected docility and, sometimes at great risk, began once again to forge their

own paths to follow Jesus and gathered into horizontal communities. The Church splintered, but crossed oceans, and grew.

Now, here we are some 500 years later. We have survived war, division, and we the Church are not growing but shrinking. In that 500 years, we largely stopped being horizontal communities, and we took our way of life for granted. We expected to keep going and growing, because we always have in the past. But that isn't happening, so what do we do now?

The best effort we can make is to work for the Christian Church to be a horizontal community of faith, "one that relates to God through having healthy relationships with other human beings"⁷⁸. Further, many denominations, including the Episcopal Church, have already started down this fruitful path by returning to an ecclesiology and theology of baptism and Eucharist. With this theology and the associated liturgies, we are reconciling our Christian identity; those of us who (try to) live the gospel life of discipleship can be clear as to whom we belong. When we intentionally partake in and worship with a horizontal community that supports, encourages, and forgives each other, our understanding of God's love through Jesus in unity with the Holy Spirit grows. "The intensity of rites – liturgy – has an essential role in enabling the church – all the baptized – to claim their identity and live out their priestly ministry in the world."⁷⁹

As participants in the Eucharist we are spiritually and bodily transformed. In Baptism we die to sin and rise again - as Christ has risen. This, like the crucifixion, is a

⁷⁸ Roger E. Olson, "Horizontal and Vertical Churches: Where's the Balance?," *Roger E. Olson* (blog), July 30, 2015, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2015/07/horizontal-and-vertical-churches-wheres-the-balance/>.

⁷⁹ Susan Marie Smith, *Christian Ritualizing and the Baptismal Process: Liturgical Explorations toward a Realized Baptismal Ecclesiology*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 174 (Eugene, Or: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 103.

one-time unrepeatable event. In the Eucharist we are invited to again participate in - to experience- the resurrection; we are invited to live a renewed life. When lay leaders serve the community at the Eucharist, the renewed life they receive from the Eucharist is enhanced all the more.

Again, this is, what the leaders of the Liturgical Movement of the last century had in mind when they advocated for active participation of the laity. When lay ministers participate in liturgical leadership, not only does the assembly, the horizontal community, have the opportunity to draw again closer to God, but they also are more fully “being the church” by involving the whole of the community. It makes clear the concept of baptismal equality, and uses and shows appreciation for the gifts of the individual members of the community.

Looking at the survey results might make one ask: Which came first – the lay leadership that led to more engagement in Eucharist or did meaningful engagement in Eucharist lead to being a lay leader? Surely it does not matter. When someone who has a strong faith that is strengthened by regular participation in Eucharist, becoming a lay leader is the next reasonable and logical step. We have learned that personally inviting someone to become a lay leader is the most effective way of encouraging someone to take on the responsibility. Their experience of serving others enhances their engagement and experience. In my opinion, the cause and effect does not really matter: what matters is the participation.

Suggestions for Additional Research

This project has led me to see an opportunity for additional research in several areas. It might be helpful to know on a wider scale how parish priests feel about these

findings. It seems likely that other priests also will not be “surprised” by the results of the survey, but beyond that, how have they experienced lay leadership in their parishes? For example, do lay leaders “lighten the load” of the parish priest or do they necessitate an added layer of scheduling, management, and/or training? Have parish priests seen improvements in the feeling of community (horizontal church) as a result of lay leadership, and in what way? Further, what difference does the size of a parish make for the priest? Are the lay leaders from small churches over-used such that they burn out? Would priests like to have had this topic of lay leadership covered more (or at all) in their seminary studies?

Training lay leaders seems to vary parish to parish. There are several books that are intended to help train and guide various lay ministries. Which ones have been found to be particularly helpful, should there be more standardization? How often should training be done and then renewed? Is the training itself consistent or is it made up as they go along? What “best practices” are used now and how could they be shared more widely? There are many Dioceses that have special program for youth acolytes and some have reginal meetings and training being done for flower guilds, but is there any similar organization or training done for lectors and/or LEMs. Have they been successful and why or why not?

One obvious area of potential research is with the people of a parish who are not lay leaders. It stands to reason that some people do not want their worship experience interrupted by having to serve. Why is that and are there other reasons people prefer not to serve? Also, for those who do not serve – have they been given the opportunity?

Would they like to be? How engaged are they in the Eucharist? Is it better for them to be with the general congregation – why or why not?

In this study, there were no demographical differentials considered. Does gender, age, or length of time in the church or other factors matter to the results of the survey?

Only one of the rectors interviewed enforces the “gap year” for LEMs. It would be useful to know if that is helpful to the lay person, should more parishes do so, and if they did would that encourage others to serve if they knew it would be for a finite period of time. Are the restrictions some Diocese have for the number of LEMs harmful the parish, (am I the only one who feels that way?) In my parish, the choir does not meet for practice or sing as a choir during the month of August, so most of them sit with the congregation rather than upstairs in the choir loft. They report that they enjoy the different perspective of the service that affords them, and a few have then asked to be lectors. Perhaps this “forced” sabbatical is beneficial? Do other parishes do anything similar and if so what are their results?

Another obvious field of inquire is the feedback loop. How to obtain feedback and how to use what is obtained is a whole science unto itself. What study has been done in the field as it relates to church communities? How many churches employ an intentional process for feedback of lay leaders, and has it born fruit? And what about at the Diocesan level? Many diocese have programs for Christian formation at all age levels. Have any created similar programs for lay leadership that go beyond simply guidelines on how many are appropriate and for how long they can serve? If so, again is there a model that can be shared?

I wonder too about church newcomers, especially those who are new to church as opposed to those who have a church background and are just new to this or that particular parish. It would be interesting to know more about when and how they are included in lay leadership, what has worked and what has not. Should they be required to be confirmed to be a lay leader? Is there special training for the previously unchurched newcomer or is it the same for all new to a particular lay task? Do newcomers feel “pushed” if they are approached too soon, or “left out” if it takes too long?

And finally, another obvious area for further research is about those who serve as ushers. The statistics from this study show a certain level of disconnect from the Eucharist and worship when a participant is serving as an usher. Has it always been the case or is this a recent development? Certainly, many of our church members are more, or for the first time, fearful of what might happen while at church. This must have affected those who serve as ushers. I know of several churches that have members armed with pistols as they patrol their parking lots before, during, and after services. Fortunately, I do not know of any Episcopal Churches who do this, but there might well be some.

This increased anxiety and assumed level of responsibility must have had its effects on those who serve as ushers. Clergy would benefit from knowing more about this. Are ushers content to carry this responsibility, or would they welcome some relief from it. Many churches hire people from outside their membership to work in their children and infant nurseries so that members do not have to miss church in order to watch the young. This is a type of outsourcing and makes good sense. Not only do the members not miss the service, but parents can choose to take a break so that they can

worship more fully or they can decide to keep their children with them and start them on their spiritual journey at the earliest age. Should we consider doing something similar for ushers? Should more of our parishes hire professionals for security rather than asking our ushers to carry that load? And what affect would that have on newcomers when they drive in the parking lot and see security folks. Should we be locking our doors? Would that help the ushers at the risk of discouraging newcomers? We might tease that it would make our habitually late parishioners be on time, but would it, or would it just provide a reason for them to not bother coming at all?

Size of the parish, it would seem, makes a difference in this consideration. In my parish, for example, our ushers are typically “on duty” one Sunday a month unless they are filling in for someone else, so about twelve times per year. In smaller churches it is probably more frequent and in larger churches, it is probably less. Some parishes do it as we do – a week a month. Others schedule by the month. For example, my son-in-law who attends a big parish ushers the Sundays in August and at no other time. There are pros and cons to this difference in scheduling. Today, in many churches, the ushers are given more extensive training for what to do in an emergency. If they serve less frequently, will they remember the training or is it more likely to be forgotten? On the other hand, if serving as an usher is what most interrupts or lessens the engagement in the service for lay leaders, perhaps it is beneficial to decrease the frequency of their service responsibility.

Is there some other way to offset the effect of ushering, or to enhance the ushers’ experience? Perhaps ushers would be willing to attend one service and serve at another? Or perhaps there could be something supplemental done for the ushers before or after the

regular service? This is an issue that is likely to magnify rather than to decrease. What, if anything, are parishes doing to address this changing situation? Again are there ideas that could be shared?

Like most research projects, this one has raised more questions than it answered, clearly there is more investigation that could be done.

Recommendations

While the results of my research for this project were mostly what I expected them to be, I still learned a great deal and have several “take-aways” and suggestions of new ideas for changes and modifications in organizing and managing lay leadership.

The research reinforced the idea that serving as a lay leader at the Eucharist is positive and productive for most peoples’ spiritual journey. Therefore, the opportunity to serve should be readily available. But at the same time, people should not feel that they are “stuck” with the same responsibility year after year. At the very least, this means that the communication tools used by a parish must be updated often and the information should be disseminated frequently and probably by multiple techniques.

For example, in my parish while we are known for being very welcoming. Because of our size we recognize newcomers pretty much immediately. We do not give our “Newcomer Packet” to folks until about a person’s third visit. We do not want to scare folks off by coming on too strong too fast. Newcomers are likely to be welcomed when they come in the door by the vestry person of the day, the ushers, and me. If they do not get all three welcomes, they will get at least one. We provide a full-text bulletin and ask if they need anything such as a hearing device or help to their seats. We also have a guideline that our regulars do not sit in the back row so that newcomers, who often

prefer that row, will easily find room to sit. Further, in each pew there is a short explanation of what to expect and how to take communion during the service. All of this is to say, that when someone has visited three times in close succession, we feel they are ready for and probably want more information. Of course, we will provide them with any information they want if they have asked for it before their third visit.

The newcomer packet is chock-full. Among other things, there is a booklet with a brief description of every ministry of the church along with contact information for the person they would need to speak to in order to learn more or to volunteer. We also ask for their contact information, even if they have already filled out the visitors' card found in the pew, so that we can order them a nametag and include them on the email list for the weekly news update. When/if a newcomer fills out the pew card, I send them a handwritten note thanking them for worshiping with us and offering to meet with them.

While this is well and good, what the interviewed rector in Kentucky does would be an excellent addition. At that church, newcomers are invited to attend a "101 class" on everything they should or need to know about the parish. Some of us are audio learners and some learn better in other ways, so this class not only helps those who are audio learners, it also provides a safe space to ask questions. In the class, in addition to talking about the various ministries and how to get involved, he walks the newcomers through a spiritual gifts assessment tool that can suggest areas in which the newcomer might be interested and that will encourage them to get involved sooner rather than later.

This would be an invaluable tool for encouraging folks to consider a particular lay ministry, and further, it can be offered not just to newcomers but periodically to anyone who has interest. This brings up another suggestion: We all know it, but it does not hurt

to be reminded that there is no such thing as over communication! It is perfectly possible for information to have been announced verbally, in writing, and any other form of communication, and to have been completely missed by one or several folks. This is exactly why the tried and true Ministry Fair is tried and true. Even when the information about a ministry has been available year after year, it is likely to strike someone as new because they just did not “see” it before. So, try Ministry Fairs, even if the aim is simply to educate, and repeatedly make the ministry information that newcomers receive available to all in multiple fashions, especially on the church website. And finally, it should always be kept current.

For those parishes who are not (or choose not to be) limited to three year terms for LEMs, it is still important for them, and all the others in lay ministry, to be given the option of stepping down, retiring, or simply taking a break from any particular service responsibility. This can be done annually, or even more frequently. For example, lay leadership schedules are often made and/or printed for portions of the year at a time. Before each new schedule is prepared, the laity typically on the schedule could be asked and/or reminded that they may step down at any time. Of course, most folks who have something unexpected come up that changes their circumstances will notify the schedule keeper, but if they are routinely asked, they do not have to wait an entire year if they are just tired or if for some non-emergency situation they want to step back.

Depending on the size of the parish, it may be advantageous to have one or more persons as the “head” of a lay ministry such as the LEMs, lectors, etc. These folks can take a good bit of time consuming effort off the plate of the rector or staff.

Typically, it is these various “Heads” of ministry who keep the schedule for who works when, and they usually have the responsibility for part or all of the training done for newcomers. It is helpful if this training is reviewed and updated periodically.

Although we joke about it, we Episcopalians are not the only ones who are reluctant to change, “because we have always done it that way.” On the other hand, we do not help ourselves if we do not intentionally examine our practices. This is where a Diocesan or perhaps a convocation-wide gathering of like ministries would be helpful.

Most definitively and importantly though, the ideas and suggestions this research has brought up is the corroboration of the hypothesis that serving as a lay leader at the Eucharist is usually a positive and affirming act. Everyone should have the opportunity to have that enhanced experience. Everyone could confirm and reaffirm their relationship with the Godhead by this service. All of us, clergy and lay should wish that for each other.

To that end, we clergy should offer and encourage participation in these various lay ministries. Of course we must be attentive to those who serve to make sure that it is of a continual positive benefit for them, but no one, if at all possible, should be excluded from serving if they have the desire.

At the church in Savannah, Georgia from which I went to seminary, and where I served as a lector and LEM, there was a woman who was mentally disabled. She had an ungainly gate, and her speech was not always easy to understand, but she never missed church and she was more than eager to participate in any way available. She attended youth events long after she “aged out” and she was always an enthusiastic participant. She wanted to be a part of the service. Because of her physical limitations, she could not

be a LEM, and she did not read well, so did not want to try being a lector. But she could be an acolyte, and she was the most reliable acolyte the parish had ever had. She worked her way through the “ranks” until she became the crucifer. It was incredibly obvious that her service as acolyte enhanced her experience of the Eucharist, and it enhanced that of most everyone else too.

In addition to benefiting her, watching her gave another young man who was developmentally delayed the courage to ask to participate as well. He had no physical limitations, but for him too reading was difficult and he did not want that duty. He began as an acolyte and eventually moved on and was trained as a LEM. It could be almost a mystical experience to receive the chalice from him. When I received the wine from him, I felt the presence of God there with us.

The research showed that serving at the Eucharist enhances or at the very least does not detract from the servers’ experience of the worship. Therefore, we should offer this opportunity to everyone who has an interest and is properly trained. As discussed, personal invitation seems to be the most effective method of bringing new people to the various ministries and they should understand that serving is a ministry one does for the People of God.

Church Music Directors often invite people to join the choir. Many a music director assure the invitee that “anyone can sing.” They present their invitations as a positive and happy thing that they can do for themselves and others during a service. Even a joyful “noise” unto the Lord is in fact joyful, and is likely to enhance that person’s experience of worship. Sure some folks sing much better than others, but again we

should all be given the opportunity to use our gifts, limited though they may be, to honor the Lord.

Another possibility of encouraging lay participation, if time and architecture allow for it, is to have each person who receives the Eucharist then serve the next person. This way of distributing the gifts is more casual, and less efficient, but it can heighten everyone's experience in the right circumstances. Many of us have distributed communion by this method at beach or camp services, but there are parishes who do it this way routinely. In this manner, everyone at the service is a lay leader and together they share the Body of Christ among the Body of Christ.

As it is said, "the space always wins." So, there are many church naves where this method is simply not possible without complicated maneuvers and for some the very idea of the potential germ spreading makes it completely uninviting. But there are parishes that have grown and thrived by the inclusive nature it offers.

The sacramental nature of this extraordinary vocation to which I am fortunate enough to have been called is without doubt the most powerful. It is where I meet the people of God, with the Body and Blood of Jesus, in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Although in almost every Eucharist I now attend, I am the one who presides and consecrates the bread and wine as they become the Body and Blood, I am not the only one who takes part in that meeting. Surely the laity who help by serving at the Eucharist, in any leadership fashion, must feel the powerfulness of it too.

We are in this together and this is a way that we can and should include as many as possible. When someone has served, has experienced this "thin space," It is almost impossible to not be moved by it. Those of us who worry about the shrinking church,

who worry that our way of doing church will disappear, need only remember what Christ did on the night before he died. He took bread, he blessed it, he broke it, and he gave it to . . . us for the forgiveness of all. It is without doubt our most powerful gift to share. Not only should we share it, we should allow and encourage the laity to be a part of the sharing process.

Appendix

Greetings,

Does serving as a liturgical leader during the Eucharist change the leaders' worship experience? I am pursuing a Doctorate of Ministry from Sewanee, and I am exploring this question for my final project. You have received the attached survey because you have been identified as one who serves in a worship leader's role at least occasionally. The survey is very short, please take a few minutes and answer the questions. If you have any follow-up comments, I would appreciate those as well.

Of course you are under no obligation to participate, but if you do your answers will remain confidential. The results are intended for use only in my project. I may quote you if you make a final comment, but you would be identified only by your leadership role and not by name. In taking and submitting the survey you are indicating that you understand and agree to allow your responses to be used as I have indicated.

Thank you so much, for both your participation in this project and for serving God and God's people by your ministry.

In Thanksgiving,

Mollie Roberts+

The Rev Mollie Roberts, Rector
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Survey:

- 1) When I serve as a worship or liturgical leader for the Eucharist my role is a:
 - Lay Eucharistic Minister
 - Choir member or musician
 - Lector or reader
 - Usher
 - Other please specify

- 2) My experience of the Eucharist is different when I am serving as a worship leader versus when I am in the general congregation

Strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree

- 3) Generally, I am more engaged in the service when I am serving as a worship leader

Strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree

- 4) Generally, I look forward to services more when I will be serving as a worship leader

Strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree

- 5) Generally, I am able to pray more deeply (better) when I do not have to lead and am part of the general congregation.

Strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree

- 6) Generally, it enhances my experience of worship to be a leader.

Strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree

- 7) Generally, when I am not a worship leader, receiving communion is more powerful for me.

Strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree

- 8) Generally, when I was not a worship leader – “church” stays with me further into the next week.

Strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree

- 9) Comments:

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