

A Reflection on the Eucharist During the time of COVID-19

A Pastoral Letter

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Abstract

This pastoral letter begins with a view of the present pastoral effects of the community spread of COVID-19. It continues with a survey of Christian, Anglican, and Episcopal understandings around how our praying shapes our believing. Then, the essay explores the theology of *reunion* and the nature of corporate prayer as the bedrock of Episcopal Eucharistic Theology. There is an exploration of "drive-by" and "drive-in" Eucharist, when communion is not possible, virtual Eucharist, lay presidency at the Eucharist, and how the manner in which we make Eucharist challenges our secular imaginaries. In conclusion, there is an invitation to lean into the creativity of Holy Week and the Easter Vigil, finding the sacrifice of the candle as an orienting theme for Easter during a Eucharistic fast.

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Prolegomena – First Things

I have been thinking that in lamenting about being unable to commune together at present, we may be overlooking the power of the preached Word, which can come through very clearly on television. ~Fleming Rutledgeⁱ

On Pastoral Loss and Greif

During the novel COVID-19 pandemic, I have been especially proud of the clergy in our diocese who, though under the weight of pastoral and administrative matters, have "turned on a dime" and offered all kinds of new ways of connecting with people. In a matter of a few short weeks,

the clergy have led their people through a massive amount of change. The clergy are just now dealing with their response to that change and their grief of their own loss.

Their loss is compounded by the fact that at this moment, everything seemingly is up for grabs. "Normal" does not seem to exist. Everywhere people are scrambling for new routines. In the midst of that stands the priest, the deacon, the rector, the lay leaders, and vestries. Each leader is dealing with their journey through change and grief at loss.

This loss for the priest is especially present, for it is the priest who is called in the ordinal to administer communion. This loss reverberated as soon as the cup was withheld, and has continued as we have moved to "stay at home – work safe" or "shelter at home" physical distancing. Clergy have grieved the loss of administering the eucharist, praying the prayers, and gathering the people for whom they have been given charge over.

We are genuinely grieving the normalcy of church life as we are grieving the upending of the daily lived routine and schedule we have curated over the years. There is an old Kubler Ross graph that can help us understand how people manage the stress of new and changed situations. Our lives are changing, they have changed, and the choices we make today are going to impact our lives well into the future. In a relatively short period, we have moved from shock to denial, frustration, depression, and grief. We have some sense of alignment. We have some sense that we are not alone in this experience. We are communicating well. Some of us are moving out of the grief towards agency, creativity, and action. This move is healthy and good. It is a sign that we are corporately, and honestly, moving towards mission engagement around this moment.

Our Response – Creativity and Action

As clergy have wrestled with this loss, and the perceived pastoral needs to gather, we have, as we have been trained to do, sought to act creatively. Such creativity is a natural outcome of leadership, and it is also a reasonable form through which to seek agency.

I have received several questions about the provisions for the Eucharist on Easter. I have had suggestions such as bread and wine in people's homes being blessed across the airwaves. This liturgy is a being called "virtual Eucharist."

Another idea was pre-packaged and delivered wafers to parishioners' doorsteps. Also, sending pre-blessed miniature cups and wafers through the mail. Several health professionals in Houston admit that there is not enough science yet on this novel virus, but that it is most likely not a good idea for anyone to add to unnecessary mail. The virus lives on surfaces for different periods – some for more than 17 days. Furthermore, the fact that asymptomatic people pass it to others makes the practice of mailing items (especially items to be digested), not a good idea.ⁱⁱ

We have also seen drive-through Eucharists being proposed. In no less than two weeks, the idea of lay presidency entered the conversation on the internet. Theological conversations between our people and our clergy is a natural creative way in which we take agency over our lives and ministries. In a time of a pandemic with localized viral outbreaks with devastating community spread, I do not frown on the conversations at all. These questions do need to be addressed theologically and pastorally, and I intend to do so below.

Please understand then, that I am offering this reflection on the Eucharist in order that we might gain common alignment for the sake of moving through the stages of change needed for the very best leadership at this time. I also wish to make clear this is not a full teaching on Eucharistic Theology. I am addressing here the questions that have arisen in the last few weeks during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction to Episcopal Eucharistic Theology

Let us begin with words and thoughts from one of the architects of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, Leonel Mitchell.

"Traditionally, this dependence of the theology upon worship has been expressed in the Latin maxim *lex orandi lex credendi*, or more accurately *legem credenda lex statuat supplicandi*, which means that the way we pray determines the way we believe... Worship, religious activity in all of its aspects – what we do and how we do it, as well as what we say and how we say it – underlies religious belief."ⁱⁱⁱ

Leonel Mitchell explains in his footnote a bit more about this. He writes,

"Two of my former colleagues in the Graduate Program in Liturgical Studies at the University of Notre Dame have had a considerable influence on my thinking on this subject: Robert J. Taft, S.J., whose 'Liturgy as Theology,' *Worship* 56 (1982): 113-17, summarizes views which I have heard him express formally and informally on many occasions; Aidan Kavanagh, O.S.B., whose 1982 Hale Lectures at Seabury-Western (published as *On Liturgical Theology*, New York: Pueblo, 1984) gave form and structure to the idea he has often voiced. Kavanagh's discussion of *lex orandi-lex credendi* in his response to Geoffrey Wainwright in 'Response: Primary Theology and Liturgical Act,' *Worship* 57 (1983): 321-24, includes this insight: 'The old maxim means what it says. One thing it does *not*, however, say or mean is that the *lex credendi* exerts no influence upon the *lex supplicandi*: only that it does not constitute or found the *lex supplicandi*. That is all. But it is a precious, because of fundamental insight, at least in my own estimation, and its implications for both primary and secondary theology are indispensable."^{iv}

What is key for Mitchell (and the authors of the Book of Common Prayer, and every Episcopal liturgist of note that I spoke to in gathering thought for this paper) is that liturgical action is the "primary and foundational theological act from which all subsequent theological activity arises. The liturgical assembly is a theological corporation."^v

The notion that the liturgical assembly is a theological corporation is an essential and core piece of our inherited way of undertaking the glorification of God, the sacramental life of the church, and the preparation for and support of the mission. I experience the reality of our present pushing on us to change our profound liturgical and Eucharistic theology. It does so after only three weeks (as of the writing of this text). Why? We do this because of our grief over a changed

situation. We do this because of our desire to get something we cannot have right now. We do this because of what has become the primary make-up of ordained life.

In my estimation, never has a brief experience, when it comes to thousands of years of liturgical heritage, so eagerly sought liturgical change. Never has a brief experience so pressed change for our Eucharistic theology. There has been little time or thought given to how the manner of our prayer might impact our future theology, ecclesiology, and mission. We should not rush to change our liturgical practice, for in doing so we are saying something and doing something that will change our theology.^{vi} Regardless, because of grief, because of desire to pastor, and because of sincere attempts to lead, we should not dispense with the theological ideas presented out of hand.

On Who Is Praying

Key to the Eucharist, and liturgical reformation in America since the time of The Rt. Reverends Samuel Seabury and William White, has been the question of who is praying the Eucharistic prayer?^{vii} For our Episcopal ancestors, the debate was over the apostolicity of the eucharistic role of the clergy. For us, we have been through 50+ years of discourse over the role of the baptized in worship. Much of this culminated in the 1979 Book of Common prayer. We have been shaped by this prayer book and liturgy, and spent a great deal of time thinking theologically about who is praying in the Eucharist. The twentieth century was an age of defining the rules of the assembly.^{viii} The influence of a wide variety of theological thought has impacted the conversation. The questions raised are:

Am I participating as the priest prays?

Is the priest praying my prayer?

Are the clergy praying with us or for us?

Is the priest one of us as we pray the Eucharistic prayer together?

Is the priest our chosen celebrant among equals with the baptized?

Or is the priest praying the prayer for the congregation?

The questions point to an emerging sense of a hierarchy of orders – which is not at all part of our inherited prayer book theology. The latter suggests a hierarchy where the priestly vocation is to pray on behalf of the baptized.^{ix} The Rt. Rev. Neil Alexander, Bishop, and Dean of the School of Theology at Sewanee has a helpful way of thinking about the intricate work of the Church in these conversations. He says, "Every time we change theology, we change everything else in relation to it. It is all like a mobile."^x When you pull on the vocation of the baptized, it moves the ordinal and moves our ecclesiology. So, as we move out into new forms of worship (especially virtual worship), what is happening is that we are again asking these kinds of questions.

Historically, the assembled congregation (one priest, one church building, Sunday morning services, one plot of land, and an internally focused ministry) has dominated every part of our theology, ecclesiology, and liturgy for a century. Moreover, the primary actors in that space and dialogue have been the clergy and priests most of all.^{xi} This parochial orientation now puts

pressure on us. It puts pressure on us because of the Eucharistic centrality of our common life. It puts pressure on us because we cannot physically go to church. It puts pressure on us because we are sharing liturgical leadership in people's homes. People are publicly praying the daily office and leading worship online.

At the core of our questions about Eucharistic theology, we find deep questions about who is praying. Indeed, we may debate this. However, that is not the purpose of this paper. The purpose of this paper is to lay out clearly what The Episcopal Church's Eucharistic Theology is at this moment in time.

What we know is that the core of our theology is itself created by our councils and conventions. It is that theology that we have, to this point, agreed upon. It does not negate further thinking, change, or future missiological conversations and adaptations. It means there is at present a core Eucharistic theology that moderates our actions as bishops, priests, deacons, and the baptized.^{xii}

In the last two weeks, theologians across the globe have put their minds to this question, "Who is praying the Eucharist?" We have agreed that the very core of Anglican theology, through all of its twists and turns, has determined that it is the corporate body who is making the prayer.^{xiii} This corporate Eucharistic theology is present from the earliest Anglican reformers to our present-day conventions and synods. Furthermore, a number higher than two people must always be present.^{xiv} The point here is that Eucharist is a corporate and communal act. Moreover, The Rt. Rev. William Gregg, liturgist, writes, "Eucharist with a few people present to meet the rubrical requirement seems to miss the point of the exercise, and I do not think actually can bear the weight of the occasion."^{xv}

Who is praying the Eucharist? The people and the priest are praying the Eucharistic prayer. It is the very nature of the liturgy of the Anglican and Episcopal tradition received through the ages that it is necessary to have our people gathered. This gathering is the *synaxis* nature of our Eucharistic prayer. In the early language of church theologians like Ignatius, it was the *union* of the church. It was the *collecta*, in other writings. But most of all, it was the notion of pulling forward into our Eucharistic theology the prayer of the synagogue, which was understood as *reunion*. The Eucharistic prayer is *reunion* theologically – a coming together of people who have been apart.

The Eucharistic prayer, prayed by priest and people, is a reunion from being apart gathered to pray, hear the word of God, and to say the words over the bread and wine. The priest may say the prayer aloud, but it is the solemn assembly reunited and praying in one voice the liturgy of Eucharist – the Great Thanksgiving.

Marion Hatchett wrote that everyone stands at the beginning of the Eucharistic prayer as a way to "[foster] and [signify] the participation of the congregation in the action." When the celebrant says, "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God," the celebrant is asking for "permission to offer thanks in the name of those present," says Hatchett. He is underscoring the notion of *reunion* in our liturgy. He is upholding the early church notion that the whole gathered community actively shares in the sacramental prayer. He continues, "We stand to give thanks; we stand because we have been raised in baptism; we stand because all of us are part of

the action. And when the celebrant says, ‘Let us give thanks to the Lord our God, the celebrant is asking for “permission to offer thanks in the name of those present.”^{xvi} When we come to the end of the great thanksgiving, the celebrant lifts up bread and the wine, expresses in the fullest possible terms our praise of the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, (from the earliest liturgies) now and forever, we, as the corporate reunited, with the mystical body of Christ, say or sing, “Amen.” What is called the “*Great Amen*” or the “*People’s Amen*” goes back at least to the second century, even when the celebrant said most of the Eucharistic prayer in silence throughout the Middle Ages, and into our Book of Common Prayer, the priest raises his voice at the end so that the people would know when to respond Amen.^{xvii} This is a point that Justin Martyr makes in his writing.^{xviii}

Dom Gregory Dix writes in *The Shape of Liturgy* that the Eucharist is a social work, a people’s work of bringing the church at work back together, then a presentation of that labor to God, together in the Eucharistic feast. We bring our offering of the week past to God and prepare to do work with God in the week to come. We are presenting most of all, ourselves together with word and action at the table.^{xix}

Massey Shepherd’s historical work on the American Prayer Book reminds us of the profoundly Anglican tradition that it is the church that is making the sacrifice of its labor both liturgical and missiologically.^{xx}

Liturgist The Rev. Louis Weil, who was integral to the development and creation of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, reminds us in *Theology of Worship* that: “all the members of the assembly are celebrants.”^{xxi}

Theologian and liturgist, The Rev. Ruth Myers writes, “It is in the eucharist that the assembly is drawn into God’s mission.”^{xxii} Myers is speaking of both the *reunion* of those who gather and the gathering together of those in need of *reunion*. She reiterates that the Eucharistic prayer “is the prayer of the community, the assembly’s worship.”^{xxiii} Part of her crucial emphasis is that when we go out and gather away from the existing church building, we repeat in ever new contextual settings the same action of making *ecclesia*. We are “ingathering those to whom we go to the assembly which made eucharist.”^{xxiv} Here Myers is both drawing from the inheritance of the work of our Prayer Book ancestors and leaning on the writing of Paul Bradshaw. Bradshaw is known for his work on Polycarp and ancient church liturgies.

Liturgist and priest, The Rev. Rick Fabian, in *Worship of St. Gregory’s*, a church in San Francisco, writes, “Following rabbinical custom, the Presider secures the congregation’s assent.”^{xxv} He continues, all present “concelebrate” at the eucharistic table, while the Presider prays aloud. Here Fabian is also leaning on Bradshaw’s work.^{xxvi}

I imagine that none of these great liturgical voices could have imagined the situation we are in. But all of them imply, infer, and assume that the body of Christ is present in the making of the eucharist through the gathered community. Moreover, it is both a reunion of the community. It is an oblation and ingathering of its work. It is a prayer made by all together and has been from the beginning.

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of America, in its guidelines, points out that when the community cannot gather, it is a very real fast. We are not together. Reaffirming our heritage of Christian prayer, they reaffirm that surely "when a community cannot gather to share the sacrament, Jesus shows up, and we are still part of the body of Christ. 'The Use of the Means of Grace' reminds us that Holy Communion takes place in the assembly (Principle 39)." ^{xxvii}

Lay theologian and liturgist Mills Fleming writing in the midst of a conversation on the topic of the Eucharist in the midst of the COVID-19 viral community spread, affirms the very same. ^{xxviii} It is most certainly the people ingathered and working together. All too often, we think of "the work of the people" as something divided up among us.

In a blog post earlier this week, Dean of Berkley at Yale Divinity School, and Anglican studies professor, The Rev. Andrew McGowan reminds us that "*worship* is a communal activity defined by place, not merely by spiritual unity." He leans heavily on the New Testament understanding of this fact found in 1 Corinthians 11.20 and Acts 2.1. The testimony is clear that the people come to "one place." Moreover, he reminds us that our heritage of liturgy involves the use of "physical material signs" and that these are rooted in the context itself. Uniquely in our discourse above, McGowan makes this essential addition to the present conversation. He reminds us that the significance of the reunified people is pictured in the action brought about by being in one place together, for it is here that "they are administered by one to another, not merely present and used." In other words, we cannot do it by ourselves but must be together. He continues, "Anglicans exclude private eucharistic celebration and auto-baptism for this reason. It takes two, it takes material substances, and it takes the exchange of them in each other's presence, for a sacrament, in particular, to be what it is." ^{xxix}

What our Anglican heritage reveals and Episcopal tradition reveals, is that the very reunion and participation of all those gathered at every point of the service is what constitutes the liturgical act. This is not an act the priest makes, and the people then receive. We are singing, praying, administering, and acting as one – physically together. Our agreed-upon Eucharistic Theology found in our tradition and exemplified in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer is that the Eucharistic act is not about the priest doing something for others. For, while we may gather virtually, we cannot hear one another; therefore, there is no actual interaction. We may pray, but we cannot hear the diversity of each other's voices. The priest may pray, but she hears not my assent to that prayer. We are gathered virtually, but we are not reunited.

On "Drive-By" and "Drive-In" distribution and When Communion is Not Possible

People have suggested that we have a priest celebrate the Eucharist, then people can "drive-by" and get it at the curb. Others have suggested that we gather people in their cars in the church parking lot for the Eucharist like a "drive-in" movie theater, then the communion can be administered in a "drive-by" manner. I do not think that "drive-by" distribution is a safe way to

administer Communion. Health officials tell us the virus is both airborne and passed between people on objects. Everyone involved, breathing on, or touching the wafers or chalice, may inadvertently pass the virus to individuals in one or more cars. Those in the car may pass it to the person doing the administration. As this is a novel virus, health officials are encouraging the greatest of boundaries, and giving communion by drive-by distribution violates the six feet rule.

We need to remember that in this unique viral outbreak, we cannot harm (even unintentionally) while attempting to do good. This is one of our oldest ethical norms.

There is more here. Both of these methods undermine the very core of the interactive, physical presence that we have already spoken of. They are not about our reunion, our ingathering, or our labor. They do not allow the kind of interactivity that is meant as the regular part of making Eucharist.

One might ask, how is this different than when we take the Eucharist to a shut-in, to those in the hospital, or even to a small group? In each of those cases, we have a gathered community that has made Eucharist together. We are taking what has been made by the ingathered and participatory community to those who could not be present. In so doing, we are gathering them into the community. They, the ones receiving it, are not making it. That is why in the instructions for administering the Eucharist to those who did not attend, we are not re-enacting the work of the people said around the altar. We are always taking something to someone that has been prepared by others.

There is a bit of a slippery slope of liturgical theology here as well. When we make the receiving of Eucharist, however prepared, a necessary part of the Christian life, we undermine a core belief that has been present since the resurrection – the grace of the resurrected Christ is present regardless of the consuming of the Bread and/or Wine. This is a point made by Martin Luther in his text *The Babylonian Captivity*. It is also the theological understanding of the reformers, Richard Hooker and Thomas Cranmer.

We might well remember 1662 Common Prayer rubrics regarding ministry to the sick:

...by any other just impediment, do not receive the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood: the Curate shall instruct him that if he do truly repent him of his sins, and steadfastly believe that Jesus Christ hath suffered death upon the Cross for him, and shed his Blood for his redemption, earnestly remembering the benefits he hath thereby, and giving him hearty thanks therefore; he doth eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ profitably to his soul's health, although he do not receive the Sacrament with his mouth.

We see in Cranmer's directions an affirmation that the body of Christ "exists" for the individual. Hooker uses strong language bringing the sacramental theology back to its rootedness in the cross rather than the elements alone. He writes,

The very letter of the word of Christ giveth plain security that these mysteries do as nails fasten us to his very Cross, that by them we draw out, as touching efficacy, force, and virtue, even the blood of his gored side, in the wounds of our Redeemer we there dip our

tongues, we are dyed red both within and without, our hunger is satisfied and our thirst for ever quenched; they are things wonderful which he feeleth, great which he seeth and unheard of which he uttereth, whose soul is possessed of this Paschal Lamb and made joyful in the strength of this new wine, this bread hath in it more than the substance which our eyes behold, this cup hallowed with solemn benediction availeth to the endless life and welfare both of soul and body, in that it serveth as well for a medicine to heal our infirmities and purge our sins as for a sacrifice of thanksgiving; with touching it sanctifieth, it enlighteneth with belief, it truly conformeth us unto the image of Jesus Christ; what these elements are in themselves it skilleth not, it is enough that to me which take them they are the body and blood of Christ, his promise in witness hereof sufficeth, his word he knoweth which way to accomplish; why should any cogitation possess the mind of a faithful communicant but this, O my God thou art true, O my Soul thou art happy!”^{xxx}

Our own 1979 Prayer Book’s understanding follows this as well. In the rubrics found on page 457 it is written, “If a person desires to receive the Sacrament, but, by reason of extreme sickness or physical disability, is unable to eat and drink the Bread and Wine, the Celebrant is to assure the person that all the benefits of Communion are received, even though the Sacrament is not received with the mouth.”

One may participate in the Eucharistic making without consuming the elements. Christ is present regardless, and grace is administered. We might well remember that when a person does not receive the Wine for whatever reason at the rail, we are enacting this theology.

While the “drive-by” and the “drive-in” models are inventive and creative, they undermine the essential participatory nature of Eucharist-making we discussed. By making “giving the sacrament” an essential part of our life, we undermine the reality that Christ and grace is present and offered through the Gospel, the liturgy of the word, and by even being in the presence of Eucharistic celebration without consuming the Bread and Wine.

On The Presence of Christ In The Virtual Eucharist

What we do as a church, what we say as a church, and how we live out our liturgical life regarding all worship and especially the Eucharist at this time shapes our believing. Since our move to a Eucharistically centered Sunday morning worship, we must recognize that people long for the Bread and Wine. We have already surveyed some of the reasons for that desire. For most of us, it has only been three weeks to date without regular Eucharist.

A priest in the Diocese of Texas reminded me about Terry Waite. He was a representative for the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Church of England, and he traveled to Lebanon to try to secure the release of four hostages held hostage in 1987. Waite was taken hostage himself on January 20th. He would spend the first four years of his 2,353 days in solitary confinement. Some 330 days after Christmas mass, Waite saved a small piece of bread, perhaps a crumb, and some water. He then recalled the birth of Jesus, not that far from where he was confined. He recalled the words of Jesus at the Last Supper on that holy night memorized after years of attending worship. He ate and drank and went to sleep. This is a powerful image of a faithful man’s desire

for Christ's presence. This is a powerful image neither of lay presidency nor of virtual Eucharistic integrity. It is an image of our human desire for the symbols of Christ's presence. There is, of course, a considerable difference between what we honor as powerful and meaningful for an individual and what the Church undertakes as regular or even pastoral practice.

While we have not suffered to the extent Waite did, there is nevertheless a deep desire to consume blessed Bread and Wine. This brings into question the notion of virtual Eucharistic life.

We need to be mindful that the virtual Eucharist is not new. Some nondenominational churches such as Saddleback [developed means](#) so that parishioners may participate virtually with grape juice and live stream. In the 1990s, there were liturgically rare experiments like [eHolyCom](#). The United Methodist Church [explored the topic in 2013](#) and shared the resulting thoughts. Chris Ridgeway, author and pastor, in a recent article, reminds us that, "most sacramental denominations have relegated online Holy Communion to an exotic theological issue—akin to 'Can extraterrestrials be saved?' (or to [virtual cathedrals](#) in the immersive Second Life video game)." [You can find a whole list of virtual options here](#). A congregationalist confession of faith, The [Westminster Confession](#), article 27.4 does not allow it.^{xxxix}

A new book is about to be published by Roman Catholic scholar Katherine G. Schmidt, entitled [Virtual Communion: Theology of the Internet and the Catholic Sacramental Imagination](#). Episcopal chaplain at Harvard, Aiden Luke Stoddart suggests in a recent article entitled "[A Eucharitic Proposal for a Time of Pandemic](#)" that we should engage virtual Eucharist. I believe that we are going to speak about this for a very long time. I believe that we have already spoken about the pillars of our Eucharistic theology that would give a resounding "no" to this practice. Liturgists lay and ordained have said we should not diverge from our eucharistic theology at this moment,

Yet, it is a serious question. What follows is an engagement of that question from our history and our present Book of Common Prayer Eucharistic Theology.

One of the very difficult spots we find ourselves in is that we as Anglicans have forever set as a hallmark "of our Eucharistic theology *not* to define precisely how Christ becomes/is present in the Sacrament."^{xxxix}

We see in the Thirty-Nine Articles how the reformers resisted the notion of describing how Christ is present in the Eucharist.^{xxxix} Anglican ecclesiologist, R. W. Dixon maintained the Articles exemplified both "continental Protestant confessions and the anathema-encrusted pronouncements of the Council of Trent". He writes, "They dogmatize without arguing... they affirm without offering proof; they deal neither in expostulation nor rebuke. They are not apologetic. Completeness of form is their character."^{xxxix}

There is also a strong belief that the very nature of the incarnation rejects all manner of Docetism whereby the body of Christ is merely a spirit. Therefore, the reunion of the gathered body, one bread, and one cup is a powerful theological, ecclesiastical, and liturgical reality of Eucharist-making. Again, we might turn to liturgist and bishop William Gregg, who writes, "Neither the

celebration of the Eucharist, nor the Sacrament itself, are abstractions, or ‘virtual realities’. They are not ‘shadows’ of the real thing.” Therefore, he offers “virtual Eucharist cannot be done.”^{xxxv} These are powerful and strong words. They are evident of the incarnation theology that is part of our Episcopal tradition.

McGowan concludes his remarks on the idea with these words:

“I note here that there are some Anglicans whose refusal of a classic sacramental doctrine (whether evangelical or catholic) would lead them to suggest the material signs are not necessary at all, whether for Eucharist or ordination, etc. but merely useful or edifying. I think the problems with this view are too deep to address here, but it is worth noting that establishing a precedent where this position is implicitly affirmed now, even in crisis, would have implications whose scope would be hard to anticipate.”^{xxxvi}

The Rt. Rev. Pierre Whalon writes:

“Simply put, the full meaning of the Eucharist, signified by the embodied, physical gathering of a congregation and its corporate liturgical actions, is not best presented by an online format, or by the regular distribution of Communion outside the physical eucharistic celebration, or by individual households holding up bread and wine to a screen while a priest prays in some other locale. This is not to say that the presence of the Dying and Rising Christ cannot be present and received in any of these situations. It is to say that from a human perspective, the full meaning of the Eucharist is not obvious.”^{xxxvii}

We do not think that pre-recorded versions of prayer services truly are the best because they do not at least allow participation between celebrant and participant virtually. In this case, I may be praying with others who happen to be praying at the same time, but we are not doing so unified in our prayer. We are also not unified in prayer with those leading the service. This is not to say that the prayers are not efficacious. Indeed, prayer by individuals is effective. It is efficacious. However, there does seem to be varying degrees of what it means to pray together virtually. One of them has to be that if we are after the most good, we are praying the prayers together at the same time, even if we are in different locales.

In the Diocese of Texas, we have discouraged the celebration of the Eucharist by two or three online while others watch or even participate in a different place. There are many reasons for doing so. The first is that some parishioners may, in fact, feel left out from those who do get to participate. They may wonder why they were not asked to help read or to lead? It is possible that while some people may feel comforted by the Eucharist being celebrated that there may be others who are saddened by not being able to receive. These different outcomes are outcomes worth pondering. They are outcomes different from the desired result.

The Rev. Sam Wells and The Rev. Abigail Kocher have written an excellent piece worth considering. It is entitled [“Thoughts on Virtual Communion in a Lockdown Era.”](#) They find first and foremost that our norm is as described above. Virtual worship is an experience of remoteness that is different. They suggest:

“In all these ways the Eucharist is clearly not the same when experienced remotely. We can’t get the same sense of being one body that shared physical presence gives us –

though online platforms can achieve a great deal in other ways. It's a different sense of 'with.'"

They suggest, as have many others, that this season is helping us long for that which we cannot have. Our longing is deepening our appreciation for human contact and the celebration of reunion in the bread and wine. In very stirring words they make the case for the celebration of the Eucharist where nobody partakes. It is a brilliant and chilling imagining. They write:

“What is required of us is to keep the feast. It may feel a terrible absence to offer the Eucharistic prayer without the consumption of elements, in this season keeping the feast is more akin to keeping a fast. Not a fast we have chosen, not the Lenten discipline we intended. But if we are to be God's people who know how to keep the feast, we may also learn to faithfully keep this fast, and concurrently to keep the celebration of the paschal feast ever before us. To offer the prayer is to tell the story of salvation history and to know that same salvation comes to this time and this place, despite all.

The Eucharistic Prayer is a prayer of consecration. It also involves prayers of thanksgiving and of intercession. Yes, the elements are being blessed by the Holy Spirit through it, and yes, we have become accustomed to thinking of that outcome of consecrated elements as the end product of the Eucharistic prayer. But perhaps now, as we keep the feast at a good social distance, we are invited to wonder at all that the Eucharistic prayer embodies, the manifold ways it beckons transformation and transfiguration of all the created world towards God's goodness, and to know ourselves consecrated into God's abundant life offered for the world.”

As I read and ponder Well's and Kocher's proposal, I am struck by the fact that it really isn't Eucharist in the way that we think about it. Perhaps that is what is so very compelling about it. To have a few gathered, to make Eucharist, and then to not partake as part of the longing of our future reunion is an intriguing and captivating theological premise. If one was to follow their idea, I believe both introductory words, the sermon, and explanation at the time following the invitation are needed. Only in this way will the full meaning of the intention be clear to those who watch and do not partake and yet may well receive the benefit of Christ's presence.

What we know about virtual worship from experience is that it can be very intimate. We are finding in our Zoom meetings, bible studies, and morning prayer services (especially where interaction is allowed and encouraged) that it can be very intimate. In a group I participated in over a week's time, it took a day before we had a rhythm and were able to share as deeply as if we were in person. So, worship and community do happen when we use virtual forms of communication and worship. However, I do not believe that because a mode, or method, of making community is intimate, that it is also a means for making Eucharist. Relationships and gathering using virtual platforms can and will continue to play an essential role in how we share the Gospel in the future. Yet, for Episcopalians, these virtual platforms will always be a precursor for linking people together in the physical world, making Eucharist as a reunified community, and serving others shoulder to shoulder and hand in hand. We come together physically so as to incarnate the body of Christ as *ecclesia* – as the church.

What I am trying to convey is that surely people of many other denominations will, in fact, do virtual communion, and they will speak about its intimacy and the spiritual power and healing it brings. Episcopalians may even try it; some have done so in seminary settings and in the midst of this viral outbreak. As Episcopalians, it needs to be said, that this is not presently part of our tradition. It may be part of other people's traditions, but that does not mean that this is the way we presently make Eucharist in our church – in our tradition. What is very clear in the present moment is that Eucharistic theology, manifested in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, and our historic Anglican Eucharistic theology, does not imagine or make space for virtual Eucharist. The result of thousands of years of human prayer imagines only the presence of human beings reunited in a physical space, with common elements, for the work of liturgy. This is the way we as Episcopalians make the Eucharist, administer it, and partake in its benefits. We are meant for each other, and we are meant to be together.

I have little doubt that the experience of this novel virus and its physical distancing will create a need for continued conversation. We were already having a conversation about virtual gatherings and the need for them as people's lives, work habits, and the use of new technology created a new mission field. The rate of technological adaptation will continue to press the Episcopal Church to investigate the virtual Eucharist.

On Lay Presidency

I have been surprised how quickly "lay presidency" at the Eucharist entered the conversation around virtual Eucharist during this pandemic. This is not a new debate. The question of lay presidency is rooted in the ancient discussion about apostolicity and ecclesiology. Presidency at the Eucharist emerges as part of inhabiting an ordered life. The Episcopal Church, in its infancy, leaned into this question with more fervor than it even has today. Are priests and bishops necessary? So, it is not surprising that it surfaces now, because the unique place the Episcopal church exists within religious life poses renewed challenges in our current situation. Furthermore, with the influx of people from other denominations or no religious background, a lack of formative theological catechesis, and successful mission engagement with the culture, we find our conversation turning to the question once again.

Prefiguring much of the Eucharistic ecclesiology in the 1830s, Vatican II, and the liturgical renewal of the twentieth century^{xxxviii} In the post-colonial era, the Rt. Rev. Samuel Seabury laid the groundwork for a discussion on the presidency at the Eucharist.^{xxxix} Seabury's own work, undoubtedly influenced by liturgical theology in Ireland and Scotland, is a clear precursor to the Oxford Movement.^{xl} For Seabury, the people had to have a priest. The reunion was not complete without a bishop or priest to say the prayers appointed. This was because of a deep understanding in his Eucharistic theology that Christ in the Eucharist and the priest saying the Eucharist preserves the ancient apostolic succession in the midst of the people. In Seabury's preaching and teaching, we also see a clear understanding that the imagery of a priest leading is an essential symbol at the Eucharistic table of Christ. She is not Christ, but she is a symbol of Christ. He preached that the apostles were sent as Christ's priests to the world. In the simplest of terms, echoing the book of Hebrews 13:10, if there is to be a table, there is to be a priest. Seabury was convinced you could not have table fellowship without the apostolic priesthood.^{xli}

Earlier, Cranmer reformed the priesthood. He believed it was essential for the proclamation of the word, the celebration of the Eucharist, and the discipline of the church. Hooker agreed. Both believed that the High Priest of the Church was Christ himself. Both supported the notion of the priesthood of all believers and the shared ministry of the church; and at the same time believed the ordinal and priesthood were necessary for the church. To change this is core theological point is to cease to be the Episcopal Church

and to become a different church. For there are indeed many churches without priests, bishops, and an apostolic connectivity to the ministry of Jesus.

We cannot, as Louis Weil points out, take away from the reality that it is the “whole people of God” that is needed for the eucharistic service; and we have staunchly rejected the idea that only one person is doing the celebratory work.^{xlii} It is the tension between these two notions of the essential nature of both bishop/priest and congregation in our church that makes us unique. It is a core piece of Eucharistic theology that binds our liturgical life and the quality of our theological nature together. Ruth Myers contributes that there is a tension between the work of the shared body and priesthood. At its best, there is a great revelation in a truly diversified community working together, and each taking turns to vocalize and speaking out our liturgy that reveals our rootedness in Baptism and Eucharistic mission. It is the bishop’s and priest’s work to remind us of that in both action and teaching.^{xliii} In this way, we have in our contemporary liturgical thinking, an understanding of how priesthood continues the tradition of embodying Christ, and serves the church’s mission of Gospel proclamation with a presence at table and font. The priest is a necessary member of the gathered community.

Orthodox priest and theologian Alexander Schmemmann pick up this priestly identity as a place holder for the quality of Unity our Episcopal ordinal and Eucharistic theology exemplifies. Perhaps it is why many Episcopal clergy read him. His ecclesial understanding of liturgical theology itself is respected across denominations. Schmemmann writes,

“If the ‘Assembly as the Church’ is the image of the body of Christ, then the image of the head of the body is the priest. He [or she] presides over, he [or she] heads the gathering, and his [or her] standing at their head is precisely what makes a group of Christians the gathering of the church in the fullness of her gifts. If according to his [or her] humanity the priest is only one – and perhaps the most sinful and unworthy – of those assembled, then by the gift of the Holy Spirit, which has been preserved by the Church since Pentecost and handed down without interruption through the laying on of hands of the bishop, he [or she] manifests the power of the priesthood of Christ, who consecrated himself for us and who is the one priest of the New Testament: ‘and he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever’” (Hebrews 7:24).^{xliv}

What Schmemmann is keen to reveal here is that no one person or part of the assembly is the full bearer of holiness. Instead, it is the priest, along with the reunion of the baptized physically present, with the common elements, that bear together the holiness of Christ. When we turn this to the priesthood we are able to see and say that, “the priesthood of the priest is not his [or hers] but Christ’s.”^{xlv} Just as the whole church is Christ’s body. Schmemmann continues, “Christ is not outside the church, and neither his power nor his authority is delegated to anyone. He himself abides in the Church and, through the Holy Spirit, he fulfills her entire life.... Standing at the head of the body, [the priest] manifests in himself [or herself] the unity of the Church, the oneness of the unity of all her members with himself [or herself]. Thus, in this unity of the celebrant and the assembled is manifested the divine-human unity of the Church – in Christ and with Christ.”

If we pick up on the Eucharistic theology of our prayer book, we see quickly in the ordinal that the priest’s work is the administration of the sacraments –in the manner and custom of the church. In the 1979 catechism it reads:

“The ministry of a priest is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as pastor to the people; to share with the bishop in the overseeing of the Church; to proclaim the Gospel; to administer the sacraments, and to bless and declare pardon in the name of God.”^{xlvi}

If we spend too much time here, focused on the priest alone, we will quickly veer to clericalism. This is not at all what our Eucharistic theology suggests. What it does suggest is that in our tradition, the reunion is incomplete without a priest or bishop at the table among the gathered people.

It is true that there are other denominations that allow for lay presidency and dismiss the apostolic nature of table fellowship as characterized in our tradition. The Episcopal Church is just not one of those denominations. The reason we do not do lay presidency is deeply rooted in our own Eucharistic theology inherited from the apostles and given a particular charism in our Episcopal tradition.

On Supporting A Society of Individualism

We know that the reality is that most of our parishioners do not attend every Sunday. The ratio of "average Sunday attendance" compared to "membership in good standing" reveals that many members miss (on average) three Sundays in a row. Of course, averages are big numbers that are arrived at because some come every Sunday, others come three or four times a year, and still others come once a month. The liturgical life of the Christian community is lived among these extremes. I realize this. However, it makes me question what else is going on. The feelings of grief are real, and so is the desire to be creative and help. But why is not being able to make Eucharist so powerful? Why are people so hungry for it?

One explanation is the move to Sunday Eucharistic worship as the norm. Fewer and fewer of us remember the time when we had Eucharist once a month, or only on the fifth Sunday. Furthermore, even fewer remember when we did not have Eucharist on Easter because it did not fall on the fifth Sunday. Such was the reality of the Episcopal liturgical tradition a little over 40 years ago.

There is still something more. There is a behavior that we are inhabiting that, as of yet, we have not named. The behavior is called "reactance." A study from the National Library of Medicine and based upon the clinical work of Doctors W. J Brehm and S. S. Brehm reveals that *reactance* is a kind of disagreeable feeling that is stimulated when individuals are threatened by loss of freedom. It motivates the individual to act in such a way as to restore that which is lost. Brehm and Brehm suggest:

“Reactance is unpleasant motivational arousal that emerges when people experience a threat to or loss of their free behaviors. It serves as a motivator to restore one's freedom. The amount of reactance depends on the importance of the threatened freedom and the perceived magnitude of the threat. Internal threats are self-imposed threats arising from choosing specific alternatives and rejecting others. External threats arise either from impersonal situational factors that by happenstance create a barrier to an individual's freedom or from social influence attempts targeting a specific individual.”^{xlvi}

I suggest that our particular circumstance of social distancing has taken away our individual freedom of movement and sorting-out of daily routines. I suggest that removal of the cup at first, and now the required virtual worship, has taken away our individual freedoms in and with Church life. It has taken away the freedom of individual clergy to administer communion. Holy Week and the Great Feast of Easter are now changed, and such freedom of local expressions

based upon expected tradition is grievous, most of all because we are no longer as free as we were before. So, we are experiencing reactance.

We are doing everything we can to get what we cannot have. For centuries, Christians lived without regular attendance or even consuming the sacraments of bread and wine. Our normative practice in the Anglican tradition has not always included regular Eucharistic fellowship. Yet, we are feeling an extreme pull to enact sacramental behavior(s) that are uncharacteristically Episcopalian. We are doing so because we are struggling to move out of our grief, take action, and claim agency. We are also attempting to get what we cannot have. These combine into compelling emotions. These emotions are so powerful that we are willing to do things we never would do under normal circumstances. These emotions blame and scapegoat those who have power and authority because they will not "let us" have what we want. These emotions have driven us to believe that instruction given to the contrary is an abuse of power. These emotions make us believe that we are urgently in need of changing our Eucharistic theology. I say all of this to normalize our feelings about our loss. It is a real loss and we are eager to have what we are missing. Reactance is real. And, why wouldn't it be? We are in the midst of a pandemic!

Our reactance combines with agency, and proposes the creative ideas. The virtual Eucharist, and the creation of home communion kits are examples of that creativity. They seek, in all earnestness, to reunite the presently fragmented Eucharistic community online. They are powerful because we are experiencing very real loss.

They are also powerful ideas because, in part, they tap into our cultural framework. One of the concerns that has been a part of the discussion on the Eucharist in recent weeks is how "what we do" in this time might contribute to greater societal fracture. Religious philosopher Charles Taylor speaks of the three heuristic imaginaries that frame present-day society and helps me to ponder the impact of these proposed changes on theology and mission itself.

Charles Taylor's three imaginaries are: the commons (space), economy, and politics. Taylor suggests that each of these is so dominant that it is a natural part of our everyday lives, how we navigate the world and the way we speak. These imaginaries are foundation pieces that have become invisible to us. We should be quick to say that Taylor does not see modernity and postmodernity as homogenous or monolithic in expression. The heuristic is based upon the diverse press of new practices, thoughts, and habits formed in this age. He says that it is "that historically unprecedented amalgam of new practices and institutional forms (science, technology, industrial production, urbanization), of new ways of living (individualism, secularization, instrumental rationality); and of new forms of malaise (alienation, meaninglessness, a sense of impending social dissolution)."^{xlvi}

The political imaginary may be described as the foundation upon which people make decisions. Today the polis makes the decisions based upon popular opinion combined with individual desire. We might well characterize this with one sentence, "I make choices about my life based upon the popular opinions of those I choose to follow." A person does not, and may even reject, the notion of history, theology, or philosophical traditions as a starting or even finishing point for decisions about how to live life or how to live life in community. The economic imaginary has to do with choice. The new economies are based upon choice and personal modification. The

manufacturing of options and the demand created by choice are key elements in our economic thinking. The individual is the location of choice, along with public opinion. The individual's right to choose is essential. We can see why reactance in this age is so powerful a determining motivator for change, because anything that impinges upon my freedom to choose is antithetical to our imaginary. Finally, we have space. This imaginary is about shared communal space. It is about where choice is practiced, and it is public. In the social imaginary of shared or social spaces, what we discover is the creation of private space. Certain things then are allowed to be a part of social space in our era, while others have been relegated to private space. We see this most in regard to the discourse about politics itself. Religion has been relegated to private choice and private space, disabling faith from impacting public and social space. There is a division here of importance, and one does not have to travel far into the space to discover the boundary.

There is much writing being done around Taylor's theology, philosophy, and sociology. Much of it has to do with wrestling with the social imaginary's assumptions. For instance, my book on politics attempts to think about how we as Christians engage in living in a dual relationship with the kingdom of God and our nations. While the Rev. Dr. Kathryn Tanner's work on capitalism takes a look at the economic imperatives implied in our current age, and challenges us to see a Christian way of engagement.^{xlix} Certainly, we cannot forget that much good has come out of humanism. What is at stake, though, ethically and morally, is a society that removes itself from the deep kinship realities that bind us together. We will not likely fully change the nature of individual thinking, choice, or space. Whether we should or not is a question itself. However, we do not want to abandon the field altogether. We believe that loving kinship^l and care is an essential part of creation care and human care. It is the basis for communal work and communal good. The Eucharistic theology of *reunion* and shared labor is a key ingredient to this conversation and should not easily be abandoned.

The Rt. Rev. Mark Eddington captured much of the liturgical concerns about adopting virtual communion as a means of Episcopal worship when he wrote, "We are in some danger of acting under pastoral exigency in such a way as to cut out the very rationale of the church as the gathering of the beloved community. We're saying that people don't need to gather, and that community is second to individual preference."^{li} This comment taps into Charles Taylor's understanding of the core imaginaries that are visible in the secular societal framework.

First, that we might change hundreds of years of Anglican and Episcopal Theology due to widespread desire and opinion on a subject that very little time has been spent discussing or has had the weighty theological reflection and corporate conversation of a gathered church. The proposals before us are more about popular opinion and individual ideas about what can be done. The short amount of time that has elapsed in the viral outbreak reveals the power of the political, (the polis) in suggesting and even demanding change.

Second, the idea that people should be able to do what they want in their own homes drives the idea of economic choice further into our religious practice. The power of the individual and the individual's choice to do what seems right and gets them what they want is driving a good deal of the conversation. Furthermore, clergy wanting to engage in such practices unsuspectingly begin to reimagine for the community a church that is a kind of economic exchange. These clergy are trying to use creativity in a genuine desire to give their congregations what they want. It is action

out of pastoral generativity. Unfortunately, rather than dealing with the pastoral crisis, the overwhelming reactance of the situation demanding a solution that runs against the very nature of our Episcopal practice and deep theological inheritance.

Finally, the idea that individuals or small groups could make communion at home through the virtual blessing of elements furthers the agenda of privatizing faith and religion, further binding it into the private space of one's living room. It further separates us from one another and builds practical support of making communion that undermines the very corporate nature of the event itself.

It appears that questioning *how* our changes or pastoral attempts to make Eucharist happen were not part of the dialogue. The concerns about our individual actions and how they might actually erode our concepts of *reunion*, mutual prayer and labor, and kinship were not considered. Such absence of concern reveals how powerful these imaginaries already function within the church and amongst its leaders. While it is clear to me that no one intended this as a kind of secular shift in our Eucharistic theology in our ecclesiological thinking it is apparent that we are unaware of the depth of the secular societal impact within the church.

Part of the reason why we should refrain from shifting our Eucharistic theology at this time is due to the further erosion of faith, religion, and spiritual public expression. Maintaining our Eucharistic theology, especially at this time, undermines secularity and its impacts on our lives.

First, we are saying that there is in fact a kind of transcendent reality that is particularly and uniquely present when we gather together for prayer and worship. When we are together, in person, we do something that is particular and unique. We make a claim that God is present in the gathering – in the reunion.

When we gather, we are reminded that our life, our experience of it, and our perspective is not all there is.^{lii} Our eyes, hearts, and minds are lifted up in a different way to hear and see differently. There is a different type of transformation and transcendent experience available to us when we gather. This does not deny the transformative and transcendent experiences of the individual. It is to say that when we make Eucharist, we are doing something more than gathering in different places together for prayer.

We discover that, in Charles Taylor's words, "the point of things is not exhausted by life." He goes on to say this is not "just a repudiation of egoism," this is about the relationship with others. We are different when we are together.^{liii} Reunion and shared labor have a different quality to them.

When we hold to our Eucharistic theology, we are reminded that we are not meant for individual flourishing alone. We are meant for communal flourishing.^{liv} What I mean here is that the Eucharist itself is not meant for individuals alone. We are not a group of individuals gathered to get our own needs met. Instead, we understand the corporate grace of salvation and the reuniting of God's created kin and family. We come to understand that without us, others may not receive what is needed. It is an awakening to the idea that when we are not present with each other, we

are not whole. Agape is not an individual practice. We cannot have a feast of friends alone. We are saying that gathering together is essential to the nature of human flourishing.

We are rejecting clericalism and professionalism. The modern social idea of economy and space means that certain professionals dominate certain spaces. When we hold on to our Eucharistic theology regarding the reunion and the shared labor of prayer, we reject the notion that “higher activities” are reserved for a few specialists. Our understanding that the community gathered physically with common elements in prayer is what it takes to make Eucharist undermines the notion that a specially trained person can do it without others in the room. This is deeply rooted in our reformation theology wherein we reject the notion that “really holy life” is only available to the “higher vocations.”^{lv}

Lastly, when we hold onto public gathering in plain sight, we reject the notion that faith is private or that faith is something that happens behind closed doors. We believe in a God who has created the cosmos, our world, nation, city, and neighborhood. We reject the notion that the corporate worship of this God takes place in private. This is both the importance of reunion that takes place within attractional churches and reunion that is missional and gathers together people in varied public spaces.

What we do in this moment matters because it matters how we do it at all times.

Dom Gregory Dix in his book *The Shape of Liturgy*, describes well the power of this eternal return to the table of Christ that so many Christians have participated in. He wrote:

“Was ever another command so obeyed?

For century after century, spreading slowly to every continent and country and among every race on earth, this action has been done, in every conceivable human circumstance, for every conceivable human need from infancy and before it to extreme old age and after it, from the pinnacle of earthly greatness to the refuge of fugitives in the caves and dens of the earth.

[We] have found no better thing than this to do for kings at their crowning and for criminals going to the scaffold; for armies in triumph or for a bride and bridegroom in a little country church; for the proclamation of a dogma or for a good crop of wheat; for the wisdom of the Parliament of a mighty nation or for a sick old woman afraid to die;

...for the repentance of Margaret; for the settlement of a strike; for a son for a barren woman; for Captain so-and-so wounded and prisoner of war; while the lions roared in the nearby amphitheater; on the beach at Dunkirk; while the hiss of scythes in the thick June grass came faintly through the windows of the church; tremulously, by an old monk on the fiftieth anniversary of his vows; furtively, by an exiled bishop who had hewn timber all day in a prison camp near Murmansk; gorgeously, for the canonization of S. Joan of Arc – one could fill many pages with the reasons why [we] have done this, and not tell a hundredth part of them.

And best of all, week by week and month by month, on a hundred thousand successive Sundays, faithfully, unfailingly, across all the parishes of Christendom, the pastors have done this just to make the *plebs sancta Dei* – the holy common people of God.”^{vi}

Each of these situations was a celebration of Eucharist, gathered in by the pastor’s call, assented to by the people’s prayers, and undermining the very fabric of human sin and brokenness. What we do matters as does how we do it. It has everywhere and always been a reunion of the people of God in which Christ was present.

Conclusion

I believe that the most appropriate act of worship given physical distancing is the Daily Office. For those not familiar with the daily office the Liturgy of the Word may be used from within Eucharist Rt I or II, concluding at the peace. (Direction are given on page 405.) These are the forms of virtual worship best shared in a variety of online formats. Meeting together virtually where we can hear each other’s “real-time” responses and voices is the very best form of such virtual daily prayer. It is a way of proclaiming the word. It reminds us of the goodness of God’s promises and the grace and mercy of God’s living word. It also reminds us that we will soon be together, as Jesus has promised, and great will be our reunion.

There are indeed many questions still to ask and to ponder together in the years to come. There are seeds of God’s goodness even now taking root as we engage mission in a time of COVID-19. Let us cling, though, to our heritage and deep Eucharistic theology rather than abandoning it. The Episcopal Church has a particular liturgical life that differentiates itself from others – in so doing its particularity adds to the world. Let us long for our reunion. Let us pray together for our return to our churches and missional communities.

Wells and Kocher, in their essay, remind us about our Abrahamic faith brothers and sisters, the Jews, “Since 70 AD, Jews have prayed, lit candles, and kept Sabbath without being able to be present in the Temple. They have kept the prayers, known by heart, passing down the faith generation to generation... The Jews have a lot to teach Christians about knowing God’s presence when the tangible signs of worship are stripped away and sacred places of gathering are not accessible for a time.”^{vii}

This is a time that we just cannot do the ordinary, nor is it a time when we can do what we may most wish to do. Yet, we should not let our pastoral desire undo what is essential to our Eucharistic theology and ecclesiology. I am fully aware that this teaching is particularly hard as we face Holy Week and Easter together. Easter without Eucharist is, at best, strange.

We need to remember that the Eucharist is about sustaining life. To celebrate in ways that endanger life (gathering) or in a quick, ill-conceived and not well-thought-out and prayed-through manner in order to satisfy an ideal or our want, seems contrary to the very nature and meaning of the Sacrament.

Let us teach each other how to make palms out of paper and parade around our home and in our yards. Teach each other to say the prayers and sing. Let us invite people to make an altar at home or stations and venerate the cross and say our prayers on Friday. Let us tell and recite the stories

of old at the vigil. Let our voices from hearth and table in our homes recite the Exsultet at the appointed hour. We can craft our own paschal candles and light them. Will a family take a turn with the verses? Or the widow speak it quietly? Let the Exsultet be echoed from the dark cathedral and churches into our living rooms and to our tables. Let us turn our attention to offering the evening sacrifice of this candle as a sign of Christ's resurrection.

It is truly right and good, always and everywhere, with our whole heart and mind and voice, to praise you, the invisible, almighty, and eternal God, and your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; for he is the true Paschal Lamb, who at the feast of the Passover paid for us the debt of Adam's sin, and by his blood delivered your faithful people.

This is the night, when you brought our fathers, the children of Israel, out of bondage in Egypt, and led them through the Red Sea on dry land.

This is the night, when all who believe in Christ are delivered from the gloom of sin and are restored to grace and holiness of life.

This is the night, when Christ broke the bonds of death and hell, and rose victorious from the grave.

How wonderful and beyond our knowing, O God, is your mercy and loving-kindness to us, that to redeem a slave, you gave a Son.

How holy is this night, when wickedness is put to flight, and sin is washed away. It restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to those who mourn. It casts out pride and hatred, and brings peace and concord.

How blessed is this night, when earth and heaven are joined and man is reconciled to God.

Holy Father, accept our evening sacrifice, the offering of this candle in your honor. May it shine continually to drive away all darkness. May Christ, the Morning Star who knows no setting, find it ever burning—he who gives his light to all creation, and who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.^{lviii}

Then Easter meals and Easter brunches with family and friends gathered virtually on computer, or by phone. Home cooked and braided challah, or a small meal shared between a couple at home shall be a sign of our kinship. Lamb or whatever is left of our provisions can be made into our feast.

Now is a time of innovation and creativity. Now is a time of deeply connecting intimately connecting, with each other. Let us light such a flame that we see in homes and churches the brightness of Christ's light in this hour of a pandemic. Let us not shrink from seeing and lighting ablaze the new fire of Christ, that we may so burn with a heavenly desire for our reunion and ingathering. Let our work and the work of our people attain, in all our labor, towards the festival of everlasting life.

Rejoice now, heavenly hosts and choirs of angels,
and let your trumpets shout Salvation
for the victory of our mighty King.
Rejoice and sing now, all the round earth,
bright with a glorious splendor,
for darkness has been vanquished by our eternal King.
Rejoice and be glad now, Mother Church,
and let your holy courts, in radiant light,
resound with the praises of your people.^{lix}

Addendum

An Offering of Reflection by Presiding Bishop Michael Curry

On Our Theology of Worship: Questions in the Time of COVID-19

Across The Episcopal Church the current Pandemic has given rise to many questions about challenges to our liturgical life. Bishops are being asked, “May we do this or that? Will you permit this or that way of celebrating the Eucharist or delivering Holy Communion to the members of our congregations?” Some years ago in an essay titled “Is There a Christian Sexual Ethic?” Rowan Williams observed that in the then current debates about marriage rites for same sex couples, this “permissible/not permissible” way of conducting the conversation was a dead end. The real (and much more productive) question for a sacramental people, he said, was not simply whether a given practice was “right or wrong,” but rather “How much are we prepared for this or that liturgical action to *mean*?” How much are we prepared for it to signify? Sacraments effect by signifying.

Sacraments are actions that give new meaning to things. The current questions about the way we worship in a time of radical physical distancing invites the question of what we are prepared for a given sacramental encounter to mean. Sacraments are communal actions that depend on “stuff”: bread and wine, water and oil. They depend on gathering and giving thanks, on proclaiming and receiving the stories of salvation, on bathing in water, on eating and drinking together. These are physical and social realities that are not duplicatable in the virtual world. Gazing at a celebration of the Eucharist is one thing; participating in a physical gathering and sharing the Bread and Wine of the Eucharist is another. And, God, of course, can be present in both experiences.

And that is surely the most important thing to remember. From the time of Thomas Cranmer, mainstream Anglicanism has insisted that the Holy Eucharist is to be celebrated in community, with no fewer than two people. In contrast to some medieval practices, the Prayer Book

tradition was deeply concerned with reestablishing the essential connection between the celebration of the Eucharist and the reception of Holy Communion. Over time, of course, many factors contributed to a general decline in the celebration of the Eucharist well into the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and Morning Prayer became the common service of worship on the Lord's Day. And while it is good and right that the situation has changed dramatically, that the Holy Eucharist has again become the principal act of worship on Sunday across our church, few would suggest that the experience of Morning Prayer somehow limited God's presence and love to generations of Anglican Christians. There are members of our church today who do not enjoy a regular sustained celebration of the Eucharist for a variety of reasons other than this Pandemic — they are no less members of Christ's Body because of it.

Practices such as “drive by communion” present public health concerns and further distort the essential link between a communal celebration and the culmination of that celebration in the reception of the Eucharistic Bread and Wine. This is not to say that the presence of the Dying and Rising Christ cannot be received by any of these means. It is to say that from a human perspective, the full meaning of the Eucharist is not obviously signified by them. Our theology is generous in its assurance of Christ's presence in all our times of need. In a rubric in the service for Ministration to the Sick (p. 457), The Book of Common Prayer clearly expresses the conviction that even if a person is prevented from physically receiving the Sacrament for reasons of extreme illness or disability, the desire for Christ's presence alone is enough for all the benefits of the Sacrament to be received.

Richard Hooker described the corporate prayer of Christians as having a spiritual significance far greater than the sum of the individual prayers of the individual members of the body. Through corporate prayer, he said, Christians participate in communion with Christ himself, “joined ... to that visible, mystical body which is his Church.” Hooker did not have in mind just the Eucharist, which might have taken place only quarterly or, at best, monthly in his day. He had very much in mind the assembly of faithful Christians gathered for the Daily Office.

While not exclusively the case, online worship may be better suited to ways of praying represented by the forms of the Daily Office than by the physical and material dimensions required by the Eucharist. And under our present circumstances, in making greater use of the Office there may be an opportunity to recover aspects of our tradition that point to the sacramentality of the scriptures, the efficacy of prayer itself, the holiness of the household as the “domestic church,” and the reassurance that the baptized are already and forever marked as Christ's own. We are living limbs and members of the Body of Christ, wherever and however we gather. The questions being posed to Bishops around these matters are invitations to a deeper engagement with what we mean by the word “sacrament” and how much we are prepared for the Church itself — with or without our accustomed celebrations of the Eucharist — to signify about the presence of God with us.

La palabra del Obispo Presidente Michael Curry a la Iglesia: sobre nuestra teología del culto

[31 de marzo de 2020] Una palabra a la Iglesia, sobre la teología del culto durante la pandemia del COVID-19, de parte del Obispo Primado de la Iglesia Episcopal:

31 de marzo de 2020

John Donne, sacerdote, 1631

Estimados amigos en Cristo Jesús,

Nos encontramos en la extraña posición de prescindir de la reunión física para adorar a Dios todopoderoso, no por pereza o por desobediencia, sino en obediencia al Señor Jesucristo, para quien la primacía del amor a Dios y al prójimo es el estilo de vida. En el contexto de la pandemia del coronavirus, prescindir de reunirse físicamente para escuchar la santa palabra de Dios y recibir el sacramento de la Santa Comunión es en sí mismo un acto de amor a Dios y a nuestro prójimo.

Como uno de nuestros antepasados espirituales clamó una vez: “¿Cómo cantar las canciones del Señor en una tierra extraña?” (Salmo 137). ¿Cómo cantaremos las canciones del Señor en esta tierra extraña y hostil del COVID-19? ¿Cómo celebraremos el culto público del Dios Todopoderoso? ¿Cómo proporcionaremos ministraciones pastorales a las personas enfermas, moribundas y necesitadas? ¿Cómo vamos a bautizar? ¿A ordenar? ¿Cómo? Le doy gracias a Dios por los obispos, sacerdotes, diáconos y todo el pueblo de Dios que han estado buscando formas de cantar fielmente las canciones del Señor, de manera que en verdad adoren a Dios y, al mismo tiempo, ayuden a sanar y proteger la vida humana.

Tengo la convicción de que la manera anglicana de seguir a Jesús contiene en su interior una forma y hábito de adoración y de liturgia que es de gran ayuda para nosotros en este momento. Bien puede ser que la amplitud y profundidad de la forma anglicana de oración común pueda ayudarnos ahora, cuando, por el bien de los demás, nos abstenemos de la reunión pública y presencial para escuchar la Palabra de Dios y recibir el Sacramento.

Con esto en mente, convoqué a un grupo para ayudarme a componer una reflexión teológica sobre cómo esta forma anglicana brinda orientación en este momento. Espero que esto sea un marco, un contexto teológico o una señal que apunte en dirección a algo de la sabiduría de la forma anglicana de oración común. Esto no es en modo alguno un conjunto de pautas, directrices o mandatos. Les encomiendo esta labor.

*Dios, nuestro apoyo en los pasados siglos
Nuestra esperanza en años venideros,
Sé tú nuestra defensa en esta vida
Y nuestro hogar eterno.*

Dios les ama. Dios les bendiga.

Guarden la fe,

+Michael

El Reverendísimo Michael B. Curry
Obispo Presidente y Primado
La Iglesia Episcopal

Una ofrenda de reflexión del Obispo Presidente Michael Curry

Sobre nuestra teología del culto: preguntas en tiempos del COVID-19

A través de la Iglesia Episcopal, la pandemia actual ha dado lugar a muchas interrogantes sobre los retos que la misma le impone a nuestra vida litúrgica. A los obispos se les pregunta: “¿Podemos hacer esto o aquello? ¿Permitirán esta o aquella forma de celebrar la Eucaristía o de impartir la Santa Comunión a los miembros de nuestras congregaciones?”. Hace algunos años, en un ensayo titulado “¿Existe una ética sexual cristiana?”, Rowan Williams observó que en los debates que entonces tenían lugar sobre los ritos matrimoniales para parejas del mismo sexo, esta manera de plantear el diálogo entre “lo permisible y lo no permisible” resultaba un callejón sin salida. La verdadera interrogante (y mucho más productiva) para un pueblo sacramental, decía él, no era simplemente si una práctica dada era “correcta o errónea”, sino más bien “¿Cuánto estamos preparados para que esta o aquella acción litúrgica tenga sentido?” ¿Cuánto estamos preparados para que tenga significado? Los sacramentos surten efecto por lo que significan.

Los sacramentos son acciones que dan un nuevo significado a las cosas. Las preguntas actuales acerca de la forma en que adoramos en un momento de distanciamiento físico radical invita a la pregunta de cuán preparados estamos para un determinado encuentro sacramental que tenga significado. Los sacramentos son acciones comunitarias que dependen de “cosas materiales”: pan y vino, agua y aceite. Dependen de reunirse y dar gracias, de proclamar y recibir las historias de la salvación, del baño lustral, de comer y beber juntos. Estas son realidades físicas y sociales que no son duplicables en el mundo virtual. Contemplar una celebración de la Eucaristía es una cosa; participar en una reunión presencial y compartir el pan y el vino de la Eucaristía es otra. Y, por supuesto, Dios puede estar presente en ambas experiencias.

Y eso es seguramente lo más importante de recordar. Desde la época de Thomas Cranmer, el anglicanismo predominante ha insistido en que la Sagrada Eucaristía se celebre en comunidad, con no menos de dos personas. En contraste con algunas prácticas medievales, la tradición del Libro de Oración estaba profundamente interesada en restablecer la conexión esencial entre la celebración de la Eucaristía y la recepción de la Santa Comunión. Con el tiempo, por supuesto, muchos factores contribuyeron a un descenso general en la celebración de la Eucaristía hasta fines del siglo XIX y principios del XX, y la Oración Matutina se convirtió en el oficio común del

culto en el Día del Señor. Y aunque es bueno y correcto que la situación haya cambiado drásticamente y que la Santa Eucaristía haya vuelto a ser el principal acto de culto dominical en toda nuestra Iglesia, pocos sugerirían que la experiencia de la Oración Matutina de alguna manera limitó la presencia y el amor de Dios a generaciones de cristianos anglicanos. Hay miembros de nuestra iglesia en la actualidad que no disfrutaban de una sostenida y regular celebración eucarística por una variedad de razones amén de esta pandemia: no son menos miembros del Cuerpo de Cristo por ello.

Prácticas como “llevar la comunión” presentan problemas de salud pública y distorsionan aún más el vínculo esencial entre una celebración comunitaria y la culminación de esa celebración en la recepción del pan y el vino eucarísticos. No quiere esto decir que la presencia del Cristo que muere y resucita no pueda recibirse por cualquiera de estos medios. Quiere decir que, desde una perspectiva humana, el pleno significado de la Eucaristía no se manifiesta obviamente en ellos. Nuestra teología es generosa al afirmar la presencia de Cristo en todos nuestros tiempos de necesidad. En una rúbrica en el servicio de Ministración a los Enfermos (p. 379), el *Libro de Oración Común* expresa claramente la convicción de que incluso si alguna persona no puede recibir físicamente el Sacramento por razones de extrema enfermedad o discapacidad, el solo deseo de la presencia de Cristo es suficiente para recibir todos los beneficios del Sacramento.

Richard Hooker afirmó que la oración comunitaria de los cristianos tiene una significación espiritual mucho mayor que la suma de las oraciones individuales de los miembros del Cuerpo [de Cristo]. A través de la oración colectiva, dijo, los cristianos participan en la comunión con Cristo mismo, “unidos ... a ese cuerpo visible y místico que es su Iglesia”. Hooker no tenía en mente solo la Eucaristía, que, en su tiempo, podría haber tenido lugar trimestralmente o, en el mejor de los casos, una vez al mes. Tenía muy presente la asamblea de fieles cristianos reunidos para el Oficio Diario.

Aunque no sea exclusivamente el caso, el culto virtual puede adecuarse más a los tipos de oración representados por las formas del Oficio Diario que por las dimensiones físicas y materiales que exige la Eucaristía. Y en nuestras circunstancias actuales, al hacer un mayor uso de este oficio, puede haber una oportunidad para recuperar aspectos de nuestra tradición que apuntan a la sacramentalidad de las Escrituras, la eficacia de la oración en sí, la santidad del hogar como la “iglesia doméstica” y la seguridad de que los bautizados ya están marcados para siempre como propiedad de Cristo. Somos miembros vivos del Cuerpo de Cristo, donde sea y como sea que nos reunamos. Las preguntas que les hacen a los obispos sobre estos asuntos son invitaciones a un compromiso más profundo con lo que queremos decir con la palabra “sacramento” y cuánto estamos preparados para que la Iglesia misma —con o sin nuestras habituales celebraciones de la Eucaristía— signifique respecto a la presencia de Dios con nosotros.

On the web/En la red:

[*Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's Word to the Church: On Our Theology of Worship*](#)

[La palabra del Obispo Presidente Michael Curry a la Iglesia: sobre nuestra teología del culto](#)

ⁱ @flemingrut (Fleming Rutledge) "As a preacher in the Reformed tradition," Twitter, 28 Mar. 2020, <https://twitter.com/flemingrut/status/1244030808563896321>

ⁱⁱ I would add that only the most necessary clinics, food pantries, and essential care services continue with the utmost care.

ⁱⁱⁱ Leonel Mitchell, Leonel *Praying Shapes Believing: A Theological Commentary on the Book of Common Prayer*. (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Morehouse Publishing, 1985) 1, and 305.

^{iv} Ibid, 305.

^v Ibid, 305-306.

^{vi} Bishop William Gregg writes, "Rushing to develop a theology under pressure seems at best a bad idea. Just as haste in other areas produces bad, and often unintended and unknown consequences, so in the Church in our theology and practices. The whole realm of technology and the Eucharist, to me, falls under this rubric." William Gregg, "Eucharistic Theology." Message to Andrew Doyle. 27 March 2020. E-mail.

^{vii} Dan Handschy, "Samuel Seabury's Eucharistic Ecclesiology: Ecclesial Implications of a Sacrificial Eucharist," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 85, no. 1 (2016): 1-23. www.jstor.org/stable/43973279.

^{viii} C. Andrew Doyle, *Vocātiō: Imagining a Visible Church*. (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2018) XIV-XV.

^{ix} Ibid.

^x Neil Alexander, "The Bishop and the Liturgy," Lecture, Living Our Vows: Episcopal Church Bishop Residency, Roslyn Conference Center, Richmond, Virginia, June 15, 2017. 4.

^{xi} Doyle, XV.

^{xii} Rudolph Almsy, ecclesialogist and church historian, writes about Hooker's understanding of our church life, "Since the Puritans were so conscience-ridden, he had to argue convincingly that Nature and reason, like Scripture, serve as a source of assurance. In matters of controversy, Hooker insists, 'the testimony of man will stand as a ground of in-fallible assurance' (II.vii.3), particularly when the controversy deals with the visible church's polity that all agree is less important than the church's doctrine." We would note that this is what makes Christ's church invisible – its mystery, and the church of England visible – a polity or "assembly of known company." (III.i.1-2) Almsy, Rudolph. "The Purpose of Richard Hooker's Polemic." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39, no. 2 (1978): 251–70. Here then we see that since the beginning there is an Anglican idea that the very best of our understanding that it is in a convention that such matters are determined best of all.

^{xiii} Jeffrey Lee, A Pastoral Letter, "On Our Theology of Worship: Questions in the Time of Covid-19," with thanks to James Turrell and Juan Oliver. See also email correspondence of Andrew Doyle with bishops, lay theologians, and liturgists during the week of March 22, 2020.

^{xiv} Private Eucharist was an essential reformation criticism of the church. It has continued as a notion emphasized by liturgists and especially so in the work of Dom Gregory Dix, Leonel Mitchell, Ruth Myers, Massey H. Shepherd Jr., and Louis Weil. William Gregg writes, "In the Anglican Tradition from the very beginning is the insistence that there must be at least one person in addition to the celebrant present for the Eucharist to be celebrated. Hence the rubric of the BCP since 1552." William Gregg, "Eucharistic Theology." Message to Pierre Whalon. 27 March 2020. E-mail. Andrew McGowen wrote, "Christian worship generally implies a community physically present in one place. Forms of prayer without physical presence are also necessary, and believers are joined in prayer even without knowledge of the fact because they are members of the body of Christ united in the Spirit. So yes, there is always a "communion" of sorts present in prayer. There are various ways the "communal" aspect of this more individual activity can be enhanced, including adding physical presence. However, this is quite a different matter from corporate worship. We get into trouble when we start with general ideas about prayer and worship and not the specifics of Christian practice. Andrew McGowan, "Liturgy in a Time of Plague: A Letter to a Colleague." Blogger, 16 Mar. 2020, abmcg.blogspot.com/2020/03/liturgy-in-time-of-plague.html.

^{xv} Gregg, Doyle email.

^{xvi} Marion J. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980) 361.

^{xvii} Ibid, 373.

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- xviii Justin Martyr laid out one of the earliest descriptions of the Mass in his *First Apology*, written between 153 and 155 A.D See: <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/fathers/view.cfm?recnum=1610>
- xix Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1945) 733.
- xx Massey H. Shepherd Jr., *The Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955) 83.
- xxi Louis Weil, *A Theology of Worship* (Boston: Cowley, 2002) 46-48.
- xxii Ruth Myers, *Missional Worship/Worshipful Mission: Gathering as God's People, Going Out in God's Name* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Erdmann's Publishing, 2014) 52.
- xxiii Ibid, 188-190.
- xxiv Ibid, 197-199.
- xxv Rick Fabian, "The Worship of St. Gregory's." St. Gregory's Episcopal Church, 2001, www.saintgregorys.org/uploads/2/4/2/6/24265184/worship_at_st._gregorys_1_.pdf, 12 and 79.
- xxvi Ibid, Byzantine bishops and presbyters concelebrate on occasion. After Vatican II, Roman Catholic reformers seized on this practice for a compromise that might enable priests trained for daily private masses to share in a single community Eucharist; Anglicans welcomed it as a vehicle for collegiality, and ecumenists made it a sign of mutual denominational respect. By contrast, the classical pattern calls for one Presider at the table, taking the unifying role of the Chabûrah host, and yielding this place to a visiting presbyter when ecumenical circumstances warrant it. [P. Bradshaw, "Yielding to Polycarp," *Worship*, 1986.] At St. Gregory's it's the whole congregation. This, too, was the notion of the BCP reformers prior to '79.
- xxvii Resource in the time of Pandemic created and shared by The Worship team of the Office of the Presiding Bishop at 800-638- 3522, ext. 2590, or worship@elca.org. Updated March 20, 2020 Copyright © 2020.Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- xxviii Mills Fleming, "Eucharistic Theology." Message to Pierre Whalon. 27 March 2020. E-mail.
- xxix McGowan, "Letter."
- xxx Richard Hooker, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity (1594)*, Keble's ed (Oxford: Church and Paget: 1888) Book V, 87.2.
- xxxi Chris Ridgeway, "Online Communion Can Still Be Sacramental," *ChristianityToday.com*, Christianity Today, 27 Mar. 2020, www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/march-web-only/online-communion-can-still-be-sacramental.html.
- xxxii Gregg, Doyle email.
- xxxiii Paul D. L. Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism: Essentials of Anglican Ecclesiology* (London: T & T Clark, 2008) 50-51.
- xxxiv "The Thirty-nine Articles and the liturgy assume a real communion with and participation in Christ in the Eucharist, but they draw back from any attempt to pin this down to a particular philosophical theory of the relation of the earthly elements of bread and wine to the body and blood of Christ. Article XXVIII rules out extreme views on both sides. On the one hand, the Lord's Supper is no mere sign of the mutual love of Christians (an extreme radical Protestant view). On the other hand, the concept of transubstantiation, which maintains that the bread is no longer really bread nor the wine, is rejected, as contrary to Scripture and to the nature of a sacrament (in which the natural, earthly reality of the sign is preserved while becoming the vehicle of the divine.) On the question of reception, the Articles affirm a real participation in or 'partaking of' Christ and stress that this cannot be impaired by any unworthiness in the minister of the sacrament. But they balance this objective presence by stating that the Body of Christ is 'given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner' through faith, so that the 'Wicked, and such as be void of a lively faith, although they do carnally and visibly press with their teeth' the sacrament, do not partake of Christ, but instead eat and drink judgment on themselves (Article XXVIII).
- The Articles are limited in their aims, marred by a polemical animus in some cases, and selective in the topics they address. They are far from being an Anglican systematic theology. Yet, as we have seen with regard to the threefold ministry and the Eucharist, these Anglican formularies commend themselves by their balance and restraint....The nineteenth-century High Church Anglican ecclesiastical historian R. W. Dixon claimed that the Articles were superior to both continental Protestant confessions and the anathema-encrusted pronouncements of the Council of Trent: 'They dogmatize without arguing', he wrote; 'they affirm without offering proof; they deal neither in expostulation nor rebuke. They are not apologetic. Completeness of form is their character.' By completeness of form, Dixon meant, I believe, a certain quality of restraint and discipline, balance and coherence; a reluctance to go beyond what was necessary and a readiness to leave much undefined and in the realm of private judgement provided that certain vital parameters were observed. It would seem that in code, as well as in creed, a certain

approach to authority contributes to the distinctiveness of Anglicanism.” The Rt. Rev. William Franklin reminded me of this contribution. Ibid, Avis.

^{xxxv} Ibid. McGowan in his blog writes, “Yet to substitute some other material proxy - (e.g.) bread and wine on coffee table and eucharistic prayer on livestream - would be both to question the affirmation of the body of Christ that exceeds the eucharistic signs, while at the same time calling into question the necessity of the material sign otherwise. It creates a sort of middle ground that undermines the two known points of reference either side of it.”

^{xxxvi} McGowan.

^{xxxvii} Pierre Whalon, “Eucharistic Theology.” Message to Andrew Doyle, 26 March 2020. E-mail.

^{xxxviii} Bill Franklin does an excellent job in his work on this Eucharistic trajectory in his work *Nineteenth-Century churches: History of a New Catholicism in Württemberg, England, and France* (New York, 1987).

^{xxxix} Handschy, 23.

^{xl} Ibid.

^{xli} Ibid, 18-19.

^{xlii} Weil, 47.

^{xliii} Myers, *How Shall We Pray*, 171.

^{xliv} Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist* (New York: St. Vladimir’s University Press, 1988) 24-25.

^{xlv} Ibid.

^{xlvi} Book of Common Prayer 1979, 855.

^{xlvii} You can find the research at the US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health. The research begins with and then updates the work of Brehm and Brehm. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4675534>.

^{xlviii} Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007) 3.

^{xlix} My book is entitled *Citizen: Remaining Faithful in a Partisan World*. Kathryn Tanner’s book is entitled *Christianity – the new Spirit of Capitalism*.

‘I am reminded in the concept of both reunion and kinship of the words of Christ from the cross from John’s Gospel 19:26, “When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, ‘Woman, here is your son.’”

This is the only interruption in the Gospel's witness of the crucifixion, it is only momentary, but this action and Jesus' words point to the future. Jesus offers the hope of a relationship bound by his living word, a relationship that is beyond mere human bonds of affection but one that is deeply rooted in the love of God.

As we reflect on this, we may see clearly and understand what seems of the utmost importance, and that is the family nature, the sacred filial nature, of the words that Jesus uses. The words "this is your son" is theologically an adoption formula (Brown, 907). It certainly is similar to other scriptural forms of adoption. [Raymond Edward Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, Vol. 2, (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006) 907.]

What is unique, though, is that it is definitely a revelation of the work of the cross, especially as witnessed by John's Gospel. All of the ancient church theologians speak of this action by Jesus as being part of the caretaking of his mother, of his family, and of his friends. But there is more too that they see in this passage. Let us here be mindful of the very next words that John writes for us, "After this [Jesus was] aware that all was now finished." [Brown, 923] This testimony by John places a great deal of emphasis upon this event. This is one of the very last actions of the Son of God on earth.

The disciple and his mother are representative of all the followers of Jesus throughout the fourth Gospel, and as it points to the future sacred filial relationship, I believe it bears witness to all those faithful saints who have followed and follow Jesus today.

Perhaps like the historian and New Testament scholar Jurgan Bultmann wrote: “Mary represent the Jewish Christendom and the Disciple the Gentile Christendom united. Even as a modernist scholar he reads in the text the profound moment of God’s family.”

This is what the first systematic theologian of the church Origen wrote: Every man who becomes perfect no longer lives his own life, but Christ lives in him. And because Christ lives in him, it was said to Mary concerning him, “here is your son.” [Brown, 924] Origen's words capture the idea of the nature of discipleship of following Jesus and the idea that one is not alone but always bound with the family of God. There are no individual disciples, no Christian without community. It is at once an individual connection to Jesus and thus to the Godhead, and it is also the connection of the community - one disciple with another.

Ephraem the Syrian states that just as Moses appointed Joshua in his stead to take care of the people, so Jesus appoints the disciple. Ambrose, in the west, maintains the mystery of the church is revealed in words, "here is your mother." Moreover, that in this mystery of adoption made possible by Jesus Christ's words and his victory on the cross, the Christian, the follower of Jesus, the disciple, becomes a son and daughter of the family of God the

Church. [Brown, 925] In all of this, there is very real shared and mutual life. It is certainly manifested in our baptismal liturgy found in the Book of Common Prayer 1979. It is also a liturgical theology that then undergirds our Eucharist. We need a priest, one who stands in the apostolic place, but we also need everyone else.

We cannot be a Christian community alone. Our connection is physical and relational. It is deeply rooted at the foot of the cross. It is something that is about our reunion and regathering there and at God's table. It does something very particular to undermine our society's want for the individual and life of the buffered self.

^{li} Mark Eddington also wrote, "In our culture of spectacle, I'm really worried about decentering the life of the church from 'participative engagement' to 'spectator religion.' Teaching people to gather with their bread and wine on the TV table in front of the laptop is sort of like the church actively contributing to the construction of Sheilaism."

Sheilaism is a kind of religious belief that coopts pieces and parts of various different religions into a personal faith expression. Syncretism is another concern that without communal formation, one simply believes all of the world religions are talking about the same things just with interchangeable parts and elements. Mark Eddington, "Eucharistic Theology," Message to Andrew Doyle, 26 March 2020. Email.

^{lii} Charles Taylor, "A Catholic Modernity." Marianist Award Lecture 1996. University of Dayton, Dayton. 1996. Lecture, 15.

^{liii} Ibid.

^{liv} Ibid, 17.

^{lv} Ibid, 19.

^{lvi} Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1964) 744-5.

^{lvii} Wells.

^{lviii} 1979 BCP, 285-286.

^{lix} Ibid.