

Distribution Agreement

In presenting this final project as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my final project in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this final project. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the final project. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this final project.

Signature:

Christopher A. de Silva

Date

Between Sword and Surrender: Finding New Narratives for Christian Belonging

By

Christopher A. de Silva
Doctor of Ministry

Candler School of Theology

Dr. Don E. Saliers
Project Consultant

Dr. Jennifer R. Ayres
Director of DMin Program

Abstract

Between Sword and Surrender:
Finding New Narratives for Christian Belonging
By Christopher A. de Silva

Religious circles ought to heal not harm. Studies show that religious communities may have the capacity to protect from LGBTQ exclusion that turns some young members to suicide ideation. Yet, paradoxically, another study shows that one of the top three reasons Americans leave religion is the unwelcome of LGBTQ community members by faith communities. Where in the arc of this narrative does a faith community's welcome and belonging narrative exist? Can the church be a better safe space?

This project challenges church leaders, especially college campus ministers, to consider deconstructing binary markers, and subverting hurtful, heteronormative narratives that keep from discovering the intersections of faith, gender and sexual identities. It questions what it means to truly extend welcome and embody radical Christian hospitality on a Catholic university campus. A series of interviews with undergraduate students interrogates the university's campus ministry mission statement of "belong, believe, become," and the ways in which Christian leaders encourage or fail to encourage Christian belonging.

With reference to poetic narrative that describes the experience of a student that identifies both as gender non-binary and practicing Catholic, this essay investigates clichéd narratives found in liturgical and musical worship frames. It hopes to find alternate narratives that create a more authentic prayer space for genderqueer belonging, one that is adaptive and generative. It discerns a Christian space for full LGBTQ inclusion. This essay invites church leaders to consider a liminal space of tension to imagine new ways to tell of restoring trust, of rekindling relationships, and rethinking ritual, religious narratives to rebuild spaces of inclusive ministry.

Between Sword and Surrender:
Finding New Narratives for Christian Belonging

By

Christopher A. de Silva

Project Consultant: Don E. Saliers, Ph.D.

A Final Project submitted to the Faculty of the
Candler School of Theology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Ministry
2022

Between Sword and Surrender: Finding New Narratives for Christian Belonging

“I’ve yet to find the appropriate tension / between sword and surrender.”

~ Gillian Ebersole, *The Water Between Us*

The young poet muses, and in their musing, they present a challenge to consider the prospect of a liminal space for radical love.¹ More specifically, through a profound glimpse into the experience of a gender non-binary college student who is also a faithful, practicing Catholic, this challenge comes to discern a possible space where one lives in tension between revolution and redemption, within the boundary lines of acceptance and rejection, and to move through gaps of certitude and ambiguity with the hope of deconstructing binary markers of faith, gender, and sexuality, reaching out for social justice, thinking what it might mean when one thinks of building inclusive Christian community.

This young poet’s challenge connects to Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke’s response to another aspiring poet’s request for creative advice. Here Rilke advises Franz Xaver Kappus to “go within” and “search for the cause, find the impetus that bids you write.”² Rilke offers here not only an artistic summons to the writer, but a dare of deep spiritual imagination and contemplation to go within one’s creative and sacred loneliness to give voice to, to lament and to rejoice over one’s thoughts, dreams, and eventually holy actions born from and evolved through necessity. In another way, Rilke informs those in ministry to be mindful of the inner light or spirit that energizes church leaders into ministerial duty, to be aware of the signs of the times³

¹ Throughout this essay, I utilize the poetic narrative of Gillian Ebersole to begin a conversation on LGBTQ welcome and inclusion in Catholic prayer circles. Through the lens of this young poet, I offer parallel perspectives of discerning the intersection of faith, gender and sexual identity while locating genderqueer spaces on Catholic campuses. A recent graduate of Loyola Marymount University, graduating with dual degrees in Dance and English, they were in the class of 2020. Their poetry (see Appendix) broadens this study through a creative narrative of personal journey story of navigating ambiguity in order to establish authentic narratives for self-identity. They are the winner of the Charlotte Mew Prize.

² Raine Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, trans. Joan M. Burnham (Novato: New World Library, 2000), 11.

³ The phrase “signs of the times” comes from *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. It signals a time for the church to turn towards the world, to “turn to the subject” and “turn to

when a community rejoices and when the people lament. For the work in which I am involved in, this means intentional, inclusive ministry for creating a queer space in worship circles, that is a place that subverts normative narratives, and to search deep within myself for ways to engage in fresh narratives of religious belonging.

A particular incident on the first day of finals week in the 2015 fall semester unsettled my vocation of campus ministry to undergraduate students in a Catholic university. It stirred up a desire in me to understand more intentionally how my work of ministry to college students ought to extend a better, fuller welcome. That Monday in December, I received a university bulletin alert that a student had been found deceased in a car parked in the first-year dormitory parking lot. He had taken his own life. When I received this news, I had been working in the Office of Campus Ministry at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in Los Angeles, California for three years. The student, a first-year political science major from Delaware, had worked in the LMU offices of Campus Ministry and Student Leadership and Development. Although I was not personally connected to this student, his untimely death has made it necessary for me to broaden my thinking about the intersection of Christian faith and queer lives, about the appropriate ways in which to offer welcome, and for this final project how narratives of hospitality within Christian worship practice must sustain a place for radical belonging.

The student's friends tell me that he was actively engaged during the first months with study and work on campus. Finding safety within a community of friends at LMU during his first semester in college, the student, an evangelical Christian who found identity as a gay man, had

historical consciousness," a hallmark of the approach taken by the documents promulgated by the Second Vatican Council and its liturgical renewal movement. An emphasis on "experience" is outlined and warranted in this document. See *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), no. 4, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

decided to come out to his family before returning home for the Christmas break. His parents neither accepted his decision nor welcomed him home over the break. While Chuck found a circle of acceptance in gay friends, with his chosen college family and through campus ministry's Christian non-denominational group, The Well, his biological family rejected him. Chuck's story is one that I am continually trying to understand. It is a story that provides an immediate context to learn more about how to bridge relationships between the Catholic church and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning (LGBTQ) community while listening to stories of self-identity, family and community, and thereby gradually eroding boundaries of exclusion. To begin to understand this story, I turn to some research on LGBTQ suicide, studies on religious belonging and disaffiliation, and the effects that negative theological and religious narratives place on LGBTQ lives to provide context for this essay on inclusive community.

Eroding Boundaries of Exclusion towards Adaptive and Generative Ministry

The undergraduate journey into self-identity must be marshalled through support and life-giving accompaniment from family, faith circles and community. An article from the Archives of Suicide Research, "Religion and Suicide Risk: as systematic review," looks at the existing literature, a total of 89 articles, on religion and suicide written over the last ten years. The article's goal was to identify what specific dimensions of religion are associated with specific aspects of suicide. What complicates the research is the many dimensions to religion (affiliation, participation, doctrine) and suicide (ideation, attempt, completion). While the empirical evidence is complex and multivalent, researchers state that "religious affiliation does not necessarily protect against suicidal ideation, but *does* protect against suicide attempts. After adjusting for

social support measures, religious service attendance is not especially protective against suicidal ideation, but *does* protect against suicide attempts, and possibly protects against suicide.”⁴ While inconsistencies appear, the evidence gathered shows that religious affiliation and religious service attendance aid in protecting against suicide attempts and suicide, including LGBTQ suicide. The challenge for inclusive ministry is to rethink social and theological narratives of the nuclear family unit, to welcome those who sense that they do not “fit” into societal norms of a faith community. This kind of ministry discerns ambiguity in definitions of “family,” seeks to find holiness in the different, and connects queerness with the seemingly unholy, offensive and indecent.

From another study, the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) in partnership with Religion News Service (RNS) states that one of the leading causes for Americans’ disaffiliation from religion and religious groups is the “experience of negative religious teachings about or treatment of gay and lesbian people.”⁵ The report, *Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion—and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back*, states that almost 25 percent of Americans claim no formal religious identity, and that within this group of religiously unaffiliated, 40 percent are young adults between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine. This number has quadrupled over this forty-year span. In looking at the two studies, on one hand we have a study that shows the importance of belonging to a religious group in order to live well, and on the other, we have a study that shows that religious groups are abandoning members. Where within this narrative arc of belonging and abandonment do we and will we find ourselves and our ministries? What stories might we embody that point contemporary family units towards belonging community?

⁴ Ryan E. Lawrence, Maria A. Oquendo and Barbara Stanley, “Religion and Suicide Risk: A Systematic Review,” *Archives of Suicide Research* 20, no. 1 (2016): 1-21, with my emphases.

⁵ Robert P. Jones, Daniel Cox, Betsy Cooper and Rachel Lienesch, *Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion - and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back* (Washington, D.C: PRRI, Released September 22, 2016), 1-7.

University chaplain Cody J. Sanders’ research on Christianity and LGBTQ suicide examines how religious, spiritual and theological narratives tend to ambush LGBTQ people. Sanders states that certain stories from sources deemed “religious” hold great power to shape lives and worlds, stories “animating action that leads to widespread generativity and healing, as well as destruction and death.”⁶ Sanders is concerned about the dangers that religious narratives pose to LGBTQ lives and on the flipside, about how LGBTQ people “do their own work on damaging religious and spiritual narratives toward the livability of life.”⁷ He contends that the relationship between religion and the LGBTQ community is a complex one. Statistics show that the result of biased narratives, however, affect queer lives disproportionately. How we tell the gospel story will ultimately shape lives and consequently impact community building, and at the same time, how we listen and respond to stories of LGBTQ lives will have an equal significance.

Sanders researches the difference between story and narrative through the work of medical sociologist Arthur Frank. Sanders states that Frank’s method for “understanding the ways that stories “think in us” is called *socio-narratology*.⁸ Through socio-narratology’s two axioms, Sanders understands the “work” that stories perform on us as being: 1) that no individual thinks a story is entirely original, and 2) that no person thinks a story alone.⁹ Socio-narratology then becomes a communal task with communities much immersed in relational ministry practices and especially in campus ministry.

Sanders defines the category of “narrative” through the work of literary theorist and psychoanalyst, Pierre Bayard. Bayard suggests two metaphors—of the “inner” and of “collective libraries” where the collective library “might be understood as framing the ways that larger

⁶ Cody J. Sanders, *Christianity, LGBTQ Suicide, and the Souls of Queer Folk* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020), 1.

⁷ Sanders, *Christianity, LGBTQ Suicide*, 13.

⁸ Sanders, *Christianity, LGBTQ Suicide*, 19.

⁹ Sanders, 19.

socio-cultural narrative templates construct the telling and the intelligibility of the stories that operate with the individual human consciousness.”¹⁰ The concept of the “inner library” then is a subset of the collective, where personality is constructed, which then shapes a person’s relationship to other people. Frank adopts Bayard’s book/library language in thinking about how narratives and stories “populate individuals’ self-understanding and apprehension of the world.”¹¹ Arthur Frank’s thinking resonates with the area of campus ministry in which I am directly involved: the formation of young adults through worship, liturgy, and music. What stories or narratives told at public worship will develop individual personalities that lift up or abandon the dignity of the queer or different person? What prayer practices will lead to building up or tearing down walls of exclusion?

Frank then augments Bayard’s idea of inner and collective libraries by incorporating the central concept of “habitus” from the work of Pierre Bourdieu into a narrative category, arriving at the concept of “narrative habitus,” meaning a “collection of stories in which life is formed and that continues to shape lives.”¹² It is in discerning this concept of narrative habitus, with stories and narratives that shape lives that I hope to find better ways to minister to students about the intersections of faith, gender and sexual identity, and to imagine how my ministry might blur boundary lines in order to dwell, think and act within porous border markers that might eventually bring to bear adaptive and generative campus worship ministry. This project seeks to interrogate embodied ritual narratives built and controlled by a society that perpetuates a circle of belonging where those that “fit” a certain “type” of mold become relevant while queer bodies are deemed “intrinsically disordered”¹³ and become irrelevant. Holding on to the truth that religious

¹⁰ Sanders, 20.

¹¹ Sanders, 20.

¹² Sanders, 20.

¹³ See Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 2357. https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM

community often saves lives, I ask how authentic prayer and worship practices might influence and shape a ritual narrative habitus for compassion and care. What are the elements of ritual and prayer that might distance and prevent building LGBTQ belonging?

Having looked briefly at research on the effects of religious community on LGBTQ suicide and their religious belonging and disaffiliation, I now turn to the significance of spiritual accompaniment in my work at LMU to counter religious narratives that keep LGBTQ students and those that befriend them away from participating in prayer. Particularly for my work in liturgical music ministry, I contemplate ways in which to cultivate a prayer habit which examines ritual performance that separates and damages community and LGBTQ lives. In forming young poets for the liturgical art of music and worship, I think of ways that current Catholic prayer culture tends to compartmentalize welcome and I seek to reinscribe ways in which to rebuild trust in prayer language that heals and empowers adaptive and generative ministry.

“Once when we were arguing / about religion, you asked me – / *do you even love God?*”
~ Gillian Ebersole, *The Water Between Us*

Narrative Habitus and a Sense of Ignatian Spirituality

The young, genderqueer poet reflects on the narrative of love echoed in a prayer attributed to Pedro Arrupe, Jesuit priest and superior general of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). In this particular narrative, Arrupe offers a framework for love experienced in a deeper spiritual context: “Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in Love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.”¹⁴

¹⁴ The source of this prayer is unknown and it is often attributed to Pedro Arrupe, S.J (1907-1991) and Joseph Whelan (1932-1994), S.J., former provincial of the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus.

Falling in unconditional, absolute love embraces ambiguity. This love language becomes the medium to speak of genderqueer welcome within God’s love, in what Patrick S. Cheng calls radical love—“a love that is so extreme that it dissolves existing boundaries.”¹⁵ With demographic shifts, it becomes necessary to imagine places for trustworthy belonging and LGBTQ livability, to be aware of the signs of the times, reading them authentically in order to begin catching glimpses of God’s radical love in Catholic queer spaces.

While Cody J. Sanders uses Arthur Frank’s reminder that “[n]arrative habitus is the embedding of stories in bodies” to link to the LGBTQ lives who have attempted suicide, I ask What might a narrative habitus¹⁶ for compassionate accompaniment through a welcoming practice of prayer and ritual bring to students who are searching to understand and harmonize the dissonance of bodily intersections of faith, gender and sexual identity?

When a student enters LMU, the campus ministry office organizes a three-day, faith-based First Year Retreat¹⁷ that allows students to explore new experiences off campus at a retreat center in the San Bernardino mountains. This retreat creates a space for incoming first-year students to spend some time in social interaction, communal prayer, and outdoor and small group activities to get to know their peers. It is at this retreat that students learn of campus ministry’s mission message. The message encourages students to think more about what it means *to believe, to belong and to become*—and more specifically, to believe in and to belong to God and each other, and to become “persons for and with others,” a phrase used commonly in Jesuit institutions.¹⁸ The ethos of “persons for and with others” embraces the LMU college experience.

¹⁵ Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011), 44.

¹⁶ I use the concept of “narrative habitus” and the phrase “narrative” interchangeably throughout this essay thinking of how narratives continue to shape lives.

¹⁷ See “First Year Retreat,” Loyola Marymount University, last accessed February 10, 2022, <https://mission.lmu.edu/ministry/retreats/fyr/>

¹⁸ Pedro Arrupe, *Justice with Faith Today: An Anthology of Letters and Addresses. II.* ed. Jerome Aixala. (St. Louis, Mo: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1980), 123-138.

This faith expression on campus urges the young student on towards a spirit of togetherness. However, I have learned from the following student interviews, that there seems to be an absence of both accompaniment of the LGBTQ student and of a livable faith environment within the campus ministry setting for the queer Christian community. For that reason, at LMU, we must establish a liminal space for shaping belonging relationships.

Establishing a site for shaping friendships through genuine *belonging, believing and becoming* is ongoing work in campus ministry. Loyola Marymount University is a private liberal Arts university that is part of a network of twenty-seven institutions of higher learning around the country known as the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU). A unique characteristic of LMU is that it is co-founded by three religious orders—the Society of Jesus (known as the Jesuits), the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary (or the Marymount Sisters) and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange (CSJ, in short). The university’s mission emerges from the charisma, or presence and personality, of these three orders.

Using Pierre Bayard’s thought, I would also add that “charism” might also be presented as a collective spiritual library where a greater mysticism meets the performance of conscious and active participation in all of life.¹⁹ The spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola guide the overarching charism of the university. An Ignatian spirituality of finding God in all things inspires and engages the imagination of students, staff and faculty members. It fosters the Christian imagination for what it means to be an LMU community that actively celebrates life,

¹⁹ I refer to a central theme of the Catholic liturgical renewal movement of the twentieth-century and *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, a document promulgated by the Second Vatican Council – “fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations.” See *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on Sacred Liturgy), no. 14, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html

brings unity and one that gives greater glory to God.²⁰ Perhaps a narrative habitus might be found within Ignatian spirituality's challenge of finding God in all things. Perhaps by making visible the ones ignored, or by finding the absent and irrelevant ones. In recognizing the different, wounded, queer bodies, a community's hurts and vulnerabilities might be shared that all may learn from them, and that transformation and healing might begin. I share these listening sessions through interviews with students in this following section.

Narratives for Visibility and Reconciliation: Interviews with LMU Students

Loyola Marymount University reflects the city of Los Angeles and its religious and ethnic diversity. In addition, the PRRI demographic of young adults disaffiliated from religion is largely present in the LMU community. Within this pluralistic environment of undergraduate students comes the reality of creating a trustworthy place in campus ministry for self-identity within the intersections of faith, gender and sexuality. The task is to begin the work of undoing what Mary McClintock Fulkerson calls "contemporary social obliviousness,"²¹ to recognize who these ambivalent ones are, to identify the ones who choose to remain affiliated, and to reach out to the ones that have left, and to question why. McClintock's study focuses on the inclusion of disabled persons in racially homogeneous churches, and her analysis highlights ways to create opportunities to experience and in many ways, find a lived narrative to welcome those who are "bodily different" as equal partners in community.

²⁰ The academic and spiritual life of the community at LMU is directly influenced by the three charisms of its founding religious orders – "That all may have life" (the RSHMs), "That all may be one" (the CSJs) and "For the greater glory of God" (the Jesuits).

²¹ Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 15.

From the following student interviews, I recognize the need to claim a space for LGBTQ visibility, shape a landscape of porous boundaries, and ensure places for both confrontation and reconciliation. These become difficult spaces of both revolution and redemption and they align with Fulkerson's work of locating "a place to appear, a place to be seen, to be recognized and to recognize."²² I have already shared Chuck's story to open up this discussion on preparing genderqueer space in campus ministry, about Christian hospitality and engaging in compassion and care. The following stories now describe the lives of three students and their LMU journey as a way of researching "inner library" stories. I interviewed each student separately, mostly over Zoom, and during the 2020 and 2021 pandemic months. For the purpose of interrogating the campus ministry core message, during the interviews, I asked students to reflect both on why they chose to study at LMU and on the campus ministry mission message of belonging, believing and becoming.

Jo²³

Jo is a sophomore mathematics and theology double major. They are transgender masculine, and identifies as gender non-binary and gay. Jo's choice of study at LMU is driven by change—to change themselves to be better at understanding church teaching as well as to change the church to better understand the LGBTQ community. At the heart of Jo's longing lies the desire to build bridges. Jo describes "belonging" as a place "where your needs are met, whatever they are, where your concerns can be heard and you do not feel traumatized—a place of healthy relationship."²⁴ Unfortunately, they "did not feel reassured or validated" in their queerness while on the campus ministry First Year Retreat, receiving only "nice comments" by staff members.

²² Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 21.

²³ For this study, I have changed the names of the students interviewed to protect their anonymity.

²⁴ Excerpts from an interview with Jo on March 26, 2021.

While living in the dormitories on the LMU campus, they were assigned to the male dormitories, indicating a need for more transgender, non-binary spaces on campus and in church circles: “I’m normally put in female spaces, especially in the church.” However, in that dorm Jo found a caring friend who accepted and supported them.

Growing up Catholic, they comment on a lack of representation of both their queer and ethnic identities in campus worship spaces. A regular attendee, Jo’s experience of Mass in their hometown is encountered in the diverse and multicultural traditions of worship—comprising of both Latinx and Vietnamese communities. However, they find a lack of belonging at “English Mass” on campus (which they associate with whiteness), and a lack of understanding from worship communities where they often feel alone: “I understand more of my gender which really does nothing except for making me know myself more, and there is an importance and a sacredness to that. I feel like in a lot of Catholic spaces I say things and people don’t know how to respond. I can’t come in and talk about things casually without being responded to negatively.”

Jo thinks “becoming” might be found in becoming truer to oneself, standing up for oneself and recognizing what one’s boundaries are.

Nick

Nick was a sophomore when I first interviewed him. He is now a senior international relations and Spanish double major. Nick identifies as gender non-binary and uses he/they pronouns. He describes himself as a masculine-coded individual. He chose LMU “for the Jesuit heritage, their philosophy on education and service to the world, and the emphasis on going into the world.”²⁵ Nick is atheist and finds belonging in his participation in campus ministry’s music

²⁵ Excerpts from an interview with Nick on November 24, 2019.

ministry as a choir member and cantor at Mass. He continues to contribute to campus liturgies and states that the music allows an imagination for connecting with those who are in need and are marginalized – those without home, the people at the border, immigrants: “Even when we are different, we are all united in ministry.”

Nick understands faith and belief as a call to love one another:

As an outsider in the Catholic sphere (I am not Catholic, I am not Christian), I have been Jesuit-educated in high school and in the Episcopalian faith tradition during middle school. I’ve been taking influence from those schools. From what I’ve been able to understand, Catholicism at its roots and by studying Christ, is that he is there to serve because he loves us. And I feel like at its heart, to be faithful to Christ is to serve and promote justice.

Reflecting on an explanation of the Resurrection given to him in class, Nick connects faith with justice work: “The disciples see the risen Christ as how God sees everybody, as this beautiful thing that you can’t help but love, without seeing any flaws, just like the pure human essence. And I think really to be faithful is to try and see everyone in that way that God sees people.”

Nick is a member of a student service organization on campus that focuses on issues of homelessness and education which feeds his hunger to do good for others:

There a lot of things about people that can grind against us or bother us, but I’ve always found it an interesting notion to think, “How does God see this person?” So, trying to treat people lovingly and helping them, even when it’s of no benefit to you, really that’s the kind of thing that Jesus would be all for. I believe the commandment that he put over all else was to love your neighbor, your enemy as yourself. And in studying theology, I think that’s the root of everything that comes forth. It’s that kind of love. And love is not just a smile and thumbs up, it is serving, it is helping, it is being with people.

Nina

Nina is now a senior History major and Political Science minor who identifies as gender non-binary, feminine presenting and bisexual. They describe “belonging” as a place “where you feel understood, where there’s friendship and you feel like you are not an outsider in the

group.”²⁶ Nina believes that she can help others feel more belonging if she can also belong to herself: “I just want to be that person who is authentically themselves, and so authentically themselves that people feel comfortable coming to you with their authentic selves.”

For Nina, believing and self-acceptance go hand in hand. She states: “I don't think there's a lot of difference between believing in God and believing in other people. If you can't connect with God right now, and you can't love God right now, you can still love other people. And God will love you for loving other people.” In addition, for Nina self-knowledge leads to more authentic ministry: “If we don't have the basic building blocks of “who we are” set up, we cannot be people for others because we're so busy being confused about ourselves.”

Reflecting on “becoming,” she claims: “I've become better equipped to be a safe space for others because I have become a safe space for myself first. Nina conceives of a queer space as one where all voices are heard. A queer space is a place of understanding, of seeing different perspectives, of connecting with those who struggle: “These places need to be created by us.” She thinks of reconciling faith and gender identity as an ongoing bridge building experience:

Faith gets you through until you find those people, and then, when you do find those people, in my experience it's what helps you help the people that you find. I think faith helps bridge the gap when our life experiences haven't gotten us there. So, it (faith) helps get us to where we need to be and then bridges the gap to where we need to go.

One common thread from these student interviews through their reflections on belonging and believing was the desire for a more livable intersection of faith, gender, sexuality and social justice. From this thread, two further topics of conversation arose: 1) identifying space to be recognized, understood and not be left as an outsider, and 2) becoming true to the self in caring and knowing authentically “who we are” before taking on tasks of bridge building.

²⁶ Excerpts from an interview with Nina on January 21, 2022.

Narratives of visibility, self-identity and self-care within campus ministry involve being and becoming more adaptable to the changing church, and from these demographic movements relational ministry ought to be about not only taking care of the other, but of taking care of the self before doing so. The next part of this project consequently considers how ministry might be adaptive and generative on the LMU campus in light of the changing demographics of religious disaffiliation, and to enable a broader welcome of the LGBTQ person. Midway through this research study, the world closed due to the coronavirus pandemic. In what follows I consequently draw on ministerial experiences gained during the pandemic to further my thinking on inclusive ministry that becomes adaptive.

It is hard for me to trust a religion / that speaks in clichés.
~ Gillian Ebersole, *The Water Between Us*

The Coronavirus Pandemic as Template for Adaptive Ministry

The coronavirus pandemic has affected lives around the globe. In the US, deeply embedded issues of systemic racial inequality and discrimination have come to the forefront. The movement to end racial injustice over the period of social isolation has indeed questioned societal clichés of welcome and inclusion. In campus ministry, the pandemic has given us pause to rethink and rebuild how to pray together effectively as community while holding social justice narratives at the center of worship.

The question for my ministry of liturgical music is: What does it mean truly to sing “all are welcome” while upholding the dignity of every person? And to epitomize this: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matthew 25:35). The young poet continues to doubt. They question the need to review and revise clichéd narratives that perpetuate boundaries of conditional welcome, of membership that embraces norms and labels that often at best separate,

and at worst, ambush. More particularly, the conditioned narrative or default prayer practice of Catholic churches tends to revolve mostly around the Eucharistic celebration. The pandemic time when in-person Eucharist was not possible has pushed us to consider other ways to reconnect communities with the rich heritage of Catholic prayer expression. I take a cue from the young poet and attempt to make more adaptable the ways our welcome language and practice in prayer spaces might bring livability to the online community which in turn prepares space for the in-person genderqueer student community. To echo Nina's words I am searching for a way for the church to be "better equipped to be a safe space for others."

During the time of these student interviews, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the campus community to transition to an online modality of living, learning, and praying. And it forced the the campus ministry liturgy team to move what would usually be celebrated as in-person Sunday Masses to two virtual prayer services over Zoom—a morning Service of the Word and Evensong or evening prayer.

With this shift into a period of social distancing and quarantine came opportunities for adapting to new situations and environments. Since there were many online options for the celebration of Sunday Mass available to the quarantined Catholic community, the LMU liturgy team decided to explore other forms of Catholic prayer. In these alternate prayer contexts, how would we celebrate church within isolation measures? Online worship provided a template for adaptive ministry. Thinking beyond the "norm" and outside the "regular" labels of liturgy became an exciting reality. The ongoing coronavirus pandemic has coursed a new trajectory for ways in which communities build and rebuild community.

Gathered in boxes on a screen, this new modality brought a fresh way of thinking about how a community comes together for prayer and, more generally, comes together. Free from the

ordinary rituals of an entrance procession, the faithful gathered “unmuted” to greet each other before each prayer service, excited to be together again in “community.” It was a reimagined rite of gathering and welcome into a ritual space, one that felt liberated from the confines of a more traditional physical structure. In this kind of worship gathering with the absence of font, altar furniture, sacred symbols and vestments came a dissolving of what Mary McClintock Fulkerson refers to as “power differentials” in reference to marked character of certain bodies normal or abnormal.²⁷ Fulkerson refers here to shifts of power present in certain able-bodied, racial and gender divides. Ministry leaders must be sensitive to these embodiments of power. Certain signs and symbols embedded in ritual unintentionally create a negative narrative of structure and hierarchy which damages the ones in the pews.

Often within the best-intentioned desires for extending Christian hospitality in person or online comes the structural reality of a host-guest power dynamic and imbalance that clouds an authentic welcome, which then unintentionally places more obstacles in the path of full inclusion. This is what Jacques Derrida warns about such instances in which efforts to deconstruct binary systems become in themselves ways to reinscribe power differential: “Hospitality is a self-contradictory concept and experience which can only self-destruct,”²⁸ especially when the welcome is “a performative contradiction which bids welcome by acknowledging that we do not know what “welcome” means and perhaps no one welcomed is completely welcome.”²⁹ Derrida sets a space for the performance of liminality in welcome where not only the host offers hospitality but the guest must become equally open to receive. Each must

²⁷ Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 18.

²⁸ Jacques Derrida, “Hostipitality, trans. Barry Stocker and Forbes Morlock” *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities* 5, no. 3 (2000): 5.

²⁹ Derrida, “Hostipitality,” 7.

be open to mutate roles. This is a kind of hospitality where the other itself is no longer the other; otherness dissolves.

Within this mode of Zoom prayer, the context to accept a change in structure and in power dynamics created a liturgical space that offered a unique welcome. In the absence of the role of a central prayer leader or presider at these prayer services, the gathered faithful all played active and equal parts within the liturgy. In this way, worship practice online continues to interrogate the liturgical renewal movement of bodily, fully conscious and active participation.

Liturgical scholar Teresa Berger puts it well: “[O]nline practices shed light on the privileged norm or ideal person behind the conventional understanding of active participation.”³⁰ The online mode exposes societal constructions of the self— “namely, the image of a fixed, clearly definable, able-bodied, self-determining, neuro-typical, healthy, unencumbered self (who also often just happens to be male).”³¹ This time of Zoom prayer provided another lens through which to view, attend, and experience ritual prayer outside of the Eucharistic celebration, and a viewpoint from which stereotypical worship performance became redundant and interesting new patterns for prayer emerged. Might this also become a template for adaptive ministry, for including the participation of LGBTQ persons in liturgical prayer space? Will this online modality lead to in-person gatherings that put an end to distancing of precisely the ones who most seek community, care, and compassion?

In addition to Jesuit clergy and women religious, during these online liturgies students, faculty and campus ministry staff claimed space for preaching. Attendees engaged in participatory prayer by sharing prayer intercessions into chat boxes and unmuting to offer prayer

³⁰ Teresa Berger, “*Participatio Actiosa* in cyberspace? Vatican II’s liturgical vision in a digital world” *Worship*, vol. 87 (2013): 537.

³¹ Berger, “*Participatio Actiosa*,” 537.

responses. These services displayed many ways in which boundaries and power differentials can fade away. Participation in this prayer format outside of the expected and “normal” Sunday Eucharistic celebration enabled the clichéd narratives of Sunday liturgy to become reviewed and revised. Markers of church embedded in conventional worship spaces that signal only binary narrative become nuanced in this mode of prayer gathering. The experience of an online communal space and from community building through Zoom prayer services enabled a performing of liturgical liminality, an adaptive resilience that showed imagination for broader hospitality and a more capacious sense of liturgical space.

Exploring these alternative prayer formats outside of the expected Eucharistic liturgy online forced the LMU liturgy team to create new pathways for the body of Christ to be seen. Stepping outside of comfort circles to create places of belonging requires trust and openness. Gaining trust for relationship building in community from lives that feel ambushed in prayer narratives and practices is a challenge in and outside of the pandemic, and within these times trust-building urges more ministerial intentionality and authenticity.

In the chapter, “Creating Space for Strangers” from his book, *Reaching Out*, theologian Henri Nouwen imagines ways in which to remove such obstacles in the way of inclusive community by adopting a more tempered power dynamic of hospitality towards creating a free space for belonging. Nouwen suggests: “Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the life style of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his own”³² Here the obstacle before the guest, of being held captive by the host, is removed. In this model of welcome, the guest is welcome to enter the free space to learn about God in their own way, and in turn to find out who they are as Christian disciples. For campus ministry, this method empowers students (especially

³² Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1975), 51.

the genderqueer Christian student) to come as they are, discover God, and find God in themselves in a non-threatening environment. It establishes space to engage first in belonging and understanding who they are as persons of God before learning more about the doctrines and teachings from the tradition. The host-guest power structure is gradually dismantled through paradigm shifts of public worship practice.

In this way of freeing up space for recognizing different bodies, Nouwen sends this reminder: “Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place.”³³ To effect change, the space must be an empty one, void of our own occupations and preoccupations, free from our implicit biases, open only to God’s voice speaking at the center of our being. Nouwen disarms power by removing the clutter of hostile preoccupation which acts as an agent against change. By removing hostility and preoccupation, the space becomes empty of inner voices that tend to support the status quo, preserving things the way they are and have always been. Moving from adaptive ministry to generative ministry requires change. Changes in worship practice experienced through the COVID-19 pandemic have set a precedent for adapting liturgy to the signs of the times. However, lasting change cannot occur without building trust.

My mother is teaching the alphabet / to a small boy in a spare bedroom. / Every few minutes he sings a song / he made up just for her. ~ Gillian Ebersole, *The Water Between Us*

Narratives of Accompaniment for Generative Ministry

The spirit of togetherness that permeates the LMU core becomes more attainable when the narrative of welcome turns into one of accompaniment. In this section I highlight two elements of accompaniment—proximity and performativity. I first discuss proximal or devoted

³³ Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 51.

accompaniment in the form of close connection and solidarity with the LGBTQ person, and then I think about accompaniment through the queer or subversive performance of embodied ritual prayer that upends heteronormative sacred spaces.

Trust-building begins to develop only through walking closely with the other, and with gradual deepening companionship it leans towards inclusive fellowship. Forms of adaptive ministry untether othering; they necessitate accompaniment. Through accompaniment patterns, the prayer space becomes staged for one of non-judgmental active participation in prayer and community where “the liturgy requires our humanity at full stretch”³⁴ (proclaims liturgical theologian Don Saliers), where all our humanity becomes present in “a place of convergence” of God’s activity and human activity. The community engages authentically in Word and Eucharist, recognizing God’s participation in all lives. This mutual dialogue insists on ministerial effort that pays attention to the signs of the times. It requires attentiveness to the full range of a community’s joys and sorrows which allows individuals to share truth and vulnerabilities fully and to create a space for healing and reconciliation.

Accompaniment takes the form of becoming aware of the anxieties and vulnerabilities that certain theological and religious narratives have laid bare for LGBTQ lives. From his context of church planting, pastor Tyler Ho-Yin Sit tells us that “sacred witnessing”—the story sharing of communal anxieties and suffering—challenges individuals to recognize the holiness of struggle and in return provide safe space for belonging. Through my interviews with them, students revealed vulnerabilities which encourage me to re-focus “eyes for holiness” and make room for care of those most affected by discrimination and injustice. Sit advocates for storytelling as a pathway towards generative ministry vis-à-vis community revival. Sharing

³⁴ Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 28.

stories and vulnerabilities charts a course for communities and individuals to move away from feeling othered, pointing to new life. It “illuminates a hopeful path for meaningful connection,”³⁵ and in the process God becomes present and God’s activity continues in and in spite of our human action.

To take this one step further, developing “eyes for holiness” activates the Christian imagination for a ministerial practice of togetherness. For theologian Barbara Brown Taylor, imagination is a practice that is fully embedded in our faith life. In the book, *The Preaching Life*, Taylor contends that our faith and relationship with God are more than an intellectual or emotional exercise: they are “a full-bodied relationship in which mind and heart, spirit and flesh, are converted to a new way of experiencing and responding to the world.”³⁶ Seeing the signs of the times engages the imagination. In other words, everyday liturgical narratives of life ought to nourish souls through the week leading back to Sunday’s Eucharistic liturgy and become fully embodied prayer moments, sacred experiences lived through each day that carry all that is blessed and broken, including each other.

In the campus context, the quotidian routine of study—assignments, projects, papers and exams—become prayer and intercession for others and for the self; they foster personal growth and a growing in community. In another way, all life is liturgy. Liturgical narratives of the ordinary should provide opportunity to engage the imagination in finding what Taylor calls “the extraordinary hidden in the ordinary.” She draws from Native American spirituality to gain more understanding about the process of imagination.

³⁵ Tyler Ho-Yin Sit, “When the Magic Happens I Struggle to Catch My Breath: Planting Seeds of Community on Common Ground,” in *Anchored in the Current: Discovering Howard Thurman as Educator, Activist, Guide, and Prophet*, ed. Gregory C. Ellison II (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 159.

³⁶ Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1993), 42.

Within the Native American experience, the process of imagination reveals familiar images and narratives in a unique and new light. Taylor informs us through the spirituality of Blackfoot Indian Jamake Hightower that there are Native Americans who call this process “looking twice” at the world. First, bringing “our eyes together in front” to notice every detail before us. Then looking again, directing our gaze at “the very edge of what is visible.”³⁷ Through this imagining, faith and inclusive community intersect. Who are the invisible ones in our prayer community and why are they missing from the pews? Looking for what Taylor calls “the hidden figure” would mean trying to locate the “presence that moves just beneath the surface of every created thing.”³⁸ Indeed, Christian imagination compels believers to reset expectations beyond coded practices of heteronormative liturgy. This way we might bravely imagine inclusive prayer practice through “finding God in all things” queer.

Finding new ways to identify and accompany the “hidden figure” at LMU into chapel liturgies means looking twice, looking for familiarity in the unfamiliar at the fringes of our campus community and society. When in ministry we engage in looking twice at the world, an amount of certitude in our decision and meaning making processes fades and we begin to see ambiguity more clearly. Becoming people of intercession then means to pray outwardly, to invite into prayer those who hide from community because of socially and religiously-constructed stigma.

Destigmatizing LGBTQ trauma and struggle means to be in solidarity with the neighbor. Don Saliers raises this point: “[I]ntercessory forms of prayer forces us to recognize that religious faith must be lived in the world of power, conflicting passions, and in moral ambiguity.”³⁹

³⁷ Taylor, *The Preaching Life*, 45.

³⁸ Taylor, *The Preaching Life*, 49.

³⁹ Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 134.

Saliers contends that the double commandment of loving God and loving neighbor must not be sliced in two. Instead, one must accompany the other. Authentic Christian life narratives dwell in liminal tension of prayer as praise and of prayer as love of neighbor.

Walking alongside the neighbor-stranger takes the form of close proximity to the sheep of a shepherd's flock which will result in church leaders smelling of the sheep.⁴⁰ Peripheral accompaniment is not enough. Accompaniment of the LGBTQ person insists on deep solidarity. It requires sacred witnessing to, imagination for and proximity with the disinherited citizens of society.

Additionally, through theological anthropology M. Shawn Copeland states that: "Solidarity sets the dynamics of love against the dynamics of domination."⁴¹ Copeland refers here to the anthropological subjects of the exploited, despised, poor women of color. Solidarity is "a task, a praxis through which responsible relationships between and among persons" may be "created and expressed, mended and renewed."⁴² For Copeland, the fundamental obligation of solidarity does not come from identity politics or from the erasure of difference but from "human creatureliness and love."⁴³

This kind of accompaniment in liturgical contexts takes the form of truthful performance and embodiment of radical love. The redemptive body of Christ dissolves divine and social boundaries through radical love. And so, for dismantling heteronormative systems within sacred spaces for liturgical accompaniment through a desire for physical and spiritual intimacy, feminist theologian Marilú Rojas Salazar puts it this way: "The body of Jesus becomes the table that

⁴⁰ An analogy Pope Francis uses frequently to refer to pastors and church leaders in relation to pastoral ministry. This phrase comes from Francis' first papal apostolic exhortation in 2013, *Evangelii Gaudium* (The joy of the gospel) and is mentioned in several homilies - "Evangelizers thus take on the "smell of the sheep" and the sheep are willing to hear their voice" (EG, 24).

⁴¹ M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 94.

⁴² Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 95.

⁴³ Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 95.

awakens the Eucharistic desire for a life with dignity, equality and justice, and the desire to belong to a community that is inclusive, loving and desirous of a better quality of life for those who have been excluded by reason of race, sex or social condition.”⁴⁴ Salazar and Teresa Berger note the desire for a table of togetherness on- and offline that liberates interdependence from a nexus of oppressive forces through reconstructed worship spaces, spaces that perform diverse, generative prayer expressions of living spiritualities for brave belonging.

Salazar, in addition, raises the matter of the performance of resentment, which I found resonant in Jo’s interview when they described the “English Mass” and how liturgy at LMU presented as “white.” This is also what the young poet Ebersol conjures up in the imagination—a tension between sword and surrender. This necessary holy indignation reclaims anti-system, anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-elitist spaces and in many ways recognizes “the diversity of creation” and of divine power that has remained unnamed. It is the power that “demands a force of visibility based on the desire of God or the divinity to come out of itself” as “act of sharing its power so that otherness may exist and be recognized.”⁴⁵ Through full LGBTQ participation in the life of the church and the gospel of Jesus, an alternative, queer-strange stage is set.

Enacting symbols of being and becoming the true body of Christ flow in counterpoint to a set of stationary rules. I agree with Salazar in saying that full inclusion is a complete act of subversion in which the liturgy becomes deprivatized, brought into the public space, where it defends human rights and makes visible despised and excluded bodies.⁴⁶ After all, an anti-establishment, counter-cultural way of being was what Jesus lived and died for in accompanying

⁴⁴ Marilú Rojas Salazar, “Queer Liturgy, trans. Francis McDonagh,” in *Queer Theologies: Becoming the Queer Body of Christ*, eds. Stephanie Knauss and Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez (London: SCM Press, 2019), 105.

⁴⁵ Salazar, “Queer Liturgy,” 107.

⁴⁶ Salazar, “Queer Liturgy,” 107.

the most broken, blessed and beloved bodies. What patterns of embodied prayer will mark our community's welcome of LGBTQ bodies?

I win a gift card and buy candles, / try to burn sacred into my room.
~ Gillian Ebersole, *The Water Between Us*

Three beatitudes to guide campus ministry's *belonging, believing and becoming*

At one point in time, the LMU campus ministry office offered an active outreach ministry to the LGBTQ community. It was disbanded when student interest waned. Now is the appropriate time to reinstate this ministry, to rebuild sacred LGBTQ space again. I am told that the group was named “*Beati*”—the blessed ones, appropriately. The narratives of the Beatitudes offer a launch point for an inclusive, non-judgmental discipleship of radical love. They provide guideposts that illuminate pathways to broader Christian hospitality, for how to perform welcoming host-guest interaction, for how to listen to story and to retell narratives that include, and for ways to pray at the point of the convergence of God's loving actions and our accompaniment of the LGBTQ person. In both Lukan and Matthean accounts of the Beatitudes, active discipleship for social justice work is at the forefront, and God's love emanates beyond life and death, beyond expectation and imagination.

From the student interviews included in this project, I offer the following three “beatitudes” for living out the mission message of LMU campus ministry—*belong, believe, become*—for building communities that welcome and accompany the young, undergraduate LGBTQ person. I realize that this journey of self-identity for many is complicated, and some may prefer anonymity. Still, it is necessary to make more visible those that have expressed their radical love for their faith, gender and sexual identities. With these brave and blessed ones, I stay

attentive for the hidden body of Christ while bringing to bear Ebersole's suggestion of experiencing the mundane to "burn sacred" into that space.

Blessed are you who look twice at the world

I am struck when Nick, who lacks belief in the existence of a God, asks the question: "How does God see this person?" From the interview, I realize that for Nick God is defined through intentional, collaborative community. Relationships in community are where Nick experiences God and where bridge building between Catholic church and LGBTQ people begins. He gives shape to the ambiguous nature of belonging to God with some sense of post-Catholic awareness,⁴⁷ and in this case, the suspicion of the magisterium in relation to LGBTQ full inclusion.

This beatitude offers a Eucharistic vision of the shamed, despised body. A vision that sees beyond the mere enforcement of rules to knowing that every table story shared is the redemptive gospel of Jesus which desires intimate belonging. Through brokenness, something divine emerges. In this place we perform the host-guest welcome with scars of holy imperfection that give new language for accompaniment into sacred belonging.

Blessed are you who listen compassionately to stories of the *other*

I draw from Jo's experience of feeling awkward in LMU Catholic prayer spaces: "I say things and people don't know how to respond. I can't come in and talk about things casually without being responded to negatively." Sharing vulnerabilities with another initiates a trust journey of mutual listening. The true act of listening builds trust. It is a challenge that requires openness and humility to learn from the other, to resist solving things that might appear

⁴⁷ Tom Beaudoin, "A New Post-Catholic State of Awareness: Has Public Discussion of Catholicism Reached a New Moment?" *America*, January 8, 2011, <https://www.americamagazine.org/content/all-things/new-post-catholic-state-awareness-has-public-discussion-catholicism-reached-new>

problematic. This beatitude encourages believing in the unknown, assuming the best of a situation and imagining hopeful healing that follows.

I think Jo assures us that it is alright to be honest enough to say that we do not know what this (gender fluidity/gender queerness) is all about. When there is a strong desire for claiming a voice of authority over one of accompaniment, compassion dies, and the challenge to speak the words, “come as you are” evaporates into the false belief that the catholic space thus created welcomes everyone. This then becomes a place of the dishonest love and veiled authenticity that students like Jo experience.

Blessed are you who love yourself first before loving others.

Nina’s comment of having “the basic building blocks of ‘who we are’ set up” before being and becoming “people for others,” highlights the significance of self-care. First, she would say, understand and love yourself. Only after that act in love with God. The collective library of Ignatian spirituality offers various narratives for accompaniment. Finding God in all things is one pattern of accompanying persons that yearn for belonging community. *Cura personalis* is another.

Cura personalis simply means the complete care for a person’s mind, body and soul— to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12.31), expressed in “human acts of giving and receiving.”⁴⁸ During the course of these interviews, the value and practice of Catholic social justice teaching surfaced many times. Students are mindful of the light of compassionate service to others that radiates through the prism of self-care in calls of accompaniment and togetherness, yet they sometimes experience a different narrative from church leaders. A generative ministry

⁴⁸ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, “Cura Personalis” *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* 37, no. 1 (2007): 10.

of healing only becomes real when the Christian imagination for meeting God both in self and the other is wholly engaged.

Therefore, eyes for looking twice at the world, ears for listening compassionately and hearts for loving self before loving others become new patterns of embodied prayer, hoping to “burn sacred” into the room. These are ways that embodied ritual prayer will emanate radical love and will tell new stories and create fresh narratives that will in turn shape lives for the full inclusion of the LGBTQ person in Catholic prayer spaces.

If you asked, I'd lay down my sword / at your altar, spend my life kneeling / until I believed love could heal the bruises.” ~ Gillian Ebersole, *The Water Between Us*

A Place of Convergence for Livability in LGBTQ Catholic Spaces

Finding new narratives for Christian belonging in between “sword and surrender” and pushing the positive influences of narrative habitus towards LGBTQ inclusion is somewhat risky business in Catholic spaces. Yet narratives of radical love, true hospitality, and accompaniment must be voiced, even at the risk of being taken “hostage”⁴⁹ in “all are welcome” situations—to refer back to Derrida.

Stories that shape lives of generous compassion must be told and retold or we risk co-opting our role as Christian witnesses, taking on instead the role of a bystander who does not speak up. Patrick Cheng advises: “We simply cannot afford to turn a blind eye to any act of bullying, theological or otherwise.”⁵⁰ Witnessing to the world in the contours of adaptable and

⁴⁹ Derrida, “Hostipitality,” 9.

⁵⁰ Patrick S. Cheng, “Theological Bullying and the Roman Catholic Church,” in *More than a Monologue: Sexual Diversity and the Catholic Church, Volume II: Inquiry, Thought and Expression*, eds. J. Patrick Hornbeck II and Michael A. Norko (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 169.

generative ministry for LGBTQ welcome means taking on the responsibility not to obfuscate the intrinsic gospel messages of mercy and justice and to recognize God’s passionate love for us.

When belonging ministry takes on patterns of adaptability and generativity within the borderlands of certitude and ambiguity, more welcome, greater nourishment and lasting livability follow as communities thrive in relationality where the metaphorical “homelessness” of LGBTQ folk⁵¹ caught in “middle spaces”⁵² of spiritual abandonment dissolves into a warm, “welcome home” embrace.

With a similar attitude to Rilke’s letter to the aspiring poet, Catholic priest and theologian James Alison pens a “Letter to a Young Gay Catholic,” and in it he asks this question: [D]o we dare to have our love stretched by building without approval, as we wait longingly for the day when some Berlin Wall comes down, and communication is restored?”⁵³ Dare we have our love stretched? A challenge akin to Rilke’s urging to “go within” extends beyond the here and now, through pandemic times and into the realm of what is to come. Regardless of the answer, we must continue the work for LGBTQ inclusion in Catholic prayer circles.

For healing, revolution moves to reconciliation and sword to surrender. For those facing hate and discrimination daily, I cry out with their voices of rage and contempt against structures of monolithic power. Nick’s recollection of the resurrection story told to him by a professor brings hope for the livability of the LGBTQ as “the disciples see the risen Christ as how God sees everybody, as this beautiful thing that you can’t help but love.” For places of convergence of God’s activity and our own Christian witness through action means stretching our love,

⁵¹ Merriam-Webster defines “folk” as an alternate spelling of “folks” used “especially to explicitly signal the inclusion of groups commonly marginalized.” See <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/folk#:~:text=Definition%20of%20folk,Gender%2Dnonconforming%20folk>

⁵² Patrick S. Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality and Spirit* (New York: Seabury Books, 2013), 111-25.

⁵³ James Alison, *Broken Hearts & New Creations* (London: Continuum Books, 2010), 184.

sometimes flipping the script of radical love on the ones that insist on hateful rhetoric and ambivalent welcome and instead to sing truthfully that “*all* are welcome.”

Lastly, M. Shawn Copeland warns of “gains” only for “our” specific group through a limited performance of Eucharistic solidarity: “Eucharistic solidarity teaches us to imagine, to hope for, and to create new possibilities. Because that solidarity enfolds us, rather than dismiss ‘others,’ we respond in acts of self-sacrifice – committing ourselves to the long labor of creation, to the enfleshment of freedom.”⁵⁴ While Copeland stares in the face of white racist supremacy, the issues of injustice and domination continue to permeate the LGBTQ context of narratives of race, gender and sexuality.

How might we dwell in these places of convergence, places of redemption, of liminality and inclusivity? Mary McClintock Fulkerson believes something we already know and practice yet sometimes forget: “[F]aithful inclusivity is a form of life patterned after the life of Jesus; it is enabled by God; it involves loving acceptance of people for who they are.”⁵⁵ All of this rooted in desire—a desire for God and a desire to be intertwined with each other through Christian hospitality of belonging and welcome. Such is a place where God’s desire converges with our own.

This place is where charity and love meet. As gospel mandate, washing the feet of the other is an example of God’s pattern of meeting us where we are at and for us to meet God in the way that is most sincere. And so I work toward imagining a changing culture of welcome and belonging in worship circles at LMU for the genderqueer student to experience, one that practices compassionate Christian hospitality to transform the community’s narrative habitus for good.

⁵⁴ Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 128.

⁵⁵ Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 213.

In Appendix II (below), I offer a script for a liturgy of inclusive welcome that I hope might be used as a template for an alternate gathering prayer (in connection with Sunday's Eucharistic liturgy) when the campus community welcomes the incoming class of first-year students during LMU's Welcome Weekend. This Saturday evening liturgy is set as an ecumenical vespers prayer and includes a litany of welcome, a service of light and a litany of gratitude. Here I hope that the community will participate with eyes, ears, and hearts fully open to the possibility and promise of what radical and transformative love might look like for ourselves and for the world in these places of convergence.

The young poet Ebersole wonders about the persistence of radical love. They ask: "What is on the other side of metal and a white flag?"⁵⁶ I think it is the place of *ubi caritas*⁵⁷ where God dwells. In this space and with certain uncertainty, we stretch love together.

⁵⁶ Gillian Ebersol, "I hope everything I have lost is under a bookshelf in the corner of heaven," in *The Water Between Us* (Sequim: Headmistress Press, 2021), 3.

⁵⁷ *Ubi caritas Deus ibi est* (Where true charity is dwelling, God is present there) is a traditional chant sung at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist on Holy Thursday, the Mass of the Lord's Supper.

Bibliography

- Alison, James. *Broken Hearts & New Creations*. London: Continuum Books, 2010.
- Arrupe, Pedro. *Justice with Faith Today: An Anthology of Letters and Addresses. II*, edited by Jerome Aixala. St. Louis, Mo: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1980: 123–38.
- Beaudoin, Tom. “A New Post-Catholic State of Awareness: Has Public Discussion of Catholicism Reached a New Moment?” *America*, January 8, 2011.
<https://www.americamagazine.org/content/all-things/new-post-catholic-state-awareness-has-public-discussion-catholicism-reached-new>
- Berger, Teresa. “*Participatio Actuosa* in cyberspace? Vatican II’s liturgical vision in a digital world.” *Worship*, vol. 87 (2013): 533–547.
- Cheng, Patrick S. *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*. New York: Seabury Books, 2011.
- Cheng, Patrick S. *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality and Spirit*. New York: Seabury Books, 2013.
- Cheng, Patrick S. “*Domine, Non Sum Dignus*: Theological Bullying and the Roman Catholic Church.” In *More than a Monologue: Sexual Diversity and the Catholic Church, Volume II: Inquiry, Thought and Expression*, edited by J. Patrick Hornbeck II and Michael A. Norko, 164-73. New York: Fordham University Press, 2014: 169.
- Copeland, M. Shawn. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.
- Derrida, Jacques. “Hostipitality, translated by Barry Stocker and Forbes Morlock.” *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities* 5, no. 3 (2000): 3–18.
- Ebersol, Gillian. “I hope everything I have lost is under a bookshelf in the corner of heaven.” In *The Water Between Us*, 2–3. Sequim: Headmistress Press, 2021.
- Fulkerson, Mary McClintock. *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Jones, Robert P., Daniel Cox, Betsy Cooper and Rachel Lienesch. *Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion – and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back*. Washington, D.C: PRRI, Released September 22, 2016: 1–7.
- Kolvenbach, Peter-Hans “Cura Personalis” *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* 37, no. 1 (2007): 9–17.
- Lawrence, Ryan E., Maria A. Oquendo, and Barbara Stanley. “Religion and Suicide Risk: A

- Systematic Review.” *Archives of Suicide Research* 20, no. 1 (2016): 1–21.
- Nouwen, Henri J.M. *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*. New York: Doubleday and Company, 1975.
- Rilke, Raine Maria. *Letters to a Young Poet*. Translated by Joan M. Burnham. Novato: New World Library, 2000.
- Salazar, Marilú Rojas. “Queer Liturgy, translated by Francis McDonagh.” In *Queer Theologies: Becoming the Queer Body of Christ*, edited by Stephanie Knauss and Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez. London: SCM Press, 2019.
- Saliers, Don E. *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.
- Sanders, Cody J. *Christianity, LGBTQ Suicide, and the Souls of Queer Folk*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020.
- Sit, Tyler Ho-Yin. “When the Magic Happens I Struggle to Catch My Breath: Planting Seeds of Community on Common Ground.” In *Anchored in the Current: Discovering Howard Thurman as Educator, Activist, Guide, and Prophet*, edited by Gregory C. Ellison II, 155–64. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020.
- Taylor, Barbara Brown. *The Preaching Life*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1993.

Appendix I: I hope everything I have lost is under a bookshelf in the corner of heaven
Poem by Gillian Ebersole

Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way.

~ Pedro Arrupe

I've yet to find the appropriate tension
between sword and surrender.

Once when we were arguing
about religion, you asked me –
do you even love God?

A professor I loved died
after consoling me with an email,
a gentle elbow, and a nudged chair.

It is hard for me to trust a religion
that speaks in clichés.

My mother is teaching the alphabet
to a small boy in a spare bedroom.
Every few minutes he sings a song
he made up just for her.

I am obsessed with disproving
the existence of a good God,
which means I wear my problems
as emblems, add world tragedies
to a jean jacket overflowing
with iron-on cynicism, keep
a running list of evil people
who do not deserve grace.

I win a gift card and buy candles,
try to burn sacred into my room.
I'm desperate for the smell of funerals
and incense and Sunday mornings.

What is on the other side of metal and a white flag?

If you asked, I'd lay down my sword
at your altar, spend my life kneeling
until I believed love could heal the bruises.

Appendix II: Script for a Liturgy of Welcome

A Liturgy of Welcome

An Ecumenical Evening Prayer Service for LMU's Class of 2026

Saturday, August 27, 2022

5:00 p.m.

The international flags are placed in front of Sacred Heart Chapel.

At 4:50 p.m., liturgical ministers line up on the steps of Sacred Heart Chapel to greet attendees.

The chapel carillon will be pealed at 4:55 p.m.

Three candle stands with unlit candles are set on the high altar for the Service of Light and Litany of Gratitude.

RITE OF GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

CANTOR:

We welcome you this evening into Sacred Heart Chapel. First-year students and parents, we lift you in prayer today as we embark on this new journey.

We pray together that we continue to discover the talents that God has already blessed us with, and that we may recognize God's gifts that we have yet to see.

INVITATORY

CANTOR: Light and peace in Jesus Christ our Lord

ASSEMBLY: Thanks be to God

GATHERING SONG *We Belong to You (Thomson)*

As the gathering song is sung, the cross and candle bearers proceed to their assigned places and take their seats in the east transept.

Two students process up the side aisles, one on each side, to light the candles in the side alcoves.

The presider proceeds to the chair.

GREETING

PRESIDER:

We gather as an LMU community this evening, many of us, perhaps, for the first time as we start a new academic year.

We gather in this chapel where **all are welcome**, here in this sacred space.
 As we prepare ourselves to enter into this evening prayer,
 let us open our eyes, ears and hearts to encounter this same Christ
 who is present among us, God's Church gathered in God's name.

LITANY OF WELCOME

PRESIDER:

All new students who are from the Los Angeles area or the state of California, please rise.
 Blessed are you; we welcome you! **(Please be seated.)**

All new students who are from out of state, please rise. Blessed are you; we welcome
 you! **(Please be seated.)**

All international students, please rise. Blessed are you; we welcome you! **(Please be
 seated.)**

If you are the first in your family to go to college, please rise. Blessed are you; we
 welcome you! **(Please be seated.)**

We welcome, differently abled students, the hearing and sight impaired. Blessed are you!

We welcome, LGBTQ, queer and transgender students. Blessed are you!

We welcome, students of the Indigenous, Black, Asian and Latinx communities. Blessed
 are you!

We welcome, students of different faiths. Blessed are you!

All are indeed welcome in this holy place. We gather here to build community and to
 continue to discern who God is calling us to truly be.

Together with you, Lord, we will discover new ways of belonging to you and to our
 neighbor, we will learn new ways to believe in you and to trust in each other, and we will
 engage in new ways of becoming persons for and with others to do work for your greater
 glory.

We now join our hearts and voices as we sing the psalms that echo throughout time.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

PSALM I *Psalm 139: O God, You Search Me (Farrell)*

PSALM PRAYER

PRESIDER: Let us pray: *(pause)*

Lord, you create us with love and care,
and you guide our thoughts to peace;
Every day we breathe, you shape us more into your image.
Even when we fear the unknown, you keep us safe.
God, you are with us always, even when we feel abandoned.
You are our present and our future,
and we pray to live always in your light.
We ask this through Christ Our Lord. AMEN.

PSALM II *Psalm 27: Belong (de Silva)*

PSALM PRAYER

PRESIDER: Let us pray: *(pause)*

Gracious God, you are our light and our salvation.
You protect and strengthen those who hope in you.
you heard the cry of your Son and kept him safe.
We belong to you, O, Lord:
Grant that those who seek your face in times of trouble
may see your goodness in the land of the living.
You are our shelter, our refuge, our protection. AMEN.

SCRIPTURE READING John 13.2b-7, 12-15

LECTOR/READER:

A reading from the gospel of John.

So, during supper, fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God, he rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Master, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later."

So when he had washed their feet [and] put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you?"

You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master,’ and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.

LECTOR: The Gospel of the Lord.
ASSEMBLY: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

REFLECTION *Offered by a parent of a junior or senior student.*

SONG FOR REFLECTION *The Greater Glory of God (Alonso)*

LITANY OF BELONGING

SERVICE OF LIGHT AND LITANY OF GRATITUDE

STUDENT I:

We light the first candle as God calls us to find new ways for belonging. We look for ways to belong not only to you, Lord, but to each other.

As we begin our academic journey, you encourage us to learn.

May we use the gifts you have given us to prepare a space of inclusivity, a place where we might discover who you called us to truly be, your beloved ones made completely in your own image.

We give thanks for our families who have loved us into being.

We give thanks for friends who challenge us.

We give thanks for those who call us to be our better selves.

A student lights the first candle placed at the high altar. A refrain of Love, Burn Bright is sung.

Christ, our light, illuminate every path that leads to you.

Give us grace, Lord, guide our way: Love, burn bright.

In your light, Lord, every day, every way we follow you

Grant us peace to journey through: Love, burn bright.

Text: Chris de Silva © 2014, GIA Publications, Inc. All rights reserved.

STUDENT II:

We light the second candle as God calls us to find new ways for believing. Strengthen our belief in you, Lord, as we educate our bodies, enrich our minds and nourish our souls with your love.

As we leave the comfort of our own homes and move into the unknown, may we find safe spaces as we deepen our trust in you and risk encountering our new campus family.

May we find safety in your tender embrace when we feel lonely and homesick.

We give thanks for your boundless love that reaches through distant miles.

We give thanks for your healing love that soothes the broken heart.

We give thanks for your radical love that dissolves every boundary.

A student lights the second candle placed at the high altar. A refrain of Love, Burn Bright is sung.

Christ, our light, illuminate...

STUDENT III:

We light the third candle as God calls us to find new ways for becoming. Create in us generous hearts that give without counting the cost.

Show us compassionate ways to accompany each other, to know what it means to be in solidarity with the disinherited ones.

May we be like you and become shelter for those who experience loss, refuge for those seeking home and protection for those abused.

We give thanks for all the blessings that we have seen and have yet to see.

We give thanks for the splendor of this day.

We give thanks for the hands that shape and care for this beautiful and fragile earth.

A student lights the third candle placed at the high altar. A refrain of Love, Burn Bright is sung.

Christ, our light, illuminate...

Short pause for silent reflection

CANTICLE *This Is How (de Silva)*

INTERCESSIONS

PRESIDER:

Let this household of faith present itself now before the Lord our God, praying to the One whose mighty deeds are known to all....

READER: For the church of God, the faithful Body of Christ, striving to be a sign of unity and an instrument of God's peace...

For those who work to remove divisions of ignorance and prejudice...

We pray to the Lord.

ASSEMBLY: Lord, hear our prayer.

READER: For the leaders of nations who work ceaselessly to end violence...

For the ones who promote the safety and dignity of each person...

We pray to the Lord.

ASSEMBLY: Lord, hear our prayer.

READER: For the children of God who are at the margins...
 For the hungry, homeless, lonely and lost...
 We pray to the Lord.
ASSEMBLY: Lord, hear our prayer.

READER: For the LMU Community gathered today in mind, body and spirit...
 For teachers and students seeking wisdom as they grow and learn from each other...
 For those striving to imitate Christ, serving one another as persons for others...
 For parents and students exploring new horizons and possibilities...
 We pray to the Lord.
ASSEMBLY: Lord, hear our prayer.

READER: For those who served God and remained loyal to Christ in this life now gone
 home to God... *(pause)*
 We pray to the Lord.
ASSEMBLY: Lord, hear our prayer.

PRESIDER:
 Merciful God,
 you hear the cry of the poor:
 hear these our prayers
 and look upon us in your great kindness
 so that one day we might be exalted with you forever.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. AMEN.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

STUDENT:
 Let us now pray together in the words that our Savior taught us:
 Our Father, who art in heaven,
 hallowed be thy name;
 thy kingdom come,
 thy will be done
 on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread,
 and forgive us our trespasses,
 as we forgive those who trespass against us;
 and lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.
 For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. AMEN.

RITE OF SENDING

BLESSING OF INCOMING STUDENTS *May the Road Rise to Meet You (True)*

PRESIDER:

I now invite parents and family members to place your hands on your first-year student as we pray this prayer of blessing.

(Wait until parents have placed their hands.) CANTOR sings one refrain of May the Road.

Presider raises hands over the assembly

Loving God,
 You are the source of all life and author of all good,
 send your Spirit upon these students
 and fill them with your richest blessings.
 Grant that during their time at Loyola Marymount University
 they may grow in faith, in knowledge and in wisdom – always rooted in the gospel of
 justice.

All sing one refrain

Look with love upon these young students and grant that they may find in the life of our
 LMU community such inspiration that they will strive always for what is right and good.

Bless their lives this coming year. Remind them always that they are loved. Surround
 them with ever-caring friends. Fill them with a passion for life, a love of learning and a
 desire to make their lives count in a world filled with such great need.

CANTOR sings one verse. All sing one refrain.

Loving God, be with them. May you complete – in your own time and in your way – the
 good work you have begun in each of them. AMEN.

FINAL BLESSING

PRESIDER:

May the Lord bless us,
 Protect us from all evil,
 And bring us to everlasting life. AMEN.

DISMISSAL

PRESIDER: Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.

ASSEMBLY: Thanks be to God.

SENDING SONG *Building Up the Kingdom (Holland)*