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Coming to the Table: Eucharistic Practices and Beliefs among Worshipers at

St. Luke United Methodist Church, Columbus, Georgia

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Abstract

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By Cynthia Cox Garrard

Much can be learned about the meaning of the Lord's Supper within a congregation by listening to worshipers. The Christian sacrament of Holy Communion as practiced at St. Luke United Methodist Church in Columbus, Georgia affects its participants in different ways, and the participants perceive that effect in different ways. This project examines beliefs and understandings of members of St. Luke regarding Holy Communion and reveals that they bring to and take away from the communion table a variety of interpretations of aspects of the sacrament. When considered in conversation with biblical, ecclesial, and theological tradition, such an examination suggests opportunities for enriching the practice of the sacrament at St. Luke.

Coming to the Table: Eucharistic Practices and Beliefs among Worshipers at

St. Luke United Methodist Church, Columbus, Georgia

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Introduction

What can be learned about the meaning of the Lord's Supper by listening to worshipers? The Christian sacrament of Holy Communion as practiced at St. Luke United Methodist Church in Columbus, Georgia affects its participants in different ways, and the participants perceive that effect in different ways. This project examines beliefs and understandings of members of St. Luke regarding Holy Communion and reveals that they bring to and take away from the communion table a variety of interpretations of aspects of the sacrament. Such an examination suggests opportunities for enriching the practice of the sacrament at St. Luke.

Description of Project

This project involved having conversations with individuals and groups who are part of one of the four public Sunday services of worship at St. Luke. The purpose of the conversations was to learn the Eucharistic stories these worshipers valued as important and to learn the meaning of those stories: how the worshipers interpreted words or actions as they recalled them. The conversations were guided by a set series of questions intended to provide a description of some aspects of the congregation's understanding of the Eucharist.¹

I have been in ministry at St. Luke for thirty years under two separate appointments. I have observed and served thousands of parishioners at the Lord's Table. At the start of this project, I believed that there might be a special significance to the motions and other actions made by worshipers, to their "bodily formation" or the physical aspects of participation in the

1. Appendix 1. Questions to and responses from interviewees were not limited to this set of questions.

sacrament of Holy Communion at St. Luke.² That belief shaped the formation of a series of questions that were intended to uncover the significance of those actions.³

Over a period of three months, I had numerous interviews with a broad spectrum of individuals and groups who spanned differences of sex, age, theology, political beliefs, and socioeconomic groups.⁴ The ethnicity of the interviewees reflects the majority-white ethnic makeup of the congregation; in addition to the white interviewees, I interviewed one African-American member, one Hispanic member, and one African member. Five groups were interviewed: three adult Sunday School classes which represented a cross-section of ages from those in their twenties (twenty-five members) through their sixties (ten members) to their eighties (six members), a Women's Bible study group, and a three-generation family group. The classes represented a cross-section of worshipers in the English-speaking services and were chosen because they were small enough for conversation. Nineteen individuals were interviewed, ranging in age from eight to ninety-seven. All attend worship regularly, including on Communion Sunday, and have therefore experienced the Sacrament of Holy Communion enough so that (I assumed) they might have an opinion. That assumption proved accurate in all but one case. I interviewed persons with whom I have a personal friendship of many years as well as persons with whom I have rarely exchanged more than a few sentences, persons who were lifelong members, persons who were newer members of the congregation, and persons who worship at St. Luke but who are not members.

2. Taylor Burton-Edwards, April 22, 2016. Burton-Edwards used this phrase in a conversation at a 2016 Passover Seder at the home of Rabbi Beth Schwartz, which helped me recognize physical comportment as representing an aspect of an individual's understanding of and relation to the practice of the Eucharist.

3. Appendix 1.

4. Appendix 2 includes a general description of St. Luke, its architecture, and description of groups and individuals interviewed.

I sought to learn what these worshipers at St. Luke brought to the Lord's Table and took away from it in physical demeanor, affect, and theological and biblical understanding. With the participants' permission, I recorded the interviews and transcribed them, changing names to protect anonymity.

Despite differences among the interviewees in denominational upbringing, gender, age, and the service of worship attended, common themes emerged from the interviews, falling into four groups. I have labeled these themes as follows: The Meaning of Actions, The Participation of Children, Dual Meanings of the Body of Christ, and Kneeling. There were also idiosyncratic beliefs and unique practices, but the themes presented in this paper were broadly attested over a significant number of respondents.

This paper will present each theme as a theological proposition and explicate it using narrative from the interviews. The paper will then engage worshipers' interpretations with biblical and theological teachings on the particular theme and follow with an evaluation of the relationship between the theme and the way it is perceived by members of the congregation. While the different understandings of the sacrament do not change the sacrament itself, they do give insight as to how some parts of the sacrament are perceived by the congregation. Knowing those perceptions offers worship leaders guidance on how to increase the congregation's understanding of and appreciation for the Eucharist. Arun Jones notes that the learning goes in both directions: "it will also increase the worship leaders' understanding of and appreciation for the Eucharist."⁵

In conclusion, I will assess how the various interpretations of the Eucharist illuminates our understanding of the sacrament as a congregation, how this process of listening and

5. Arun Jones, e-mail message to author, March 21, 2018.

conversation benefits the practice of the Eucharist at St. Luke, and offer some ways we can strengthen our celebration.

The Meaning of Actions: What do Symbolic Actions Mean for St. Luke Worshipers?

St. Luke worshipers engage in thoughtful reflection on their actions during the Eucharist. In a lecture to the first-year 2018 Doctor of Ministry classes, Ted Brelsford asserted that orthopraxy shapes orthodoxy: we can act our way into right thinking; we cannot think our way into right acting.⁶ Moses' instructions to the Israelites regarding the Passover (Ex 12.1-20) focused not on what they were to think but on what they were to do. Their remembering was thereby tied to specific actions: the slaughter of the lamb, the smearing of the doorpost with its blood, the roasting of the lamb, the serving with "unleavened bread and bitter herbs"⁷ (12.8). Every action had a meaning and was intended to be observed by "every generation as a regulation for all time" (12.14).

Jesus also instructed his followers what to do when they gathered for the Last Supper: "After taking the bread and giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me'" (Lk 22.19). Eugene Peterson reminds us that in the New Testament, the holy meal provides a shaping formula for the disciples. "When he established a way for his followers to maintain what they had experienced, received, and been commanded by him to do, he did it by telling them to have a meal together of bread and wine. They did it. And we keep doing it."⁸

6. Ted Brelsford, "Orthopraxy," (lecture, Doctor of Ministry course, Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Fall Term, 2015).

7. All biblical citations are from the Common English Bible unless otherwise noted.

8. Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John & the Praying Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 156.

St. Luke worshipers universally imbue the Eucharist with theological meaning derived from both Christian tradition and personal insight. When asked what one word described the Lord's Supper, Andy responded, "It's hard not to use the word 'communion' in its broadest sense; the idea that you are communing, not just with God, not just with Jesus Christ, not just with the Holy Spirit as we look at the Triune God, but also the communion of the saints as we are gathered around that table with all of those who have gone before. I think about the funeral that we did this weekend, and I get a great sense of comfort from that.⁹ And so I get that that word 'communion' refers to that, but for me,...I'm talking about it in its broadest sense."¹⁰

Késare grew up in a congregation that practiced weekly sharing in the Lord's Supper. He saw this as shaping his faith. In sharing the sacrament, the shaping nature of Christ's sacrifice became actualized in Késare's life: "When [the Last Supper] happened, that was really Jesus sharing the supper with his disciples, it was before his sacrifice, and he was telling people that you cannot take this lightly. This is a serious part." He explained that the purpose of the Lord's Supper was "sanctification...I'm supposed to be a witness, right? And being a witness is not preaching on the corner, and stopping everybody that goes by and saying I love you. No, it's living the life...In my house, outside my house, in my work, I'm supposed to live as a Christian...The supper is the most important ritual in the church."¹¹

Nancy also linked her observance to Jesus' institution at the supper he celebrated with his disciples "on the night he was betrayed" (I Cor 11.23). She chairs the committee of stewards who

9. One of the revealing parts of this process was that laypeople regularly use traditional theological or ecclesiological terms to think about their faith, as Andy does here with "the communion of the saints." The context of this comment was the funeral for a colleague.

10. Individual interview #1, September 5, 2017.

11. Individual interview #12, September 15, 2017. Késare is of Puerto Rican descent. His English, while fluent, is not "standard." In this and all transcriptions, most grammatical and syntactical errors are corrected. They are otherwise accurate transcriptions of what the speakers said.

prepare the communion elements for the services in the sanctuary and spoke of cherishing the time spent in the quiet of the sanctuary, “making [communion] available and ready for the congregation...It reminds me again of the Last Supper...It takes me back to that. And to what that experience was for Jesus, in his life. And there again, the significance that we are still repeating that today!” Nancy’s memory is both religious and personal—a second-generation member of St. Luke, she was “born, raised, confirmed, and married there.”¹²

Debra said that reflecting on the sacrament was a means of grace for her. While she did not remember words of institution in the Christian Church in which she was raised, she recalled the pastor “holding the cup or the loaf, and saying ‘the Body of Christ’ or ‘the Blood of Christ’... [Those words mean] he died for you...I’m closer to Jesus, knowing what he went through for me. As sinful as I am (tearfully), and continuing to sin, and he did that for me...[and] not just me, it’s [for] the world.”¹³

For Richard, part of experiencing grace in the sacrament was a difference between receiving and taking: “The placing of the elements in another person’s hand. That transmitting, transference. It reminds me of the way you hand something to a child. The child is hungry, and can’t reach the top of the counter, and you hand her the apple and say, ‘here you go sweetheart.’ Someone who cannot attain it themselves is being given.”¹⁴ For Richard, grace is not something you take, but something you can only receive.

Biblical and theological teachings support the idea that to be formed religiously, it is not enough simply to remember, but we must also act accordingly, as Késare stressed. Yet Jesus instructs his followers what do as well as what to think. The context of the Lukan “do this” is a

12. Individual interview #15, September 21, 2017.

13. Individual interview #4, September 5, 2017.

14. Group interview #3, September 19, 2017.

constant interplay between actions and instructions, sharing bread and making peace between squabbling disciples (Lk 22.24), affirmation (22.33) and denial (22.47).

Right belief can and does shape right action in a continued dialectic; orthopraxy is shaped by orthodoxy and vice-versa. Arun Jones explains that, in the Lord's Supper, "a prescribed mental activity (recalling the event) is supposed to create orthopraxy...[There] is a back-and-forth between orthodoxy and orthopraxy."¹⁵ The practice of the sacrament of Holy Communion at St. Luke indicates that there is a lively connection between what parishioners are doing and what they are thinking about what they are doing as they share the Eucharist.

While the interviewees do not all focus on the same action as significant, their responses indicate that the congregation reflects on actions made by both the members and by the clergy in ways that enrich their faith.

The Participation of Children: How Does the Inclusion of Children at the Eucharist Affect St. Luke's Theology and Practice of the Eucharist?

At St. Luke, all who profess a faith in or love for Christ are invited to share in the Sacrament; worshipers do not have to be members of the church to receive the sacrament. Furthermore, the congregation broadly interprets Jesus' instruction to "allow the children to come...because the kingdom of heaven belongs to people like these children" (Mt 19.14) as applying to the Lord's Supper as well as to being included in worship or teaching. In this way, St. Luke stands in accord with the practice advocated in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, welcoming "all who intend to lead a Christian life, together with their children...to receive the

15. Arun Jones, e-mail message to author, December 20, 2017.

bread and cup. We have no tradition of refusing any who present themselves desiring to receive.”¹⁶

Dwight Vogel says, “Holy Communion is a sacred meal in which the community of faith, in the simple act of eating bread and drinking wine, proclaims and participates in all that God has done, is doing, and will continue to do for us in Christ. In celebrating the Eucharist, we remember the grace given to us in our baptism and partake of the spiritual food necessary for sustaining and fulfilling the promises of salvation... Holy Communion may be an occasion for the reception of converting, justifying, and sanctifying grace.”¹⁷ The purpose of Holy Communion for the baptized Christian is to confirm and strengthen the faith proclaimed in baptism. Since those who are not baptized are also invited to share in the holy meal, it serves as a means of prevenient grace, working within them to go before (*prevenir*) their profession of faith in Christ.

St. Luke members come from a variety of traditions. Some of the denominations in which St. Luke worshipers grew up delay participation in the Lord’s Supper until a person has been baptized or received Christ by profession of faith. The responses of the interviewees therefore incorporate a spectrum of opinions on the inclusion of children; there is support for both the inclusion and denial of children’s participation in the Lord’s Supper. The memories recalled by interviewees show how the inclusion of children may be comical and irreverent as well as spiritual and profound.

Sisters Olivia (age twelve) and Patricia (age eight) embody a positive aspect of the sacrament being open to persons of all ages and understandings. They regularly attend the 11:00

16. United Methodist Church, *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 29.

17. Dwight Vogel, *By Water and the Spirit: A Study of Baptism for United Methodists* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 1993), 13.

a.m. service with their parents. Interviewed in the presence of their mother, both commented on being aware of the congregation witnessing their actions as they come forward to receive communion. Patricia recalled, “I didn’t want to [take communion at first] because I was nervous about going up there, but then I started (to participate in communion) like when I was six, and I learned that it was really yummy.”¹⁸ Her sister added, “I do have to say that getting myself in front of people and doing it, it’s hard...I like to think that they are seeing me at a young age do it. And I mean, understanding it, hopefully, is what they see me doing? Because I try and pray and everything.”¹⁹

At the other end of the spectrum are examples of persons who support the idea that children should be prepared and educated before participating in the sacrament. Jeanne’s first memory of communion also offered support for traditions which are more restrictive of children’s participation. She recalled communion as “comical...I had three brothers, and you know, we would laugh when we would drink the juice, and mother and daddy, I mean they just couldn’t...I’m sorry to say that it was not a spiritual moment.” She recalls kneeling with her brothers and parents and “I was little, three or four...The bread was always those little square hard pieces of cracker that I’m sure were all purchased. And then...there was grape juice in those little bitty tiny cups... And then sometimes we would take two (she snickers). Like I said, we weren’t very spiritual until later.”²⁰

18. Individual interview #15, October 26, 2017.

19. Ibid. Their self-aware reflection surprised me. I had thought Charles Dickens was using imaginative license inferring that young children were aware of their inspirational effect on others when he allowed Bob Cratchit to say of his son, Tiny Tim, “He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk and blind men see.” Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1996), 30.

20. Individual interview #11, September 14, 2017.

Mark also recalled communion as being somewhat comical and remembered thinking, “Yes! It’s communion Sunday! I’m gonna get to have grape juice and a little snack! When I’d see the bread plates up front, in front of the bullpen, the bull-pit...wait, the pulpit. Whatever...I’d be like yes, little snack, little grape juice—I love grape juice—and less time for me to try not to fall asleep... They didn’t have actual bread they’d give to us; they gave us oyster crackers. And I would think, these are oyster crackers, for all intents and purposes!”²¹

Andy’s recollection showed that his participation with his parents shaped his appreciation of the Eucharist. He recalled the best parts of the sacrament: “First, the sermon was short. Second, you got little bitty crackers, which were weird, so that made them good. Finally, you got to go up and do something *with your parents* (his emphasis). That made it special. Then Gaston²² would dismiss the table²³ by saying, ‘There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel’s veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains. Arise, free from sin, to serve Christ.’”²⁴ For Andy, walking with his parents up to the front of the church was an important event, a powerful symbol of being included as an equal in the eyes of Christ.

Irene, a retired kindergarten teacher, said she pays careful attention to the actions of families with young children during the Lord’s Supper: “I like seeing the parents bring their babies, the little tiny babies, and the parents will dip their fingers in the glass of juice and put it

21. Individual interview #13, September 20, 2017.

22. The Rev. Gaston Pollock, a United Minister in the South Georgia Conference. Before his death in 2016, he served in a retired capacity at St. Luke, where “Andy” now serves in a lay capacity.

23. “Dismissing the table” describes a practice once common in the Methodist Church wherein worshipers knelt at the chancel rail in a group, received the sacrament by taking for themselves the small cracker or wafer and cup, both of which were nestled in a special rack attached to the rail. Pastors would verbally dismiss each group. Andy says he would hear Gaston’s dismissal 5 or 6 times a service, once a month, for all the years Gaston served that congregation. I’ve never heard of another pastor using this particular rubric for dismissal.

24. Individual interview #1, September 5, 2017.

on the babies' lips...That just means so much to me that the family is including everyone and they are starting at a young age, including them in their beliefs."²⁵

James Fowler draws a connection between young children's faith and their formative experiences: "Representations of God take conscious form in this period and draw, for good or ill, on children's experiences of their parents and other adults to whom they were emotionally attached in the first years of life."²⁶ Fowler says, "Like cognitive, moral, or ego development, faith development occurs across the life cycle. We alter the ways we understand, interpret, and commit to the images, meanings, and ethical imperatives of faith." He points out that Jean Piaget's foundational work in child development was anticipated in I Corinthians 13: "When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, reason like a child, think like a child. But now that I have become a man, I've put an end to childish things. Now we see a reflection in a mirror; then we will see face-to-face. Now I know partially, but then I will know completely in the same way that I have been completely known."²⁷

It should be expected that worshipers' beliefs should change as they mature. At the same time, adults may overlay the actions or words of children with another level of reasoning, imparting to the child's words or actions a level of faith that the child has not attained. The literalism of children's understanding can elevate adult theologies as adults reflect on the ways children participate in the sacrament.

25. Individual interview #10, September 14, 2017. Although I have been in ministry at St. Luke for nearly 30 years, I have never seen this.

26. James Fowler, "Stages in Faith Consciousness," in *Religious Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. Fritz Oser and W. George Scarlett (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 34.

27. James W. Fowler, *Weaving the New Creation: Stages of Faith and the Public Church* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 91-92.

Receiving communion with his mother at the chancel rail of St. Luke, a young boy reached past the offered morsel and grabbed a fistful of “Hawaiian Bread.”²⁸ His mother’s remonstratory sibilance could not be understood, but his retort was heard throughout the sanctuary: “But Mom! It’s so *good!*” While he almost certainly was talking about the bread, I heard it as an unintentional echo of the words of the psalmist, who invited worshipers to “Taste and see how good the Lord is! The one who takes refuge in him is truly happy!” (Ps 34.8).²⁹

When he died in 2016 as a young man in his twenties, his mother requested that this story be shared at his memorial service. She regarded his childish retort as a way for the congregation to understand his faith and his life. As adults hearing the recalled words of a child, we could at the same time appreciate the humor of the story and his unintentional profundity; his exclamation proclaimed the goodness of the offer of Christ experienced in the Eucharist, literally and metaphorically transmitting joy and hope.³⁰

Laypersons also impart symbolic meaning to their own remembered actions as children. One young parent, interviewed with his Sunday School class, had a vivid recollection of receiving the wafer as a child, taking it into his mouth, and breaking it against his palate with his tongue. He said that as he did that, the words of Jesus came into his mind. He recalled these

28. The love for using Hawaiian bread in the Lord’s Supper has generated a number of memes as well as serious reflection, e.g., John F. Zellmer, “Jesus Tastes Like Hawaiian Sweet Bread,” *One Body, A Million Stories* (blog), July 30, 2013, accessed December 6, 2017, <https://cypressumcblog.com/2013/07/30/jesus-tastes-like-hawaiian-sweet-rolls/>.

29. “It also reveals the ambiguity about children receiving communion.” Arun Jones, e-mail message to author, December 20, 2017. I would later use this story as a Eucharistic sermon illustration. I did not remember the identity of the boy, but his mother identified him after the sermon as the culprit.

30. Arun Jones noted that if United Methodists regularly celebrated Holy Communion at funerals, the unintentional profundity of this child’s explanation would have been made concrete for all the participants that day. E-mail message to author, December 20, 2017.

words as being “this is my body, broken for you.”³¹ He imparted an adult’s sensibility to his childish memory.

Arun Jones observes, “Children take literally what adults understand to be metaphorical. In this way, children add meaning to the ritual,” bringing to mind Roman Catholic conceptions of the literal nature of the sacrament.³² The understanding of communion as Christ’s sacrifice was held by almost all of the participants, indicating that our Protestant church may more closely identify with our Roman forebears than we realize or intend.³³

Adults recalling their participation as children in the Eucharist do so with the weight of the teaching of the church on their lives. Children, however, collapse the distinction between traditional and personal understandings; lacking the perspective of years, for them, the sacrament is entirely personal. That monovalent apprehension exacerbates the concrete aspects of the sacrament and elevates “certain traditional understandings—e.g., [that] the feast is joyful—that has been lost among adults.”³⁴

Both the experience of children and adults’ recollected experiences indicate that children perceive the sacrament in essentially different ways from adults. Urban Holmes’ examination of young children’s theologies of the Eucharist incorporates educational and developmental theories of children’s faiths. The Eucharist is, according to Holmes, uniquely suited to communicate with the concrete ideation of younger children, who believe that “if we eat the same thing, we become the same thing.” If children who share the sacrament with adults begin to believe that they in

31. Group interview #2, September 17, 2017. Mt 26.26 and Mk 14.22 both say “this is my body.” Lk 22.19 says “given for you.”

32. Arun Jones, e-mail message to author, December 20, 2017.

33. The distinctively Roman architecture of the sanctuary at St. Luke may reinforce this theology. See Appendix 2 for description.

34. Jones, e-mail, December 20, 2017.

some way are equal to the adults, this can be an empowering and encouraging idea: “We become one with the other when we share a meal.”³⁵

Irene’s observations of the behavior of families at communion and Andy’s recollection of sharing the Lord’s Supper with his parents illustrate Holmes’s sense of unity and equality. Moreover, they illustrate a willingness and freedom among some families to begin to interpret the inclusivity of the table for themselves, opening it to the youngest children.

Holmes encourages the practice of having very young children accompany their parents to receive the sacrament, explaining that “the ability to reflect, to make judgments, to engage in formal operations is not necessary for the beneficial experience of a symbol. A symbol engages us on more levels of motivation than our reason (it is multivalent), and it would be...wrong to think that someone who made his communion without a conceptual grasp of its meaning could not derive anything but harm from the act.” Holmes expresses doubt that experiencing a symbol only on a conceptual level is a valid understanding of symbols because it makes a “univocal sign out of a multivocal symbol.”³⁶

There is no biblical record of Jesus excluding children from shared meals, though neither are they explicitly included. John’s gospel identifies a “youth” as the source of the bread and fish that were multiplied to feed the five thousand (6.8-10), and Matthew notes that the count did not include “women and children” (14.21). The Passover tradition of the youngest child asking the leading question “Why is this night different from all other nights?” indicates the presence of children is essential for the transmission of ritual. Inclusion of children may be inferred from the scriptural record, but there is no mandate for inclusion.

35. Urban T. Holmes, III, *Young Children and the Eucharist* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), 51.

36. *Ibid.*, 59.

The reflections made by Andy, Olivia, and Patricia might seem to support an unqualified inclusion, but all of these children also worshiped in the presence of their parents, who were active participants in weekly worship, Sunday School, and other activities. All of the recollections seem to point to the sacrament as forming a potent symbol in the memories of these interviewees. At the same time, the interviewees are all people who are active in worship, so might be considered likelier to have a positive connection. Nevertheless, the majority of conversations support the present practice at St. Luke of including children in the presence of their parents or guardians in the sacrament, whether or not the children have been baptized.

Dual Meanings of “the Body of Christ”

The “Body of Christ” has two meanings within the church, and those meanings are inextricably bound together. On the one hand, the Body of Christ is associated with Jesus’ identification of the bread he shared with his disciples as his body (Mt 26.26, Mk 14.22, Lk 22.19, cf. Jn 6.51). On the other hand, Paul uses the phrase to refer to the church, Christ’s body in the world (Rom 12.5, I Cor 12.12, cf. Eph 4.15-16). Similarly, the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper occurs only within the body of believers or the church, and the church does not exist without the celebration of the sacrament.

Several women in a Bible study expressed the connection St. Luke worshipers feel as being a part of the living Body of Christ. One spoke of communion as “a time to see who’s in church, too. You see who’s coming up and you say, ‘Oh good. They’re here.’ That may not be holy, but it’s honest.” Another said, “When you see people go to the altar, you start praying for them if you know them personally. When the choir comes down, I always thank them *en masse* for their...giving of their time and their service to this...congregation that gets to hear you.” A

third said, “It is a good opportunity as people go by to think about them and what they’re going through, and it’s amazing how many of them, I know something about them that needs prayer.”³⁷

The way Christians define the Body of Christ varies across traditions and denominations. Richard was not raised in a faith tradition, but he often accompanied his childhood friend to his family’s Roman Catholic mass. “I remember observing how reverently the elements were treated. And I asked about that, and it was explained to me that the reason was, that during the Mass, this is not just a piece of bread and a cup of wine, this actually *becomes* the body and blood of Christ...And so I was intrigued to that and drawn to the idea that this is something extraordinary...something that transcends human understanding. Yet I was forbidden to participate, so I had very mixed emotions. I was intrigued by the reverence it was treated with but taken aback by my being barred from participating in it. That was my first real introduction to Christianity—what I thought Christianity was about. It was this very exclusive club.”³⁸

The celebration of the Eucharist can also expand the identity of the worshipping body of Christ to include those who have died. Rachel and Stephen, a Liberian immigrant, are a married couple. Rachel, who is African-American, was born in the United States. Both expressed a strong awareness of the generations who preceded them into God’s heavenly kingdom. Rachel said, “I was always taught that you have a cloud of witnesses, the ancestors who are interceding for you, so you can bear [your suffering], because you’ve already been prayed through it.” Stephen added, “God’s prepared a path, reserved for you. And they’re always around you. It feels like

37. Group interview #1, September 7, 2017.

38. Group interview #3, September 19, 2017.

they are much closer during communion. You are acknowledging that Christ's spirit is around you. And you take in more of that spirit, and Christ's spirit engulfs you."³⁹

Interviewees were almost universal in having a high Christology when thinking of the Eucharist. Many spoke of a physical presence of Christ in the elements of the Lord's Supper. Mark recalls, "We would all file down up front, you'd have a place where you'd kneel down, just like at St. Luke, with little knee pads, and there'd be a little bench and a little table...An elder would come by and say, "this is God's body, this is the bread," and um, yeah, that's how it worked."⁴⁰ There is at St. Luke a common understanding of Christ being physically present in the Eucharist, as opposed to symbolically present.

Expanding the invitation to share in the Eucharistic Body of Christ (the bread) may help some worshipers feel more included in the corporate Body of Christ. For years, holiness and exclusivity continued to be wed in Richard's mind: "I was first struck by this reverence with which [the sacrament] was treated. The awe, to watch the head of that particular denomination go on his knees before this, told me that there was something special going on here. But why was I barred from participation?...If it's all that special, why don't I get to be a part?" It was not until many years later, when he worshipped at a United Methodist Church, that the tension was resolved for him: "Here was the ceremony and here was the liturgy and here was the reverence—without the exclusion...That communion could be this awe-inspiring, reverent understanding for us but yet is available for everyone. And that was why I became a Methodist! There I found what I wanted: the ceremony and the reverence and the liturgy and the awe—but

39. Individual interview #17, November 12, 2017.

40. Individual interview #13, September 20, 2017.

the welcoming to all. It was like this perfect synthesis between the high Roman mass and the you know, kind of hang out together thing.”⁴¹

Being a part of the body of Christ in worship and through the Sacrament is also a witness or encouragement to fellow worshipers. One woman said, “I’ll tell you one of the most moving things. (My husband) and I still talk about this, when (their friend) was very sick. She came to church, and when she went down that aisle to communion, I’m telling you, it was moving. We all knew what she was going through, and she was *there*. And that was important to me.”⁴²

Edward, a lifelong Methodist, had a similar feeling, “Something that really means a lot to me about communion is when you have these people who come down who barely can walk. They barely can get down there, and when they get down there, they’re going to kneel down, if there’s any way that they can, even though they barely can get back up. That’s touching to me.”⁴³

Interviews revealed that although worshipers had a strong identification with the broken bread as the Body of Christ, they have less of an understanding of the shared Eucharist as forming the worshipping community. Eugene Peterson asserts that understanding that relationship is less important than continuing to celebrate the sacrament: “Considering the overall faithlessness and forgetfulness characterizing Christians through the centuries—the general squalor of our conduct, our propensity for heresy—one of the truly incredible exceptions is the persistence with which this meal has been eaten... The power of this Eucharistic meal to keep us participants in the essentials of salvation is impressive. This is the primary way that

41. Group interview #3, September 19, 2017.

42. Group interview #1, September 7, 2017.

43. Individual interview #5, September 6, 2017.

Christians remember, receive, and share the meaning of our salvation.”⁴⁴ Arun Jones adds, “the power of the Eucharistic meal has been to keep Christians bound together as the body of Christ,”⁴⁵ even when they may not acknowledge that power.

In a lecture marking the publication of his book *The Revelatory Body*, Luke Timothy Johnson shared a story of the power of the Eucharist in shaping Christian character. He said that while none of the Irish and Italian Catholic firefighters who entered the burning World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, might have been able to articulate a theology of the Eucharist, all of them had been raised on the words “This is my body, given for you” all of their lives. When the time came for them to commit their bodies to the flames, they never paused.⁴⁶ The power of the Lord’s Supper to shape lives cannot be underestimated.

What Does Kneeling for the Eucharist mean for Worshipers at St. Luke?

Kneeling is a posture that is associated in Scripture with adoration or honor (II Ch 29.29, Est 3.2, Mt 27.29, where the soldiers kneel in mocking adoration), prayer (Lk 22.41, Acts 20.36, 21.5), and supplication (I Sa 25.24, Mt 8.2, 9.18). The man who sought relief for his epileptic son is recorded by Matthew’s gospel as kneeling before Jesus (Mt 17.14-15). In Mark’s gospel, “a man with a skin disease approached Jesus, fell to his knees, and begged, ‘If you want, you can make me clean’” (1.40). It might be argued that those petitioners did not understand themselves as praying. However, since the gospels present Jesus as God’s Son, a petition directed to the person of Jesus is effectively a prayer.

44. Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 156-157.

45. Arun Jones, e-mail message to author, December 20, 2017.

46. Luke Timothy Johnson, “The Revelatory Body,” (lecture to Committee of 100, Candler School of Theology, Emory University, April 16, 2016). This story more than any other cemented my belief that the Eucharist has the power to shape the behavior of worshipers at St. Luke.

When worshipers are invited to share in the Lord's Supper in the St. Luke sanctuary, they are invited to come forward at the indication of the ushers and kneel or stand in prayer at the chancel rail for as long as they like. When they are ready to receive the bread, they cup their hands and receive the bread into their hands. They may then take one of the little cups of juice from the rack in front of them. Those who are unable to come forward are served in their pew by one of the pastors. The association with kneeling at the services in the sanctuary is so strong that some worshipers who have physical limitations would rather be served in their pews than to come forward and have to stand.

Clergy may think of "traditional" in terms of the words that are said during the Great Thanksgiving. For the worshiper, tradition may mean "what we've done before." Those who participate in the 9:00 a.m. contemporary service did not describe their communion service as "traditional" even though it uses the same language as the sanctuary services. At the 9:00 a.m. and Spanish-speaking services, the sacrament is offered by intinction, or dipping a piece of bread in a common cup. Worshipers are standing but are invited to kneel at the rail or return to their seats and continue to pray after they have received the bread and cup. Debra described "all the children running everywhere" as part of her experience of communion at the 9:00 a.m. service and spoke with some wistfulness about receiving communion while kneeling, as in the sanctuary services, even though she much prefers the worship experience at the contemporary service.⁴⁷

The positive emotional connection St. Luke worshippers have with kneeling may be connected with our evangelical roots. Anglican theologian Walter Lowrie fervently asserts that "kneeling is not the only posture appropriate to prayer" and decried the "Evangelical" tendency

47. Individual interview #4, September 5, 2017. Interviewees who attend the contemporary service spoke positively of the convenience of the time (right before Sunday School), the casual atmosphere, and the still-warm Golden Donuts (a local delicacy), offered before the service.

of some priests, who “are all the time flopping upon their knees, to the secret vexation of the congregation, which is not always ready to accept at its face value this superfluous exhibition of fervent piety...[sinking] down on both knees and [remaining] there for an appreciable time...as though they were engaged in prayer.” He insists on celebrants standing erect, “since the third century...it was customary for the clergy as well as the people to stand throughout the Liturgy...and until the ninth century at least the people received the communion standing and bending reverently.”⁴⁸

Kneeling represents a conscious choice for Olivia and Patricia, who giggled when they learned that, in some congregations, the elements were passed in the pews. They found the idea of not coming forward to receive patently ridiculous; sitting implied passivity to them. To come forward implies an effort of the will: “You have to make the decision to do it.”⁴⁹

Other respondents agreed with the importance of coming forward and kneeling in prayer. Jeanne, who attends the contemporary service where the sacrament is shared by intinction, described the feeling she has from kneeling in prayer as “very comforting...I feel at peace...Other than communion, once a month, we really don’t go to the altar much. In some churches they’re used to going to the altar when they get to church, and like, Episcopalians and Catholics, maybe they have kneelers and they kneel...I don’t think I’d ever take it for granted if we did it more often...Afterwards, I am at peace. I really feel good...about praying and about being at the altar.”⁵⁰ The strong positive association with kneeling is so important that portable kneelers were built for use in the multi-purpose room so that the experience of those sharing in communion would not lack that aspect of worship.

48. Walter Lowrie, *The Lord’s Supper and the Liturgy* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1943), 70, 71.

49. Olivia, Individual interview #15, October 26, 2017.

50. Individual interview #11, September 14, 2017. She uses the word “altar” to describe the chancel rail.

A group that was interviewed asserted that kneeling connected them to a tradition at St. Luke. One woman said, “There’s just something about being on your knees.” Another woman asked, “You think it’s more reverent, more submissive, in a way?” The first woman said, “To me, it is, even though I know it’s not.” A third found kneeling “humbling,” and the fourth woman said that “going up to the altar⁵¹ and praying, you’re joined with the whole community, and with the saints who’ve gone before. I think of my husband, my mother and father, and we’re all joined together. It’s a special time.”⁵²

For Lorraine, who worships at the 11:00 a.m. service, kneeling connects her to the servant-hood of Christ. The pastor must lean over to serve the worshiper. She said that the most significant part of communion is when “I am praying and put my hands and I look in your eyes, and the pastor smiles and puts the bread in, and again, it’s that tangible...that’s my best part...To me, that pastor is touching me and saying, ‘we’re all the same.’ I’m serving you, as Jesus washed the feet and served his disciples. The pastors are down there, and we’re eye to eye almost. And we’re being served...[In] every pair of eyes, I see Jesus. I see love coming out of those eyes as someone is serving the supper.”⁵³ For Lorraine, pastors are cast in the roles of servants every time she receives the bread and cup.

Taylor Burton-Edwards blogged on the topic, “Why do we kneel for Holy Communion?” as his alter-ego “Liturgy Man.” Burton-Edwards refers first to John Wesley’s 1784 Sunday Service, in which he gave this instruction: “Then shall the Minister first receive the Communion in both kinds himself, and then proceed to deliver the same to the other Ministers in like manner,

51. Another instance of using the word “altar” for the chancel rail.

52. Group interview #1, September 7, 2017.

53. Individual interview #12, September 19, 2017.

(if any be present) and after that to the People also, in order, into their Hands.”⁵⁴ There is no mention of kneeling here, yet there very explicitly was a mention of kneeling in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England, on which Wesley’s rubric was based. There, the communicants received the elements meekly kneeling.

The Methodists seem to alternate between explicit mention of kneeling (in the 1905 and 1945 orders of service) and no mention (in the 1935 and 1965 orders). Burton-Edwards wryly notes that “the people called Methodist have not been of one mind on the issue of kneeling. Wesley didn’t seem to think it mattered, and the current ritual doesn’t mention it.”⁵⁵

While kneeling is nowhere dictated as a requisite for faith or practice, the action has a strong positive association for St. Luke worshipers, who associate it with submission or obedience. Perhaps because of Scriptural teaching, perhaps because “we’ve always done it this way,” or perhaps, as Edward indicated, kneeling is significant because it is foreign to our everyday behavior. When asked to name the most significant part of the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, Edward responded quickly, “Kneeling at the altar.”⁵⁶ He had already indicated that kneeling implied submission, so when asked to elaborate, he said, “You know, I don’t kneel down too often when I pray, and I don’t think a lot of us do, and [communion is] one of the few

54. Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America with Other Occasional Services* (London: n.p., 1784), 136. Mr. Wesley’s punctuation and capitalization are retained in this quotation.

55. Taylor Burton-Edwards, “Liturgy Man: Do We Need to Kneel to Receive Holy Communion?,” November 1, 2017, accessed November 11, 2017. <https://blog.umcdiscipleship.org/liturgy-man-do-we-need-to-kneel-to-receive-holy-communion/>.

56. The use of the word “altar” to describe the chancel rail reinforces the idea that the bread and juice shared there are the physical shed blood and broken body of Jesus. The Roman Catholic style of architecture in the sanctuary and chapel gives the visual focus to the communion table, not the pulpit. As those structures were the only locations for worship at St. Luke until the Ministry Center was built in 2004, the architecture of those buildings may have reinforced a more Catholic interpretation of the Eucharist. Worshipers’ high Christology may, in turn, affect their opinions about what is appropriate for the physical structure or appearance of the sanctuary or worship center.

times I think...we do. So that's why I say that. I may be wrong, but I'd be willing to bet money on it."⁵⁷

Conclusion

Positive Assessments

The practice of the Eucharist is like a living organism in that it has a dynamic relationship with the environment in which it exists. Asking the congregation questions about the meaning of the sacrament revealed the enlivening relationship that the congregation's participation in the Lord's Supper has on them intellectually and theologically. My initial belief that the actions or physical comportment of the worshipers were especially significant proved to be only partially supported by the interviews. The other aspects of communion that were especially significant to St. Luke worshipers had to do with the communal nature of the sacrament.⁵⁸ Some worshipers had strong feelings about kneeling or having the bread placed in their hands, but for most of the interviewees, the experience of corporate worship overshadowed their individual actions.

Diverse theologies are represented among the interviewees: pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic and Pentecostal, Church of the Brethren and Presbyterian, Church of Christ, Episcopal, United Methodist, and Southern Baptist. Despite the different denominational roots, they share a high Christology and a common belief in human sinfulness.

The interviewees' responses indicate that they reflect deeply on their involvement with the sacrament, its meaning and its purpose in and for their lives. Only one person interviewed

57. Individual interview #5, September 6, 2017.

58. Arun Jones, e-mail message to author, March 21, 2018. Dr. Jones drew the distinction between meaning-laden actions and "other aspects of communion that were also very significant...[which] had to do with the communal nature of the sacrament (children, meaning of body of Christ)."

seemed not to reflect on the meaning of the sacrament. His response may have been shaped by the location of our conversation, which was in a public space.

Those interviewed seemed to enjoy the conversation, and with the one exception mentioned above, expressed a desire to have more conversations of this kind. One group suggested that I do a follow-up study of baptism. Continued conversations become especially important when mishearing or misapprehension of the sacrament is occurring, as in Debra's recollection that pastors say that the elements are the actual Body and Blood of Christ.⁵⁹

The process of asking the congregation questions about the Lord's Supper seemed to empower respondents to engage pastoral leadership, pushing back on aspects of the sacrament that they had learned about. For example, when a guest preacher spoke about the reciprocal forgiveness that is offered before the Great Thanksgiving, one group pointed out that phrase was not always included in the practice of St. Luke. Immediately following that conversation and at every service in the year thereafter, that oversight has been corrected.

What is Missing?

Pastors and worship leaders at St. Luke are missing an opportunity to use the sacrament of Holy Communion as a faith-shaping tool. We already preach appropriate sermons and craft appropriate liturgies, but we have not matched that with appropriate education and conversation to build on and enrich the experience of the congregation. Especially, we are not involving children with their families in learning about the meaning of the Lord's Supper. The conversations indicate that worshipers have strong memories of receiving the sacrament as children. Evaluating the participation of children with their families in worship can ensure that

59. Individual interview #4, September 5, 2017.

we are providing children and their families opportunities to explore and learn about the sacrament.

Twelve-year-old Olivia gives one example of the kind of thought some children are giving to the sacrament. She regards partaking of Holy Communion as essential to being a follower of Jesus: “Just because if you’re a Christian, you have to be renewed. And that’s pretty much what communion is to me, is being renewed for your sins. And forgiven. You still do bad things, you just don’t think about it because you are little... It’s what Christians do.”⁶⁰ What Olivia regards as being expected of Christians speaks to the function of the church and the function of the sacrament, they form one another, an example of the dual understandings of the Body of Christ.

Members of the congregation are more thoughtful about the meaning of the sacrament than we pastors may give them credit for being. At the same time, what they are thinking about does not necessarily accord with Church or biblical tradition. This lively discontinuity indicates the continued need for education of and conversation with members of the congregation.

While most interviewees regarded communion as a memorial, some did express a strong affinity for the concept of the “communion of the saints.” Glenn and his wife lost their daughter to a catastrophic illness. Decades later, Glenn lost his wife as well. A life-long Methodist and regular worshipper, he often weeps as he receives the sacrament, and believes that, in the Lord’s Supper, he is really in the presence not only of Christ but also of his late wife and their daughter.⁶¹

60. Individual interview #15, October 26, 2017.

61. Individual interview #8, September 7, 2017.

A major omission in the expressed theologies of Eucharist at St. Luke is any eschatological vision. All of the interviewees connected the Eucharist with Jesus' Last Supper, often conflating "Last Supper" with "Lord's Supper." Not one spoke of it in terms of a foretaste of a heavenly banquet, what Geoffrey Wainwright speaks of as the eschatological dimension of Christ's teaching about eating and drinking.⁶²

What Next?

Members of St. Luke expressed the belief that the Eucharist connects them to one another and to God; they understand how sharing the Body of Christ in the Eucharist shapes them as the Body of Christ as a congregation. Don Saliers explains the dual function of the Eucharist and the congregation as the Body of Christ this way: "...[The] Sunday Eucharist was literally a remembering: that is, a putting together of the body of believers who were to be Christ for the world."⁶³ We are sacramentally connected with other members of the body of Christ, both within the Church Militant (the church on earth) and the Church Triumphant (the church in heaven).

At the same time, we as a congregation do not regularly proclaim this truth at either the Eucharist or at funerals. As Rachel and Stephen's interview showed, there is an African and African-American tradition that points to the encouragement offered by the "great cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12.1). Teaching and preaching on the eschatological aspect of Holy Communion and including Holy Communion in funerals would begin to remedy this lack in our congregational theology.

62. Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 26-27. Wainwright's examples of the future feast include the inclusion of the Gentiles (Mt 8.11 and Lk 13.29), the Beatitudes' promise of future filling for the righteous (Lk 6.21a and Mt 5.6), and the reward to faithful servants upon the return of the master (Lk 12.37b).

63. Don E. Saliers, *Worship and Spirituality*, 2nd ed. Spirituality and the Christian Life Series (Akron, Ohio: OSL Publications, 1996), 64.

Lawrence Hull Stookey says that while we are clearly instructed by both Jesus and Paul (Lk 22.19, I Cor 11.24) to “do this,” we are not told how to think: “The Sacrament is primarily actions done, not concepts contemplated. ... Through these actions, the fullness of Christ’s work is proclaimed with evangelical power.”⁶⁴ However, as demonstrated by their conversations, St. Luke members are thinking about what they are doing in the Eucharist, and fulfilling Paul’s instruction to “remember all my instructions, and...hold on to the traditions exactly as I handed them on to you” (I Cor 11.2 ff). They are reflecting and remembering in creative and sometimes unorthodox ways.

Pastors and educators at St. Luke can build on this established pattern of inquisitive reflection by offering opportunities for worshipers to talk with one another and with pastors. Not only would it help answer questions and correct confusion, it would provide opportunities for pastors to learn generative and symbolic language that already has meaning for members of the congregation, as in Késare’s love for the Eucharist which makes it the most important part of worship.

These interviews indicated that the worshipping congregations at St. Luke love participating in the Lord’s Supper, reflect on it both during and after the celebration, and enjoy learning more about the history and purpose of the sacrament. Teaching the significance of the sacrament is not only doing (orthopraxy) or talking (orthodoxy), it is talking about the doing.⁶⁵

The comments of children and the memories adults have of their participation in the Eucharist as children indicate that the celebration of the sacrament is foundational in the life of St. Luke worshipers. James Fowler’s teaching on the process of the formation of faith and the

64. Lawrence Hull Stookey, *Eucharist: Christ’s Feast with the Church*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 29, 31-32.

65. Group interview #5, November 5, 2017. One of the interviewees, an obstetrician-gynecologist, says that she was taught surgery in the “watch one, do one, teach one” method. Surgeons take muscle memory seriously.

testimony of the interviewees supports the inclusion of children with their parents in worship. If parents are their children's first models of how to understand and talk about God, then frequent worship as a family is critical to developing that religious vocabulary and the muscle memory of participating in the sacrament.

Don Saliers illustrates the realization of the Eucharist in the life of the Church using the "how do you get to Carnegie Hall" joke (practice, practice, practice!). Saliers argues that the practice of the Eucharist ingrains muscle memory in the Body of Christ, a corporate and individual realization of the incarnate presence of Christ.⁶⁶ This muscle memory is not only physical. It incorporates thoughts and actions and theologies and memories altogether as the worshipper participates in the Eucharist.⁶⁷

The individual witness of worshipers has a reflexive effect on the larger body in the same way that worshipping with the body affects individuals. As Edward and the woman in the group discussion indicated, these individuals may not be aware of their influence on the larger body.⁶⁸ Their struggle to worship in the way they always have signals belief that participating in the Eucharist is vitally important, and if important to them, important to all of us. Learning more about the reflexive connection between the individual experience of the Eucharist and the corporate practice will enrich the future worship life of St. Luke.

What can be learned about the meaning of the Lord's Supper by listening to worshipers? Jesus models asking his followers questions.⁶⁹ Asking questions and listening to the worshipers'

66. Don E. Saliers, "Elemental Practices: Or, How to be a Doctor of Ministry" (lecture, Doctor of Ministry classes, Candler School of Theology Teaching Chapel, Emory University, August 14, 2017).

67. Arun Jones, e-mail message to author, September 28, 2017. I am indebted to Dr. Jones for pointing out that muscle memory is not merely physical.

68. Group interview #1, September 7, 2017.

answers offers insights to pastors for future preaching and teaching and demonstrate a respect for the experiences and insights of worshipers. For this writer, the responses of the interviewees provide an encouraging vision of a thoughtful, reflective, and engaged Body of Christ who look forward to participating in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Their responses give me great hope for the future of the Church.⁷⁰

Appendix 1: Questions and Code for Interviewees

Each interview followed a general guideline (below), but also followed the lead of the interviewees. Interviews with individuals lasted 15-45 minutes; group interviews lasted 30-60 minutes. Interviews with couples were considered "individual" for the purposes of this record.

<p>Description of group/individual Date Length of conversation Recorded (yes/no)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is your earliest memory of Holy Communion? 2. What actions did the pastor take during the sacrament? What did he or she do? 3. What actions did the congregation take during the sacrament? 4. During the Lord's Supper, what do you think is the most important action of the pastor? 5. What does that action mean to you? 6. During the Lord's Supper, what (Mk 8:17) most "important action you make?" (Mk 10:51) are only two examples. 7. What does that action mean to you? 8. What one word describes the Lord's Supper? 9. What one action describes the Lord's Supper? 10. What else do I need to know about what is most meaningful about your practice of the Eucharist? 	<p>70. The three years of this Doctor of Ministry program and the friendships formed therein also give me hope for the future of the Church. The death of our colleague Perry Hunter, early in our process, broke me open to my need to reach a new line of inquiry, and what was most meaningful was a prayerfully practiced example of what 21st-century Eucharist can be when founded in Scripture and guided by the Holy Spirit. Conversations with Arun Jones, my advisor, were invaluable in turning my focus towards how the stories of St. Luke members' experience of the Eucharist can enlarge and enhance the church's understanding of what is being effectively communicated and what needs to be done to better celebrate the sacrament at St. Luke. I am indebted to his probing questions and his joyful appreciation of the Lord's Supper. Additionally, Sarah Bogue winnowed through the chaff of my ideas and found a few grains which could be planted. This work would not have been possible without their help. My husband, a "recovering Episcopalian," proof-read and criticized and photographed worship services and was patient throughout my insomnia and anxiety. The congregation and staff of St. Luke United Methodist were unfailingly supportive and generous. They shared their thoughts and were kind enough to continue to ask about my progress. I am especially grateful to the women who meet with me for Bible study every Thursday at noon. You were the first guinea pigs, the final readers, and a constant support. Thank you all.</p>
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It became apparent almost immediately that numbers 2-7 and 9 were terrible questions as they limited the response of interviewees to things they had not really thought about. Focusing on the memories was more helpful. Questions 1, 8, and 10 allowed more conversation.

Names are changed for the purposes of anonymity, a mutual agreement made orally between the interviewee(s) and me prior to the beginning of each interview. The names assigned to the individuals designate alphabetically the order in which the individuals were interviewed. Andy is the first interviewee, Brenda is the second, and so forth. While I did not examine whether gender identity affects the understanding or practice of the Eucharist, the names have traditional gender associations and are assigned to the interviewees according to their public presentations of gender identification. The reader may assume that the cultural-majority gender identification for a name applies to each interviewee, and corresponding pronouns are used. All interviews were recorded with subjects' permission and were transcribed by the author. The individual interviews were recorded as follows:

1. "Andy," September 5, 2017, 9:30 a.m., St. Luke United Methodist Church, Columbus, Georgia.
2. "Brenda," September 5, 2017, 1:15 p.m., St. Luke.
3. "Charlotte," September 5, 2017, 2:15 p.m., St. Luke.
4. "Debra," September 5, 2017, 3:30 p.m., St. Luke.
5. "Edward," September 6, 2017, 5:30 p.m., St. Luke.
6. "Frank," September 7, 2017, 2:00 p.m., a local restaurant.
7. "Glenn," September 7, 2017, 3:30 p.m., St. Luke.
8. "Hattie," September 7, 2017, 5:15 p.m., St. Luke.
9. "Irene," September 14, 2017, 1:15 p.m., St. Luke.
10. "Jeanne," September 14, 2017, 3:00 p.m., her home.
11. "Késare," September 14, 2017, 4:30 p.m., St. Luke.
12. "Lorraine," September 19, 2017, 1:00 p.m., her workplace.
13. "Mark," September 20, 2017, 12:00 noon, his workplace.
14. "Nancy," September 21, 2017, 3:00 p.m., her workplace.
15. "Olivia" and "Patricia," October 26, 2017, 3:30 p.m., St. Luke.
16. "Quinelle," October 31, 2017, 10:00 a.m., St. Luke.
17. "Rachel" and "Stephen," November 12, 2017, 10:00 a.m., St. Luke.

The group interviews were recorded as follows.

1. Group Interview #1, September 7, 2017, 12:00 noon, St. Luke.
2. Group Interview #2, September 17, 2017, 10:00 a.m., St. Luke.
3. Group Interview #3, September 19, 2017, 10:15 a.m., St. Luke.
4. Group Interview #4, October 15, 2017, 10:00 a.m., St. Luke.
5. Group Interview #5, November 5, 2017, 10:00 a.m., St. Luke.

Appendix 2: Brief description of St. Luke United Methodist Church history and buildings

St. Luke United Methodist Church, Columbus, Georgia, membership 3,500+, has four public worship services on Sunday: two “traditional” English-only services at 8:30 and 11:00 a.m. in the sanctuary, one “contemporary” English-only service in a large dining hall at 9:00 a.m., and one Spanish-only service at 12:20 p.m. in a chapel. There are also chapel services during the week for the schools, weekday services with the Respite Care Ministry, and Sunday evening worship services for middle and high school students and for college students. Those services are open to constituents of those ministries but are not public. Attendance at the Sunday services averages around 800 total. I regularly participate in the two “traditional” services.

St. Luke’s 1900 sanctuary and attached buildings burned to the ground in a fire on Mother’s Day, 1942. That structure, built on the “Akron Plan,” was replaced in 1947 with an elegant Georgian style building with a Latin cruciform floor plan in the nave. A central aisle leads to an elevated altar affixed to the east wall. The split chancel, tiled in white marble with the choir on either side, ensures an unobstructed view of the altar from the congregation. Side aisles

extend from the transepts to the narthex down the length of the nave. An elevated pulpit on the north or gospel side of the chancel is paired with a slightly lower lectern on the south or epistle side. A chancel railing with a kneeler tiled in marble surrounds the chancel area, with a “gate” or opening in the center. The kneelers are covered with pads embroidered by St. Luke members with Christian symbols. Needlepoint banners depicting the season of the Christian year and symbols of Christianity and United Methodism flank both sides of the chancel rail. Eight stained glass windows, commissioned for the sanctuary from Willet-Hauser, trace the history of faith from Creation through the Methodist movement in the American colonies. The sanctuary seats around 750 people.

The Georgian-style Turner Chapel, where the Spanish-speaking service is conducted, was constructed in 1962 as part of an expansion of St. Luke’s education wing and can comfortably seat 80 people. A Palladian window featuring the figure of Jesus dominates the west-facing wall. Symbols of the church and of the disciples surround the figure of Christ. More stained glass windows on the north and south walls illustrate various psalms.

The dining hall where the contemporary service is conducted was built in 2004 and comfortably seats 600. There is no religious art attached to the walls or windows, but drop-down screens in the hall provide illustrations, videos, Bible passages, song lyrics, and the rubrics for the sacraments.

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