Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis or dissertation 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 thesis or dissertation 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 thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

Signature:

_____	_____
Kenneth Bowie	4/29/2025

Corporate Preaching: Reclaiming the Ministry of Proclamation as the Work of the People

By

Kenneth Scott Bowie
Doctor of Ministry

Candler School of Theology

_____

Thomas W. Elliott, Jr.
Project Consultant

_____

Roger Nam
Director of DMin Program

Abstract

Corporate Preaching: Reclaiming the Ministry of Proclamation as the Work of the People
By Kenneth Scott Bowie

Acknowledging the challenges posed by the conventional form of sermon-as-monologue, particularly for Millennial and Gen-Z cohorts who value inclusivity, collaboration, and two-way conversation, this essay explores the development, implementation, and evaluation of a model for Corporate Preaching within a singular ecclesial context consisting of St. Peter's United Church of Christ and Holy Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church of South Bend, Indiana. A form of proclamation by which all members of the worshipping assembly are offered an opportunity for direct, immediate, verbal engagement in the preaching moment itself, Corporate Preaching reclaims the ministry of proclamation as the work of all the people, not just the pastor.

Designed as an experiment of three iterations of Corporate Preaching, each iteration was guided by a well-crafted prompt for reflection that encouraged participants to share personal stories aligning with themes from scripture. Over time, the congregation became more comfortable with the form and more confident in participating in preaching, as evidenced by ever-new voices added to preaching events.

Several insights were gleaned from this experiment. A well-crafted reflection prompt is vital in eliciting effective participation. Additionally, church architecture, community practice, and technological infrastructure, such as microphone use and live streaming video camera placement, affected degree of participation and level of engagement. Finally, each sermon assumed an episodic form of loosely connected participant narratives, linked one to the other by an idea derived from scripture, a consequence of the congregation's custom of preaching-as-storytelling.

While the lessons learned are unique to this context, other communities employing the model should consider contingencies for moments of extended silence or off-topic tangents and expectations for proper behavior and respectful speech. Furthermore, Corporate Preaching takes a form that follows the customary function of a congregation's sermon-making, whether didactic, expository, or narrative.

The study concludes by challenging other faith communities to experiment with Corporate Preaching, refining the model to suit their particular contexts. This approach to preaching democratizes the sermon event for settings where power and authority are problematic thereby reclaiming the ministry of proclamation as the work of the people.

Corporate Preaching: Reclaiming the Ministry of Proclamation as the Work of the People

By

Kenneth Scott Bowie

University of Notre Dame, MA, 1997
Vanderbilt University, MDiv, 1991
Millsaps College, BS, 1983

Project Consultant: Thomas W. Elliott, Jr., DMin

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
2025

Introduction

Since the time of Augustine (354-430CE), preaching has been characterized by the solitary orator making use of persuasive speech to convince hearers to adopt certain beliefs or actions and to disavow others (Dunn 1998, 2018). Readers familiar with research on preaching well know that, over the past half-century or more, the fifteen to twenty to thirty-minute sermon-as-monologue has been criticized for being, if not ineffective, at least problematic. To the extent that this paradigm of sermon-making in mainline Protestant traditions (*cf.,* Lantzer 2012, 1) encodes either a hierarchy of authority [1] or a differentiation in roles, [2] it is particularly problematic for "Millennial" and "Generation Z" cohorts. [3] These labels describe individuals who are, on the whole, suspicious of hierarchy and structures of authority, while valuing teamwork and inclusiveness. This generationally defining ethos has consequences for preaching, namely that the sermon-as-monologue is, at best, neither meaningful nor engaging or, at worst, odious and alienating. Although "generational categories are not scientifically defined" and "can lead to stereotypes and oversimplification" (Dimock 2025), what national research reveals about these cohorts is suggestive for reconceiving the ministry of proclamation: they "… appreciate two-way conversations where they're invited to think out loud with leaders and come to conclusions together" (Linkins 2023; *cf.,* Rainer III 2011). These constituencies do not simply appreciate conversation. They expect it!

---

[1] *E.g.,* "God/Scripture/Church (dogma) /preacher/congregation" (McClure 1995, 33).

[2] *I.e., "*The preacher speaks, the people listen. He (sic) is active, they are passive" (Howe 1967, 35; *cf.,* Rose 1997, 15).

[3] "Millennial" names that cohort born between 1981 and 1996, while "Generation Z" ("Gen-Z") refers to the following cohort born between 1997 and 2012. Both constitute today's youngest adults (Dimock 2019).

Apart from a trio of Roman Catholic scholars in the late 1960s (Bleidorn 1967; Cleator 1968; Leliaert 1967) and at least one practitioner from the Emerging Church Movement of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Pagitt 2005, 2014; see also Bohannon 2006; Gatzke 2006; Graves 2009; contrast Holland 2006), theorists critical of the monological paradigm have been loathe to consider as viable the direct, immediate, and verbal engagement of the assembly in the preaching moment — *i.e.,* what is here termed "corporate preaching." Perusal of the literature reveals broad agreement that proclamation can in no way include voices other than a single cleric or otherwise authorized preacher, maintaining axiomatically that "(v)erbal response from the congregation is not possible or desirable during the sermon" (Howe 1967, 86). From the reluctant to the adamant, [4] this broad agreement, while encoding a postmodern commitment opposing "a hegemonic rhetoric and epistemologies of power" (Jacobsen 2018, 33), contends that the imbalance of authority and power can be overcome within "single-party preaching" (McClure 1995) by an empathetic and attentive preacher who, through intentional collaboration with laity, can transform the laity's concerns and convictions from prior conversation into profound proclamation (Rose 1997; McClure 2004; Allen, Jr. 2005; Hannan 2021; *cf.,* Reid 1967).

Being less agnostic about the viability of corporate preaching, as well as less sanguine about the potential for conversation to correct imbalances of authority and power, I here explore reconceiving the preaching event precisely as *dialogue — viz.,* as contemporaneous interaction between homilist and congregation — with an eye toward constructing a model

[4] *Cf.,* the equivocal "I'm not quite ready to suggest that the congregation members replace the preacher in the middle of the sermon" (Hannan 2021, 67-68) to the decidedly more definitive "I am not suggesting that preachers actually hold conversations from the pulpit" (McClure 1995, 48, *cf.,* 8). See the equally unequivocal assessments of Rose (1997, 95-96) and Allen, Jr. (2005, 16).

of preaching that validates the ministry of proclamation as true liturgy, the work of the people. Constructed, implemented, and evaluated within a particular context — *i.e.,* St. Peter's United Church of Christ (UCC) and Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (ELCA), two distinct congregations affiliated with two different ecclesial traditions doing ministry and mission as one community — the model serves not simply as proof of concept but, more importantly, as prototype to be tested, revised, and reformulated for use in other parochial settings where power and authority are problematic, if not contested.

Ecclesial Context

History

Located since the late 1950s in a midtown area equidistant from the city centers of South Bend and Mishawaka, Indiana, a conurbation of some 325,000 people, St. Peter's occupies a spacious tract along a major transportation artery on which more than 27,000 cars a day travel (Parrott 2017). Reaching its zenith in the mid-1980s, decline followed in a way familiar to many in mainline Protestantism (*cf.,* Appendix: Tables. Table 1). This decline coincided not only with deindustrialization (*cf.,* Knauss and Matuszak 1993) but also with white flight from former inner city, ethnically European enclaves to racially homogenous suburban bedroom communities. For St. Peter's, decline was exacerbated in the decade before and after the millennium by the increasing secularization of American culture and the difficulty of the congregation's pastors and leaders to modulate its witness of faith.

By the time I became pastor in 2011, St. Peter's was at its nadir, having declined to an average weekly worshipping congregation of seventy-six. In the mid-2010s, after committing to extending radical welcome and full inclusion to the LGBTQ+ community, the congregation began to experience modest growth. In addition to members of the LGBTQ+ community, three

constituencies found their way to the congregation: 1) persons economically marginalized, either through disability or dearth of education or opportunity, who responded to the congregation's welcoming ethos; 2) heterosexual, cis-gender families with children, for whom experience of a diverse community of faith was supremely valued; and 3) persons seeking refuge from a toxic brand of Christian faith whose personal experience of the Divine requires the ecclesial community to be inclusive of all, especially those identifying as LGBTQ+.

These four groups, along with legacy members of St. Peter's, constituted the community when, first in 2018, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church and, then in 2021, First Baptist Church, an American Baptist congregation (ABC), approached St. Peter's with inquiries about sharing ministry. Both congregations had experienced the same decline and effects of increasing secularization as did St. Peter's. These inquiries and subsequent conversations were made possible by the mutual recognition of clerical orders and sacramental validity, as well as by common confessing of faith among the respective communions. While Holy Trinity and First Baptist considered the same menu of options — *e.g.,* closure, merger, consolidation — each chose a different configuration for shared ministry with St. Peter's. Holy Trinity and St. Peter's agreed to continue as two separate congregations with respect to polity and denominational affiliation but united as one community in worship, ministry, and mission. First Baptist, however, chose not to continue as a separate ecclesial body and, instead, consolidated membership and assets into St. Peter's.

Demography

Demography at the time of finalization of the new ecclesial configuration in 2022 reveals salient features of the community. Total participants numbered 326, among which St. Peter's predominated: 72.7% of members derived from the St. Peter's contingent and 14.4% continued

to hold membership in Holy Trinity, while 12.9% originated from consolidation with First Baptist (*cf.,* Appendix: Tables. Table 2). Of the percentage deriving from St. Peter's, 69.2% (50.3% of total participants) had come to the community within the last decade as a consequence of its LGBTQ+ welcome and inclusion (*cf.,* Appendix: Tables. Table 3).

With respect to other markers (*cf.,* Appendix: Tables. Tables 4-8), participants are predominantly White (91.4%), with small percentages of Black or African American (7.1%), Hispanic (1.2%), and Asian (0.3%) members. There are more working-age women (53.7%) than men (45.1%), and a small number of gender-nonconforming individuals (1.2%). The community has a high level of educational attainment, with nearly half of working-age adults holding bachelor's degrees or higher. LGBTQ+ individuals make up 8.7% of the community, a measure nearly double for the state as a whole. Millennial and Generation Z adults constitute just 18.1% of participants and only 22.0% of adults 18 and over. As the remaining 78% of other adults grows older, the congregation's future will be in doubt if inroads into attracting participants from the Millennial and Gen-Z cohorts fail to materialize.

Community Ethos

What appeared to be a throwaway comment from one of the Millennials in this context of ministry became the impetus for exploring the possibility of corporate preaching. In justifying preference for Sunday morning Bible Study over Sunday morning preaching, this person explained: "… *during sermons we don't get a chance as a community to wrestle with Scripture*" (*cf.,* Appendix: Exhibits. Exhibit 1). This comment highlights the problem that the sermon-as-monologue poses in matters of faith and practice for some in my congregation with respect to authority and power as opposed to collaboration and shared responsibility. Its importance was corroborated by a long-time college professor in the congregation who observed: "The days of

lectures are gone. Bright, interested young people don't want to hear from experts; they want to engage directly in the process of learning." The professor added: "This is also true of religion. The traditional type of church where people sit and listen to the wisdom of a pastor with no opportunity for interaction no longer appeals to young adults and their families." More to the point, a twenty-something Gen-Z queer woman mused: "For a community like ours, founded on equity and inclusion, hierarchies of authority are simply incompatible and inconsistent," emphasizing here an essential aspect of community ethos — *viz.,* that diversity is encouraged, plurality embraced, authority democratized, and an environment of welcome and affirmation created as an act of "a radical hospitality and an extravagant love for one another" (Marty 2008, 311). It is this ethos that enables "people with a dizzying variety of backgrounds and experiences (to) take an interest in the mystery and the mess of each other's lives" (318) and, then, emboldens them to direct engagement in all aspects of the community's ministry and mission, including the ministry of proclamation.

Enshrined in every St. Peter's constitution, from the inception of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, a precursor of the UCC in 1936 [5] until 2017 when replaced by a formal "Open & Affirming Covenant" (ONA), [6] the congregation maintains a fierce commitment to the "evangelical liberty of conscience" extended not just to doctrine, but to scripture as well. [7] Negatively, this is understood as eschewing any demand for uniformity regarding faith and practice and, positively, as committing to unity of purpose within a diversity of custom. The

[5] *Cf.,* Appendix: Exhibits. Exhibit 2, for the relevant article in the founding constitution of the Evangelical and Reformed Church.

[6] C*f.,* Appendix: Exhibits. Exhibit 3.

[7] "The Evangelical liberty of conscience shall be permitted in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures" (Article IV. Faith. Section II of the congregation's constitution ratified in 2011).

community's pledge to extravagant hospitality and radical welcome is rooted, then, not only in the lived experience of being an ONA community, [8] but also in engagement with its sacred scripture and ecclesial traditions in a way that affirms the adage of the early seventeenth century Lutheran theologian Rupertus Meldenius: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity" (Schaff 1949, 650). In the language of Brueggemann 2002, a co-UCC religionist, this commitment to scripture and tradition that "nobody's reading is final or inerrant" — especially the pastor's — that every interpretation is "inescapably subjective, necessarily provisional, and … inevitably disputatious" (13) provides the hermeneutical framework by which Meldenius' saying holds for this particular community, and, in turn, offers justification and context for considering the possibility of corporate preaching.

This ethos is the warp and woof of a community where "a sense of solidarity, equality, and mutuality" (Rose 1997, 90) binds individuals together precisely as *community*. It creates a locus where "… I find myself in circumstances that emphasize the similarities between me and those around me, or (that) I am in a group that is inseparable from a fundamental sense of who I am" (89). As expressed by the same Millennial author of the quotation noted at the outset: "… there's not a space where my identity is ever in question" (*cf.,* Appendix: Exhibits. Exhibit 4). It is this commitment to community that makes this ecclesial context a necessarily safe place, perhaps uniquely so, where corporate preaching can take place.

Worship Practice

Not only does the community's ethos but also its praxis of worship justify the development of a model for corporate preaching. While there is no standard lexicon for describing styles of worship, a long-time member of the First Baptist contingent nevertheless

[8] As well as of being a "Reconciling in Christ Partner" (RIC), the ELCA's correlate to ONA (< https://www.reconcilingworks.org/ >).

mused: "The community is a unique blend of three congregations. One is from a liturgical tradition (ELCA), another from a non-liturgical tradition (ABC) and the third is from somewhere in between (UCC)." It is this "somewhere in between" that is normative, having adopted a register of language and ritual that is ostensibly contemporary, decidedly non-doctrinal, and aspirationally accessible within an increasingly secular milieu.

In the language of the Second Vatican Council's *Sacrosanctum concilium* (SC), the community's worship is designed to lead the faithful "to the full, conscious, and active participation of all in liturgy" (I.i.14.). [9] The pattern of weekly worship — as a single, late Sunday morning liturgy about an hour in length — incorporates elements that form community (*e.g.,* an introductory, liminal rite intended to constitute the gathered people as "Body of Christ") and empower worshippers to take to the floor to address the assembly (*e.g.,* by offering intentions as a central aspect of the congregation's prayers of intercession). Additionally, there is commitment to use not just gender inclusive language but gender non-binary language in all of liturgy, including the reading of scripture, as an act of hospitality and witness to inclusion.

With one exception, the community's language and praxis, from Gathering to Sending Forth, has been guided by the spirit of Vatican II and, thus, by the effort to make all of liturgy the work of the people, that single exception being the Proclamation of the Word. Homiletic practice since 2011 for St. Peter's, since 2018 for Holy Trinity, and 2022 for former First Baptist has been conventionally monological in form, but decidedly narrative in style — *viz.,* setting contemporary story alongside biblical story in an effort to shape consciousness and form a community of shared meaning (*vid. infra,* pp. 47-50) — and, thus, opposed to a didactic homiletic often unfairly caricatured as "three points and a poem" (*cf.,* Rose 1997, 18). To be

[9] < https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html >.

sure, efforts have been made to temper the sermon's monological form. There have been experiments with "chancel dialogues" — construed as "a conversation between two or more persons" (Thompson and Bennett 1969, 8; *cf.,* Lower 2017) — with "song sermons" — whereby the sermon-as-monologue is punctuated by vesicles sung by cantor to which the congregation responds with sung refrain — or with "sermons making wisdom known" — an attempt to give voice to the wisdom of ancient sages by inviting the assembly to complete verbally and contemplate communally modern proverbs *vis-à-vis* the proverbial wisdom of, for example, the Book of Proverbs. None of these efforts, while actively engaging the congregation in the sermon, succeeded in being much more than an exercise in performance art and, despite best intentions, managed to bridge the "gap" separating homilist and assembly either in terms of authority and power or of role and responsibility (Rose 1997, 21-22 and *passim*).

A Proposal for Developing a Model for Corporate Preaching

With naivety or, perhaps hubris, I hit upon the innovation of corporate preaching independently of encounter with any published research or contact with any particular preacher, thinking it to be an insight emerging from experience with my own, singular ecclesial community. A search of relevant literature reveals, however, that preachers have been experimenting with so-called dialogical homiletics at least since the 1960s, specifically in reaction to "the poor state of preaching in the Church today" (Cleator 1968, 25). More to the point: "… today preaching is under attack in many quarters as a dull, irrelevant, and even obsolete form of communication" (Holston 1981, 89).

Near the turn of the millennium, monological preaching had begun to be critiqued in decidedly postmodern terms, with alternatives framed variously as "conversational" or "collaborative," by which is meant preaching that is "communal, heuristic, and nonhierarchical"

(Rose 1995, 29). [10] Whereas, because of my context of ministry, I framed the shift from monological preaching to corporate preaching in sociological terms — *i.e.,* Millennials' and Gen-Z's suspicion of hierarchy and aversion to authority — this later cadre of critics ground the shift in explicitly theological, anthropological and ecclesiological terms (*cf.,* McClure 1995, 53-54).

Not without its flaws, among which are a decidedly defensive tone and repetitive rhetoric, it would not be hyperbole to describe Pagitt (2005; 2014) [11] as seminal. Over several years at Solomon's Porch, an Emerging Community founded in 2000 in Minneapolis, this Evangelical innovator dared disrupt the broad agreement reached by McClure (1995), Rose (1997), Allen, Jr. (2005), *et al.* who dismiss corporate preaching out of hand. Coining the neologism "progressional dialogue," Pagitt (2005; 2014) describes a homiletic "… where the content of the presentation is established in the context of a healthy relationship between the presenter and the listeners, and substantive changes in the content are then created as a result of this relationship" (2005, 23; 2014, 19). Though he does not use the language of Hegelian dialectic, the scheme well fits what he intends. The preacher, understood here as the ecclesiastically authorized leader of the assembly, offers an initial statement interpreting scripture — Hegel's thesis. A member of the assembly responds — the antithesis. A new understanding then emerges — the synthesis. The process repeats many times over with responses being offered by additional members of the assembly with occasional contributions by

[10] There is neither uniformity of taxonomy nor consistency of nomenclature, with "conversational" or "collaborative" encoding the same commitment to democratizing Proclamation of the Word as "dialogue" did for earlier theorists.

[11] The latter is little more than a reissue of the earlier with few new observations or arguments.

the preacher. By the end of the dialogue, the assembly arrives at a progressively different understanding of scripture and the life of faith (*vid. infra,* pp. 19-20, 32).

Pagitt's (2005; 2014) model of "progressional dialogue" has been instrumental in the development of my own innovative twist for the community I serve. To the extent that he re-imagines preaching for a new ecclesial reality in a way that is faithful to the cultural and intellectual shifts of post-modernity — *viz.,* the ecclesial community is necessarily non-hierarchical and egalitarian; all truth claims are socially and communally located and, thus, are relative — so too, here. Consistent with post-modern commitments, Pagitt (2005; 2014) is reticent when it comes to prescribing a model for his "progressional dialogue." He is only willing to suggest what it looks like to him and then to invite others into conversation as to how they might make it their own (*vid. infra,* pp. 17, 29). While detailed discussion of his approach will be taken up below, suffice it to say that, along with some practical suggestions from the earliest practitioners of corporate preaching, it becomes the scaffolding on which the current model is built.

The Monological Sermon: Theological-Ecclesiological Challenges to an Ancient Model

Shaped by Greco-Roman rhetorical culture and formed by its esteem of eloquent speech as markers of masculinity, status and power (Gleason 1995; *cf.,* Bowie 2003), Augustine did much to establish the practice of preaching as the work of the solitary orator in persuading listeners which behaviors and beliefs to choose and which to avoid. This became the model that would reign supreme from his Patristic coevals down to the twentieth-century practitioners of McClure's (1995, 30-38) "sovereign preaching" and the adherents of Rose's (1997, 13-33) "traditional theory." Commitment to classical rhetorical culture can be seen in Book IV of his treatise *De doctrina christina* (*Doctr. chr.*), composed toward the end of his life. There,

Augustine, citing approvingly Cicero's *Orator ad M. Brutum* (*Orat.*), defines the role of the skilled rhetorician: "An orator is to teach, to delight, to persuade, according to Cicero in *De Oratore.* Of these, the third is preeminent." [12] It is this persuasive role of oratory that Augustine had earlier suggested was central to the practice of homiletics: "the interpreter and teacher of the divine Scriptures … in this work of preaching must reconcile the apostate, arouse the lax, and make known to those who do not know what is happening what they ought to expect." [13]

With rare exception, this model of preaching would go unchallenged for fifteen hundred years, [14] at least until the 1920s when no less an iconoclast as Fosdick (1928) deigned criticize it as being the cause of "the futility, dullness, and general ineptitude of so much preaching" in his day (133). It would take, however, the cataclysm of two World Wars, each fought to end the tyranny of despotism, for sustained challenges to the hegemony of the sermon-as-monologue to emerge. [15] Whether, as some would argue, to "disarm authoritarian leadership styles" in reaction to the apocalyptic triumvirate Hitler, Mussolini, Tojo (McClure 1995, 39) or as a consequence of rising levels of education in post-war America (Thompson and Bennett 1969, 7), [16] "a growing, vigorous minority" in mainline Protestant churches by the 1960s came "to welcome the opportunity for interaction" (Howe 1967*,* 39) in the sermon or, perhaps more accurately, simply

---

[12] Epigram to *Doctr. chr.* IV.xii.27; *cf.,* Appendix: Exhibits. Exhibit 5.

[13] *Doctr. chr.* IV.iv.6; *cf.,* Appendix: Exhibits. Exhibit 6.

[14] For Apostolic and Post-Apostolic evidence for the model of the solitary orator through its Early Modern (1600-1800) challengers, *cf.,* Appendix: Exhibits. Exhibit 7.

[15] For the continued influence of Augustine's image of the preacher-as-orator on homiletic analysis even into the early part of this century, see Appendix: Exhibits: Exhibit 8.

[16] *Cf.,* "Persons educated to think for themselves, to ask penetrating and even embarrassing questions of professors and other authority figures, are increasingly less likely to be happy with a purely passive role in the church sanctuary" (42-43).

became "unwilling to put up with authoritarian preaching" (Thompson and Bennett 1969, 7).

Although the authoritarianism of monological preaching was the root cause of the shift to dialogical sermons, the symptoms were construed over against "modern communication theory" that arose in American postwar universities. Whether described as being in "poor state" (Cleator 1968, 25), "poorly organized and poorly presented" (Reid 1967, 28) or just plain "poor" (Cleator 1968, 28) and "weak" (Reid 1967, 23, 42), deficiencies were seen to stem from preaching's "wordiness and monological character" (Howe 1967, 5) as well as from sermons being "with exceptions of course, … long, rambling, dry, uninteresting, and remote from the current realities of life" (Reid 1967, 23).

If the problem with monological preaching lay in its inability to communicate meaningfully, then communication theory suggested the solution: *monological preaching should become dialogical*. With little more conceptual framework than that simple platitude, the 1960s and '70s saw a flurry of experimentation in which "dialogical preaching" became the generic term for events that provided increased opportunity for listener participation or response. Examples could take the form of "congregational dialogue," on the one hand, in which either "questions and comments" are solicited "after the topic is presented" or, less commonly, homilist and assembly engage in active dialogue in the preaching event — *viz.,* what is here called "corporate preaching" — or as "chancel dialogue," on the other, whereby scripted set pieces involving two or more speakers are presented as performance art but which, in reality, are no more than monologue in multiple voices (Thompson and Bennett 1969, 24-36 and 37-63, respectively; *cf.,* Reid 1967, 106-115). [17] With the exception of Thompson and Bennett's (1969)

[17] Both "congregational dialogue" and "chancel dialogue" — anticipated already in the 1920s (Fosdick 1928, 137-138) — were not confined to North America (*cf.,* Greet 1967, 148-150; Orr 1970, 10-13; here, Orr's model is a hybrid form of the two).

"congregational dialogue" as "corporate preaching," Wesley Allen, Jr.'s (2005) critique hits the mark: "These early attempts at dialogue sermons represent more of a worship gimmick than a true paradigm shift in the church's approach to proclamation" (6).

Against the backdrop of this experimentation, Howe (1963) proposed a phenomenology of "dialogue" based on Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue. Whereas the sundry experiments noted above were driven by what Howe (1963) called "method," he proposed a dialogical homiletic based on "principle," understood as making use of congregation members as co-creators of the preaching event, even if only in the mind of the solitary preacher at the time of sermon preparation by means of "study groups" and after sermon delivery through "feedback" in a roundtable type of discussion (94-96 and 96-99, respectively).

It is regrettable that so creative a homiletic proposal would be constrained by Howe's (1967) own commitment to the monological paradigm: the event of preaching " … is *so obviously monologue in terms of method* — that is only one person speaks" (47-48; emphasis added). The hegemony of the sermon-as-monologue would continue to shape homiletics not only in Howe's (1967) work, but in subsequent work that, while using such descriptors as "dialogue" or "conversation," can only conceive of a sermon-in-one voice. McClure (1995), Rose (1997), Allen, Jr. (2005), and Hannan (2021) all construct homiletic models that build on Howe's distinction between principle and method.

With all early challengers to the monological sermon deriving from a Protestant context enthrall to "communication theory," it would be a trio of Roman Catholic priests who would argue for a model of "corporate preaching" rooted in ecclesiology (Bleidorn 1967; Cleator 1968; Leliaert 1967). Inspired by Vatican II's *Lumen gentium* (LG), these theorists affirmed with the Roman Curia that "the holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office … from the

Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful" (Chapter II, Article 12) [18] and so are not just called, not even simply authorized, but are obligated to preach "by the testimony of their *lives* and by the power of their *words* (Leliaert 1967, 18; emphasis original and edited for inclusive gender).

If the first wave of challengers to Augustine's model was spurred by a reaction against authoritarianism and a concern for effective communication, the second wave was inspired by the rise of liberation theologies as well as a shifting intellectual paradigm from a modern to a post-modern *Gestalt*. This second wave came to intend "dialogue" and "conversation" as descriptors for a collaborative model of preaching rooted in a non-hierarchical, decidedly egalitarian, vision of the church. Homileticians here internalized Howe's (1963; 1967) distinction between *method* and *principle*, reprising a version of Thompson and Bennett's (1969) "congregational dialogue" which, based in various "conversations," whether *formal* (McClure 1995; Allen, Jr. 2005; and Hannan 2021) or *informal* (Rose 1997), preserved the model of sermon in a single voice. Although each would develop their own method for conversational preaching while offering a full throated affirmation of the Reformed notion of the Priesthood of All Believers, all would accept without comment Howe's dictum: "only one person speaks" (Howe 1967, 48). [19]

The most significant challenge to the monological sermon in Protestantism would come not from mainline churches but from a niche movement at the edges of American Evangelicalism, the Emerging Church. Appearing almost overnight at the turn of the millennium

---

[18] < https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html >.

[19] Hannan (2021) is the exception that proves the rule here. Conceding that, from time to time, the preacher could, for example, invite certain folks with relevant expertise to have "brief cameos" in the sermon (97), Hannan never disavows the authority of the cleric as steward, custodian, or otherwise guardian of the sermon.

and deriving from the same commitment to a non-hierarchical, egalitarian ecclesial community, as well as the post-modern conviction that all truth claims are socially and communally relative, the Emerging Church produced a homiletic that shared many of the features of that second wave (*cf.,* Allen, Jr. 2008, 99). Indeed, Doug Pagitt (2005; 2014), one of the movement's most prolific apologists, advocates a homiletic not too dissimilar to the various conversational models above with but one exception — *viz.*, his pressing the Reformed notion of the priesthood of all believers to its logical and provocative conclusion: the ministry of proclamation "could be called an 'unfunded mandate of the reformation'" (Pagitt 2014, 16). Rather than resting his argument solely on Reformed ecclesiology, Pagitt (2005; 2014) raises the ante, grounding it in theological anthropology as well: "… there's a kind of dehumanizing effect when week after week people aren't allowed to share their ideas and understanding; when week after week one person is set apart from the rest as the only one who is allowed to speak about God …" (2005, 76; 2014, 73).

In the nomenclature of Thompson and Bennett (1969), Pagitt's (2005; 2014) homiletic is a variation of "congregational dialogue" in which sermon preparation makes use of "study groups" as per Howe (1967*,* 94-96), while the event of preaching proceeds via direct and immediate engagement between homilist and congregation in the moment. The Sunday sermon begins early in the week in bible study to which anyone is invited to attend. For a brief moment, Pagitt (2005, 2014) dons the hat of the "expert" or "exegete," bringing to bear the best that historical-critical, rhetorical, and literary studies have to say about any given text, before opening discussion to anybody and everybody. It then continues on Sunday morning when he does something of the same in worship, having benefitted from the insights and contributions from the bible study earlier in the week: "I talk for a while and then invite others to share their ideas, input, and thoughts about what has been said" (Pagitt 2005, 24; 2014, 18; *cf. infra*, n. 21, p. 20,

and p. 29). The key to an effective preaching event is that cadre which, having gathered earlier in the week to study, now arriving to worship informed and prepared to engage in conversation.

Anticipating objections from preachers reluctant to adopt his method because of their fear — of being wrong (2005, 119ff.; 2014, 117ff.); losing control (2005, 123ff.; 2014, 121ff.); introducing heresy (2005, 132ff.; 2014, 129ff.); misrepresenting divine truth (2005, 136ff.; 2014, 133ff.); mismanaging sermon content (2005, 140ff.; 2014, 137ff.); and surrendering pastoral authority (2005, 144ff.; 2014, 141ff.) — he offers a defense grounded in an unshakable confidence in the ecclesial community's ability to renew faith, reform practice, and restrain the church from error, all while laying bare his critics misplaced confidence in the professionalization, indeed sacralization, of the pastoral vocation. To the extent that Pagitt's (2005; 2014) "progressional dialogue" encodes his commitment to a post-modern notion of the provisional nature of truth, he refuses to specify what this type of preaching should look like or how it ought to unfold as liturgy. At most, he makes suggestions, offers insights, and invites his readers into conversation as to how they might make it their own (*vid. supra*, p. 11; *infra,* p. 29). It is in conversation, then, with Pagitt (2005; 2014), with an assist from that corps of Catholic preachers from the 1960s, that the following model emerges.

Challenges of Corporate Preaching in Practice

The challenges of moving from concept to practice were anticipated in the experiences of that initial wave of Roman Catholic practitioners and were shown to be, if not overstated, at least easily managed. The most serious challenge seemed what to do if members of the assembly are "unwilling to speak" (Bleidorn 1967, 11). From Bleidorn's (1967) reassuring "(l)et the silence settle down for a while. People need time to reflect, to gather their thoughts, to put them into words" (11) *to* Cleator's (1968) encouraging "if you give the people a question or topic to work

on … all of the sudden, the topic will come alive, and … you will have to chop off the discussion because your time has run out" (27; edited for inclusive gender), this challenge rarely materializes and, instead, highlights the promise of corporate preaching: with transparent and coherent prompting, silence is no problem (*vid. infra,* pp. 24, 28. Members of the assembly invariably rise to the task of sharing faith in a way that stimulates "the people with a greater variety of ideas" and creates for "them a sense of community" to an extent seldom found in monological preaching (Cleator 1968, 28).

A second challenge anticipated in the 1960s concerns how to construe the role of the pastor. Notwithstanding concerns for ecclesiastical authority or matters of theological expertise, these early practitioners were adamant that such concerns find no purchase in corporate preaching and, if ever allowed a foothold, forestall its effective execution. Simply put, the pastor's role "could be summarized in three words: introduce, preside, and conclude" (Bleidorn 1967, 12; *cf.,* Cleator 1968, 28). Far from dominating or even directing the flow of dialogue, the pastor must trust the assembly and "always be open to new and creative direction" thereby charted (Cleator 1968, 27). To do otherwise would stifle dialogue and hinder participation.

If practitioners of the first wave were unanimous with respect to matters pragmatic — *viz.,* patience with respect to silence, coherence and transparence with respect to prompts for discussion, reticence or quiescence on the part of the pastor-as-presider — theorists of the second were no less so regarding the more sublime — *viz.,* the vital importance of cultivating an environment safe for frank and forthright sharing (*cf.,* McClure 1995, 53; Rose 1997, 122, 127, and 131; Allen, Jr. 2005, 25-26; and Hannan 2021, 143-144; *cf.,* Reid 1967, 115; Bauman 1972, 271). Though with a particular model of conversational preaching in mind, Allen, Jr.'s (2005)

stricture holds for all who would venture into corporate preaching: "I should be able to trust that no one in the conversation will either intentionally mislead or injure me or anyone else in the conversation or intentionally misrepresent facts on which their viewpoints are based" (25). To be sure, trust is a necessary consequence of the assembly bearing witness to "authentic expression of the church's call to be the body of Christ" (*ibid.*); nevertheless, "rules" for "conversational etiquette" may be necessary. Among which rules Allen, Jr. (2005) has suggested might be: the rule of *reciprocity — viz.,* "an egalitarian interest, respect, and concern that conversation partners share for one another" (29) — of *participation — i.e.,* "(e)veryone must be able and willing (though not required) to offer opinions, pose questions, challenge different points of view, and be challenged by different points of view" (30) — and of *commitment — sc.,* "participants must be committed to the conversation and to their conversation partners even when difficult and divisive concerns are raised" (30; *cf.,* Burbules 1993, 80-82).

Both earlier and later practitioners — *viz.,* Bleidorn 1967, Cleator 1968, Leliaert 1967, on the one hand, and Pagitt 2005; 2014, on the other — assume a less than innovative goal for preaching. That is to say, each of these assumes that, though the form is novel, the purpose is conventionally didactic — *i.e.,* "to open up the meaning of the freshly read Scriptures," requiring the sermon to "contain elements of exposition, exegesis, and application" (Bleidorn 1967, 10). For St. Peter's and Holy Trinity, accustomed to preaching that exploits sacred texts not for the sake of interpreting scripture *qua* scripture but for the sake of shaping consciousness, forming community, and transforming life lived in faith through narrative, Pagitt's (2005; 2014) "progressional dialogue" will prove problematic (*vid. infra,* pp. 47-50). Far from a repeated cycle of thesis ➔ antithesis ➔ synthesis that proceeds by way of participant arguments on scripture or theology (*vid. supra,* pp. 10-11; *infra,* p. 32), the form that is required here will be

decidedly episodic — *viz.,* a series of participant narratives connected one to the other only loosely by a general idea set forth in scripture (*cf.,* Thomson 1996, 22).

A Provisional Model for Corporate Preaching

Building this provisional model began with an "invitation to conversation." Gathering a cadre of lay collaborators, [20] outlining the problem with the sermon-as-monologue, sketching the barest vision of what corporate preaching might look like [21] — including robust discussion of anticipated problems, perils, and pitfalls (*vid. infra*) — and offering assurance that, after having spent a lifetime developing an idiosyncratic homiletic voice, such model of preaching would in no way replace the current model I as pastor employ but would be an occasional, if rare, alternative exercise, this cohort offered advice and counsel as how to design, prepare, and implement the innovation in the context of corporate worship.

Consistent with the ethos of this ecclesial community, these advisors expressed none of the reservations anticipated by Pagitt (2005; 2014; *vid. supra,* p. 17). By no means concerned with heresy or error in doctrine or dogma, not at all concerned with fidelity to universal "Truth," these collaborators were instead concerned with how such a method might undermine the commitment to unity in diversity that the congregation had labored long to establish. They were concerned how to handle the excessively loquacious participant; what to do about obscurant, rambling, off-topic tangents; what appropriate number of participants might be welcomed before bringing the sermon to a close; and what to do if no one rises to speak during the sermon. They were acutely concerned how to handle disputatious or argumentative rebuttals; what to do about

[20] Drawing on members of the congregation's Sunday morning Adult Bible Study and adding members better to reflect the total distributions of adults — *cf.,* Appendix: Tables. Table 8 — this group totaled 16 participants who advised throughout the course of the experiment.

[21] *Viz.,* "So I talk for a while, then I invite others to comment, ask questions, offer clarifications, and so forth" (Pagitt 2005, 199; 2014, 201; *cf. supra,* p. 17; *vid. infra,* p. 29).

speech that violated the community's Open & Affirming commitment; and whether the model might exclude or alienate visitors who happen to worship on a Sunday when the model is employed. Tellingly, these collaborators trusted that community ethos would forestall any need to formulate contingencies in advance. [22]

They discussed how to amplify voices of participants so not only that they might be heard and understood in the worship space but also that their participation might be accessible remotely via video livestreamed or archived. They considered whether to have a stationary microphone prepositioned in the nave of the church or to have roving acolytes offering microphones to those who preferred to speak from their seats (*vid. infra,* pp. 31, 43-44, 45). They wondered how to position video cameras so that those who worship remotely might be engaged regardless from where a participant spoke. They suggested ways in which the sermon could be introduced to invite participation while reassuring visitor and regular worshipper alike that the experiment was just that — a one-off event.

Several details remained that would further define the contours of the model. They decided that three iterations of corporate preaching would be required to provide sufficient evidence of proof of concept. With a beginning, middle, and an end, three iterations would offer the minimum opportunity to test, refine and improve the model in due course, assessing its effectiveness at each point, without risking a diminishing return on effort.

Since the community's worship is driven either by the Revised Common Lectionary or by the congregation's calendar, consideration was given to scheduling iterations to coincide with extraordinary opportunities for worship. It was decided that the first iteration would coincide

---

[22] *Cf.,* Thomson1996, 21, who anticipated these issues. None of these outcomes ever materialized (*cf.,* pp. 30-31; 43).

with the celebration of infant baptism; the second with the congregation's stewardship campaign; the third with the celebration of Epiphany, a cherished feast day for the membership.

It was also decided that the congregation would best be prepared to participate in these experiments by means of a prompt for reflection, drafted in consultation with collaborators and based on study of scripture, being distributed in advance through social media and by e-mail. Finally, it was decided that the model's effectiveness would be gauged by the facility and frequency of participation by members of the assembly, and refined by that same cadre of collaborators gathering immediately after each experiment to reflect, critique, and offer suggestions for improvement.

A Provisional Model in Practice

1st Iteration: You Are My Child; In You I Delight (Mark 1:4-11) — 22nd Sunday after Pentecost / October 20, 2024, during the community's principal worship at 11:00am [23]

Preparation began with in-person study of Mark's story of Jesus' baptism. When read synoptically *vis-à-vis* Matthew and Luke, collaborators noticed the evangelist linking the divine declaration "You are my beloved child" to the event of Jesus's baptism proper — *viz.,* the divine voice is audible only to Jesus in the moment of rising from the water. This hint of adoption — when considered in the liturgical context of infant baptism, that rite in which children of the church are set apart as named and claimed as God's own and heirs of God's promises — led to an extended period of collaborators telling stories and sharing narratives of experiences by which they came to recognize their being God's delight. One male collaborator in his early fifties shared the story, as a rebellious late-adolescent, of stumbling home in the early hours of morning only to find his grandmother at prayer, fervently reminding the Divine that this grandchild of hers was "worthy, meaningful, chosen," the impact of which indelibly marked his life and

[23] Accessed here: < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Q6Kra0UKJM >.

shaped its trajectory. Similarly, one female collaborator in her mid-sixties remembered the experience, as an angst-ridden teenager feeling isolated from family and friends, of hearing God's voice, just as Mark's Jesus heard God's voice, assuring her that she "belonged and will never be alone." Each of these stories made their way into the community's proclamation. Over against such story telling, it was a short move to formulating a prompt for corporate preaching: "If the Spirit moves, you might even share your story in worship so that together we can give thanks and praise for God's all embracing, all affirming grace. (*cf.*, Appendix: Exhibits. Exhibit 9.a).

Study participants concluded planning by suggesting how the sermon might unfold and what role pastor and collaborators could thereby play. It was decided that the pastor would be prepared to bracket the congregation's participation with an introduction and conclusion that would model the type of sharing invited and offer some narrative resolution to the entire experience. In this case, the introduction took the form of the pastor's story of his own children's baptism, framed in motifs and images suggested by Mark's text, with the conclusion turning to the story of his now adult children and the manner in which their lives are lived in ways well pleasing to God. In between introduction and conclusion, the assembly would be invited to participate by sharing their own experiences as suggested in the prompt. To guard against the risk of long periods of silence, collaborators would, between that time of group study and the event of preaching, formulate their own response to the preaching prompt. Being ready to share those stories in the preaching moment would not merely guard against silence but would offer additional examples of the type of participation solicited.

Meeting to evaluate immediately after the worship service, the same collaborators who had built the model were, without exception, heartened by the experience, deeming it a success.

Four of five preaching participants — out of a total assembly of ninety persons — were among those very same collaborators who had built the model, the contributions of two of whom were new in the moment, the other two having shared their stories at the time of planning as relayed above (*vid. supra,* pp. 22-23). The stories of collaborators shared new in the moment well modeled the type of participation envisioned at the time of planning. Both of these new narratives relayed stories of grace experienced as expressions of welcome and acts of affirmation mediated by ecclesial communities at times of personal struggle, not unlike the personal struggles shared in stories at the time of planning. The addition of one unexpected participant, coupled with the new voices of collaborators, was construed as proof of concept. The model as designed proved effective in eliciting personal stories that, when proclaimed against the background of Mark's narrative, aligned with the homiletic to which the congregation is accustomed (*vid. infra,* pp. 47-50). The experience confirmed Cleator's (1968) assurance a half-century earlier: with a well-crafted prompt, "the topic will come alive" (27; *vid. supra,* pp. 17-18; *infra*, p. 28). For additional evaluation and discussion, *cf.,* Appendix: Exhibits. Exhibit 9.b.

2nd Iteration: All That She Had, She Gave **(Mark 12:38-44) — 26th Sunday after Pentecost / November 17, 2024, during the community's principal worship at 11:00am** [24]

As with the first iteration, the second began with in-person bible study, with the same group of collaborators as earlier mentioned, on a text chosen to support the congregation's annual stewardship campaign — *viz.,* the Widow's Mite in Mark 12. Collaborators were reticent to speak of their own commitment to generosity for fear of appearing to boast and, instead, offered platitudes — *e.g.,* "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7), "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35) — and personal rules of thumb for responding to mendicants encountered in the community — *e.g.,* "I never give cash, but will offer to buy a cup of coffee or

[24] Accessed here: < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kp7kKEgk58Y >.

a hamburger." One of the collaborators steered the conversation back to the Markan text and to Jesus' example there of "one poor widow," suggesting that it would be appropriate to focus attention on everyday experiences of generosity. Another agreed, proposing that the congregation be invited to share stories of paragons of generosity in their lives. They formulated a prompt for preaching that encouraged reflection on the story of the "Widow's Mite" and about what quotidian examples of selfless giving might mean for the life of the community: "If the Spirit moves, you might even share your insight or example of selfless giving as an inspiration for us all" (*cf.,* Appendix: Exhibits. Exhibit 10.a). Given the success of the first iteration, as gauged by robust participation of members of the assembly, the decision was made not to identify in advance any potential speakers but to encourage collaborators to be prepared, if needed, to share in order to keep the experiment moving forward in the moment.

If the first experiment was deemed a success, this iteration was nothing less than spectacular. Out of an unusually small assembly of seventy worshippers, nine persons shared their experience of and commitment to generosity as a virtue. Over half of those nine — five to be exact — were completely new voices to the conversation. Of the remaining four, two were collaborators who had also participated in the first iteration of corporate preaching, and two were new voices of from among the collaborators. Of five completely new voices, one belonged to a visitor to the assembly for whom that day was only the fourth time they had ever joined the community in worship. Significantly, the substance of this person's sharing was nothing less than an offering of praise and thanksgiving for the generous welcome and unambiguous offering of safety and security that the congregation had offered from the first visit to that day (*cf.,* Appendix: Exhibits. Exhibit 12). [25]

[25] For additional observation and evaluation, see Appendix: Exhibits. Exhibit 10.b.

***3rd Iteration: Christ's Star Still Shines (Matthew 2:1-12)* — Celebration of the Epiphany / January 5, 2025, during the community's principal worship at 11:00am** [26]

Reflecting on the earlier iterations — particularly the increase in participation from the first to the second by laity not previously involved in the planning process — the importance of a well-defined reflection prompt in eliciting effective sharing was recognized. The decision was made, then, to forego in-person bible study and conversation and, instead, to experiment with independent study that, in turn, would lead to the collaborative formulating of a focus statement for reflection. Since this iteration took place on Epiphany Sunday, the prompt agreed upon encouraged folks to "… think about where you have experienced God in your life — in places, through people, in experiences as improbable as they are unimaginable," being prepared to share "your own story of God's epiphany in your life" (*cf.,* Appendix: Exhibits. Exhibit 11.a.).

In an assembly of ninety-two persons, five attendees participated in the sermon. Of the five, none were among the collaborators who had been involved in the design and planning of the model. Three were completely new voices, with two having participated in the earlier iterations.

Analogous to the drafting of the sermon reflection prompt, comments and critiques were solicited by text and email. One respondent mused that the content seemed "less varied and substantive than before." When pressed for clarification, this person explained that, with the exception of one particularly captivating story, the contributions lacked a strong narrative structure and compelling plotline and seemed, on the whole, to be stream of consciousness stories on the colloquial and secular notion of epiphany experienced as a sudden flash of insight. The single exception noted was the gripping narrative of a Gen-Z adult that began: "When you're homeless like I was homeless, whether in the heat of summer or cold of winter, you have

[26] Accessed here: < https://youtu.be/7iONZfcAg6Q >.

to wear every stitch of clothing you have all at once." This story ended with the mesmerizing "right then, the clouds parted, the sun appeared, and a cool breeze-as-divine-breath blew over my body reminding me that I mattered to God and that God still loved me."

Admitting a distinct preference for preaching-as-storytelling, this respondent wondered: "Maybe it would have been better to have asked specific questions in order to make the prompt less nebulous." Another questioned whether the problem may have been in having relied too much on the word "epiphany" in prompting participants. This respondent suggested that, even though the celebration of Epiphany is an important part of the worship life of the congregation, perhaps it was too much of a challenge to expect a distinction to be made between "Epiphany" — as commemoration of Magi from the east feting the Christ Child with gifts — to "epiphany" — as experiences of the divine in everyday life. Both respondents highlighted, however, the importance of a well-crafted prompt for reflection. [27]

Lessons from a Provisional Model in Practice

As the ecclesiastically authorized preacher for the community, the prospect of engaging in corporate preaching raised misgivings for me. After having spent nearly three decades in ministry cultivating a homiletic voice, I was reluctant to relinquish control of the sermon-as-monologue in lieu of dialogue. This reluctance showed itself in the repeated proviso that corporate preaching would not replace the model that I as pastor employ for preaching but would be an occasional, if rare, alternative exercise (*vid. supra,* p. 20, 21; *infra,* pp. 49-50). To my surprise, I was not alone here. While the virtue of democratizing proclamation was well recognized and the value of experimenting with new and novel ways of worship affirmed by members of the community, anecdotal

[27] For additional observation and evaluation, see Appendix: Exhibits. Exhibit 11.b.

evidence pointed to decided reluctance to abandon current practice, a reluctance that was visceral and virtually unanimous. At no time was preference ever expressed for corporate preaching replacing current practice or becoming anything more than occasional in the worship of the community. [28]

A second misgiving proved equally overwrought — *viz.,* the fear that the invitation to share in the sermon would be met by silence. As each of the iterations confirmed and one of my collaborators observed, albeit hyperbolically: "*Everyone* wants the chance to speak up and to be heard" (emphasis added). Another collaborator encouraged, "If we offered these opportunities on a regular basis, our congregation would quickly become comfortable with the process and we'd see even more participation." While Cleator's (1968) prediction that, with the right prompt for preaching, "the topic will come alive" was validated by the contribution of no less than sixteen different participants over the course of three iterations, his promise that "you will have to chop off the discussion because your time has run out" (27; *vid. supra,* pp. 17-18, 24) was never remotely realized. I quickly learned, however, that the pastor-as-presider needed to be prepared to adjust accordingly to the number of voices participating in any given sermon. Inasmuch as that number can never be known in advance, spontaneity and liturgical deftness must be expected of the presider in order to adjust the remaining elements of worship for the sake of time — *e.g.,* being ready at a moment's notice to shorten, even omit, planned congregational singing or to truncate the sharing of intentions at the Prayers of the People (*vid. infra,* pp. 43, 45).

---

[28] For a proposal for the place of corporate preaching in the overall preaching ministry of this community, see Appendix: Exhibits. Exhibit 13.

Equally trepidatious as the fear of silence in the assembly was the fear of silence on the part of collaborators in conversations to design the model. This fear, too, proved overwrought. After outlining the problem of authority inherent with the sermon-as-monologue, I was reticent, just as Pagitt (2005; 2014) was reticent (*vid. supra*, pp. 11, 17), to do any more than sketch the barest vision of what such a homiletic might look like — *viz.,* "I talk for a while; then you talk for a while; then someone else talks for a while" (*cf. supra*, p. 17; n. 21, p. 20). To do otherwise would undermine the very commitment to cooperation and collaboration this experiment demanded. Far from silence, the cadre of collaborators responded with robust conversation, creatively imagining just what corporate preaching might look like in this context. As one collaborator later observed: "Our church's story is one continuing story of collaboration and cooperation. We have successfully integrated other denominations into our church and into our worship. We have welcomed the marginalized and continue to advocate for justice. Sharing the ministry of proclamation is just another chapter in that story." This same collaborator continued: "Not only is our church's story important here, every person's story is important. By hearing their stories, we as a community become more tightly bound together. When attachment happens through stories, it becomes a love for one another that can be sensed by those desperately looking for community." Over against, then, a firm commitment to collaboration and cooperation and an unambiguous recognition of the role that story, both gospel story and personal story, plays in this community, the provisional model quite naturally spun itself out of these conversations.

One final lesson concerns how vital community ethos was for the successful implementation of this model. Whether in the halting, labored speech of a thirty-

something woman struggling with Tourette syndrome (*vid. infra*, p. 45) or the thanksgiving of an early twenty-something, gender queer person (so new to the community as to be unrecognized by most members of the assembly) earnestly expressed for the community being a safe place for them and their friends (*vid. infra* Appendix: Exhibits. Exhibit 12), the fact that this community encourages diversity, embraces plurality, democratizes authority, and creates an environment of welcome and affirmation proved both necessary and sufficient for the successful implementation of corporate preaching. While the language used by lay respondents might vary — *from*, for example, the importance of "being judgment free" *to* just how crucial "transparency, cooperation, collaboration, and the determination to be a church free from the impulse to domination" are to our community's life *to finally* how we are called to invite "people to express their thoughts and ask their questions in a safe and supportive environment" — it was this ethos that made corporate preaching not only possible, but successful.

To be sure these lessons learned are unique to this context. Whether they can be extrapolated to different communities is a question for other pastors, priests, and preachers to answer for themselves. While over the course of this experiment, there were no loquacious participants, no rambling, off-topic tangents, no disputatious rebuttals, no speech that violated community's commitments, any setting interested in implementing its own model of corporate preaching would do well to consider contingencies for managing their eventuality (*cf. supra,* pp. 20-21; 43).

Two additional lessons were learned, however, that have direct implications for any community that would experiment with corporate preaching. The first of these lessons concerns the oft competing claims that church architecture and community

practice have on decisions from where participants speak (*viz. supra* p. 21; *infra*, pp. 43-44, 45). Though by no means Romanesque or Gothic, the architecture of this community's worship space is nevertheless longitudinal, designed with a central nave running from entryway to chancel. The decision was initially made by collaborators to invite participants to speak from a microphone prepositioned forward in the nave, facing the chancel. In the 1st Iteration, one early participant quickly recognized a problem and instinctively turned to address the congregation as the etiquette of dialogue rightly demands. In subsequent iterations, however, participants spoke from where they sat, with microphones at the ready in keeping with long established custom. Though mundane, matters of space, setting, and practice are never pedestrian and ought to be anticipated.

A final lesson with implications for wider experimentation concerns "form." That every instance of participation in each iteration took the form of a *story* of personal experience or of a *narrative* of particular encounter might, on the surface, seem remarkable. That the whole of each sermon assumed an episodic form of loosely connected participant narratives, linked one to the other only by an idea derived from scripture, might seem exceptional. Clearly, the way in which each prompt was formulated and each invitation to share modeled in the various sermon introductions explicitly invited storytelling. This is as it should be for a community accustomed to preaching-as-storytelling (*vid. infra,* pp. 47-50). Analogously, it should by no means be surprising that, for a community like Solomon's Porch served by Pagitt (2005; 2016), for example, accustomed to preaching that is conventionally didactic and shaped by "exposition, exegesis, and application" (Bleidorn 1967, 10), would derive a model such as "progressional dialogue" that replicates the community's established form of

preaching (*vid. supra,* pp. 10-11, 19-20). Whether narratively episodic as here, dialectically didactic as for Solomon's porch, or indeed reflecting some other homiletic style, any preacher developing a model for their own context would do well to ponder how traditions and practices of preaching might be exploited in the service of shaping a democratized and inclusive form of preaching.

In the end, though, as one of lay collaborator observed: "If the results of corporate preaching at any time seem disappointing, take heart and do not despair, Corporate preaching is no different than any other form of preaching. Sometimes it hits; sometimes not." This person continued, "When it doesn't, the next iteration always offers opportunity for refinement and improvement."

Conclusion

What began in earnest with a first wave of theorists in the 1960s and 1970s became a sustained challenge from a second at the turn of the millennium to Augustine's model of the solitary orator exploiting persuasive speech. Into this foray the present study has plunged headlong. Concerned to address the misgivings of a cohort of believers suspicious of authority while valuing inclusiveness — *viz., s*o-called Millennials and "Gen-Z" cohorts — the provisional model developed and implemented here has achieved that very hoped-for result. Indeed, as one of the selfsame Millennials for whom this project was explicitly designed to engaged validated: "For social media savvy Millennials and Gen-Z'ers like me, accustomed to collaborate instantly on TikToc, this experiment in corporate preaching has renewed my faith in this community as the place for me. It is where I'm not only safe and affirmed, but where I'm accepted. It's more than that. My contributions are not just valued, they are invited and solicited, even in the sermon."

What was initially a quest to democratize the ministry of preaching and to demonstrate proof of concept for one model of corporate preaching ends as a challenge to the wider church to develop additional models for a variety of parochial contexts. It is hoped that others will pick up the challenge of corporate preaching, refining it for settings where power and authority are seen as problematic so that preaching can become true liturgy, the work of the people.

Appendix: Tables

Table 1: St. Peter's average worship attendance at points of pastoral transition.

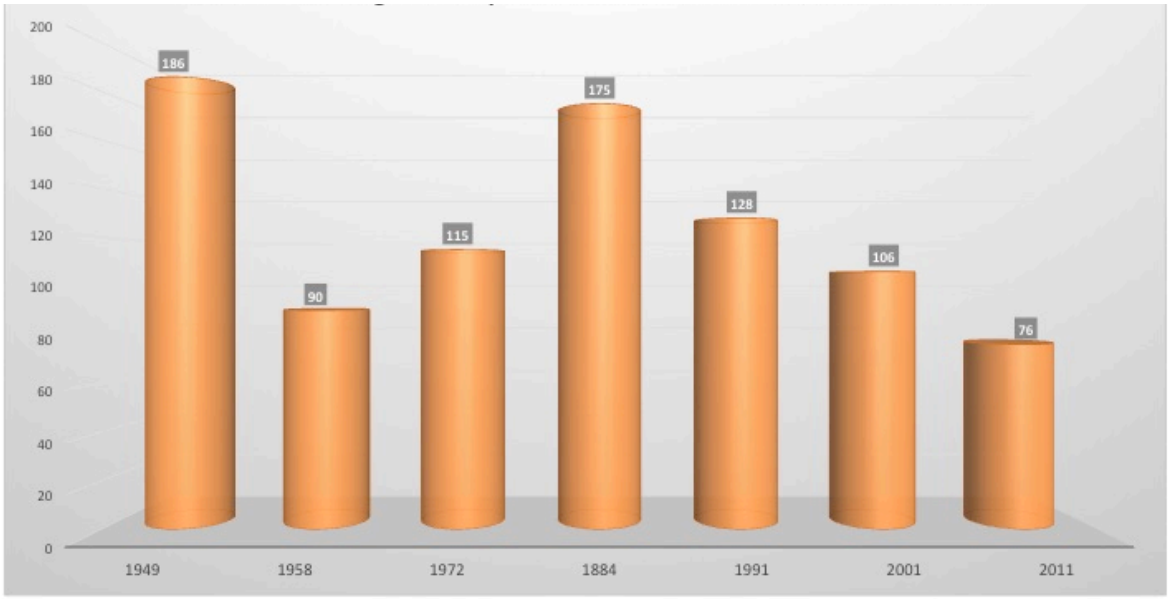


Table 2. Total community participants in 2022.

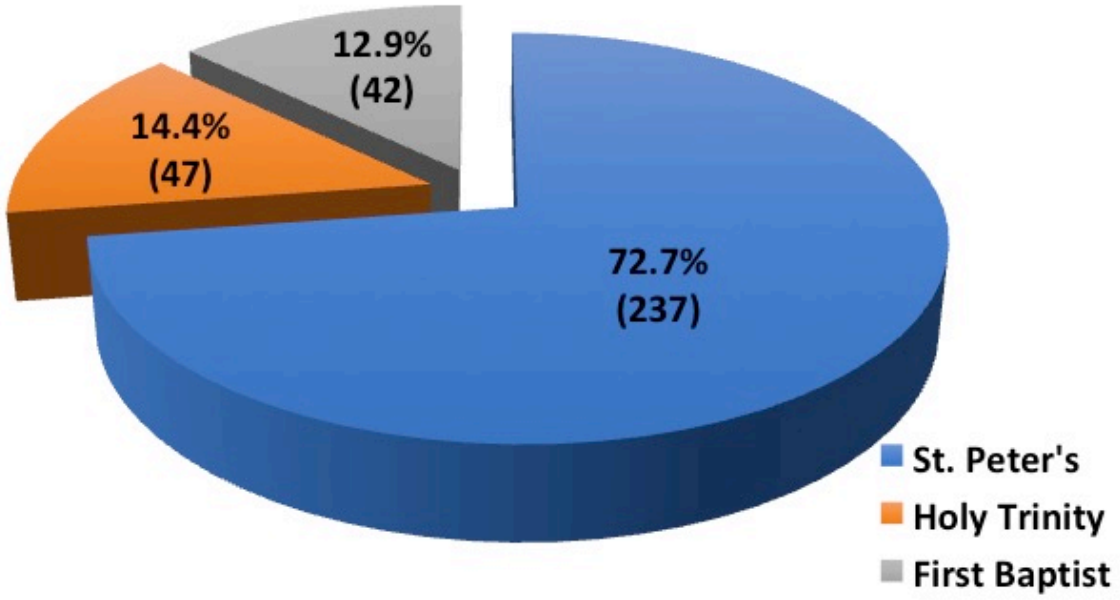


Table 3: Distribution of ecclesial members.

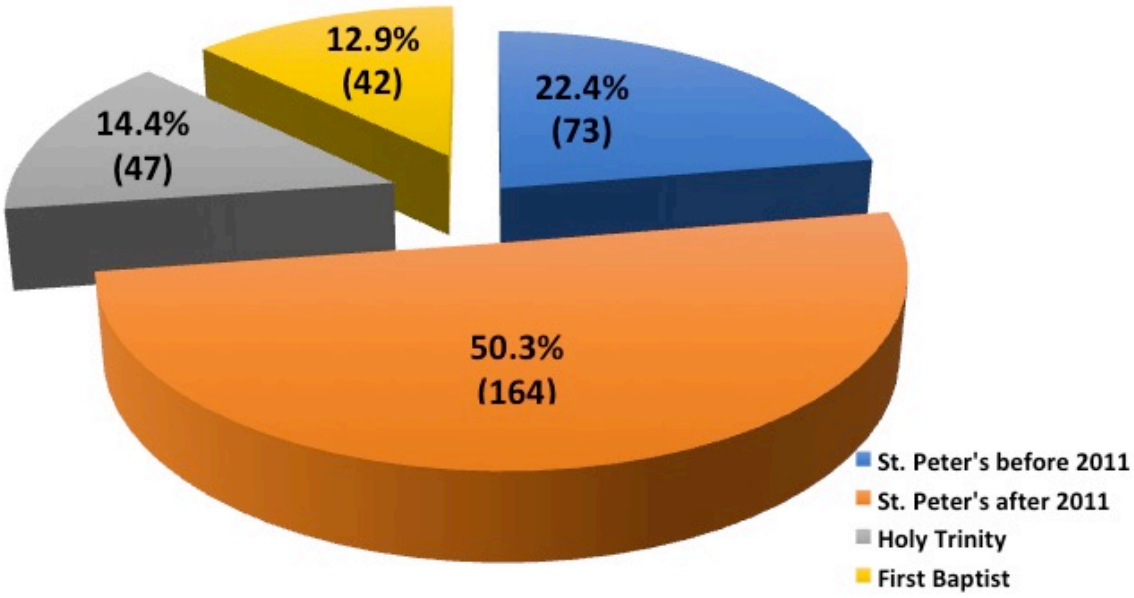


Table 4: Distribution by race.

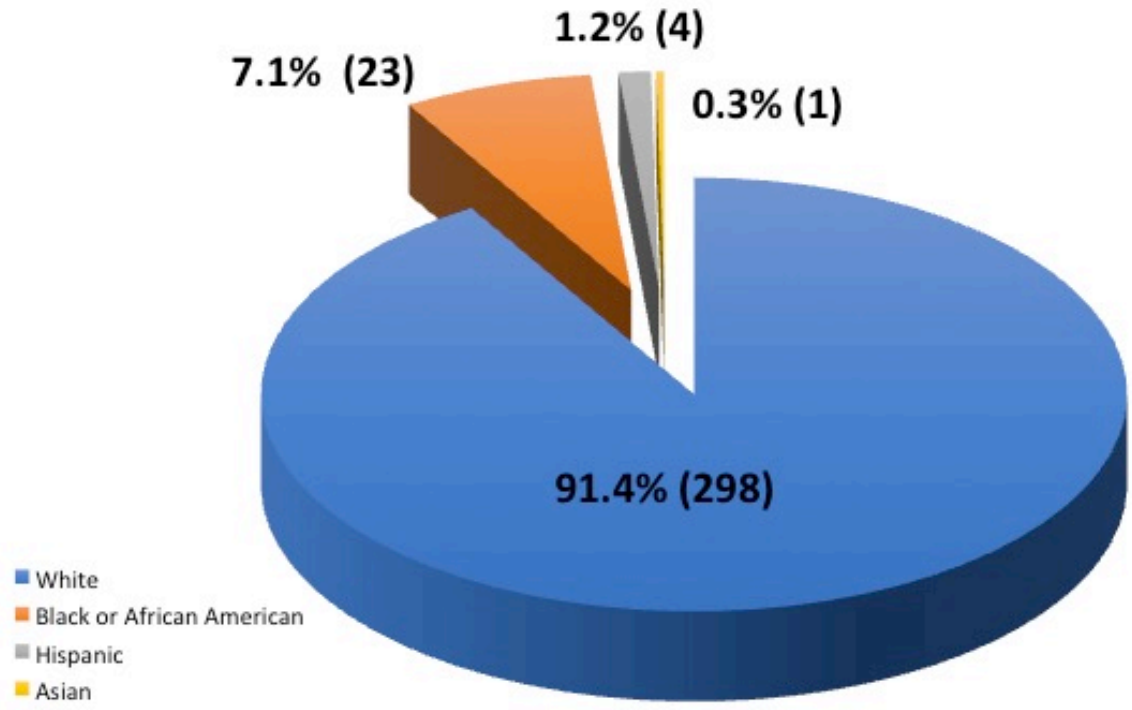


Table 5: Distribution of adults 18 & over by gender identification.

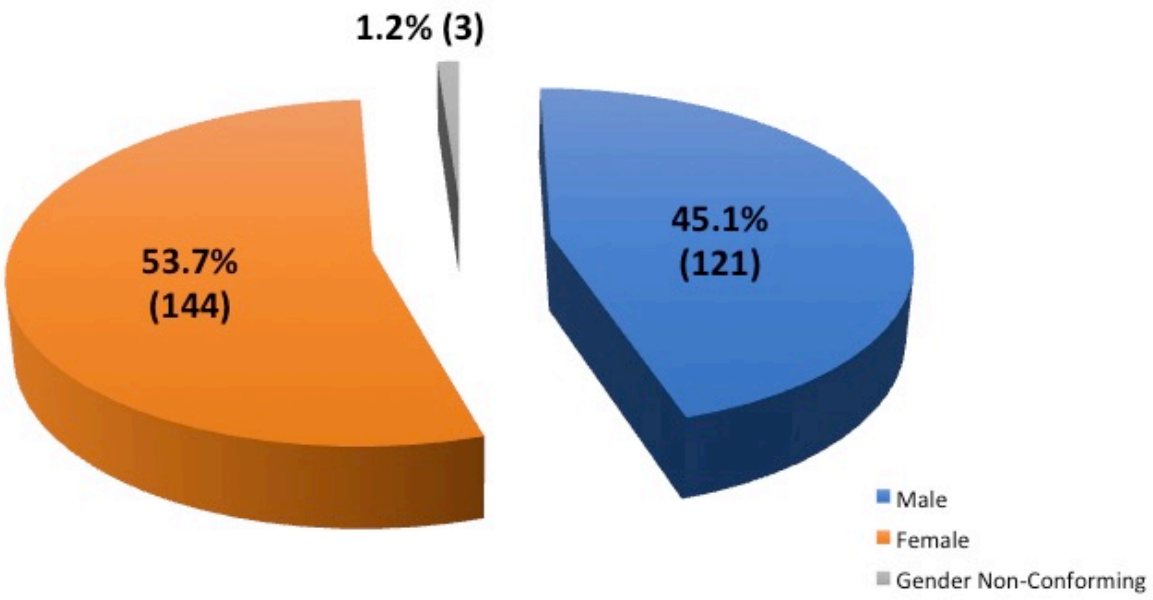


Table 6: Distribution of adults 18 & over by education.

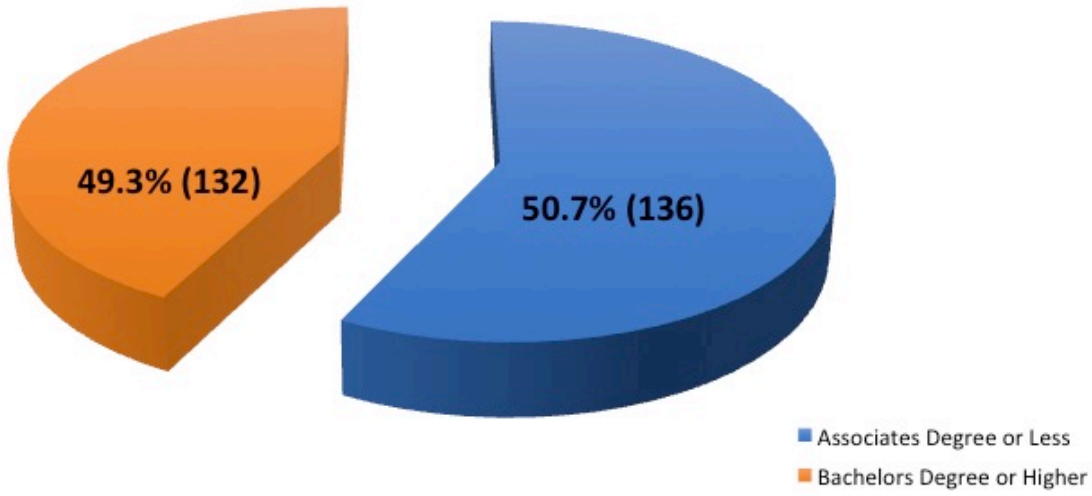


Table 7: Distribution by sexual orientation & gender identity.

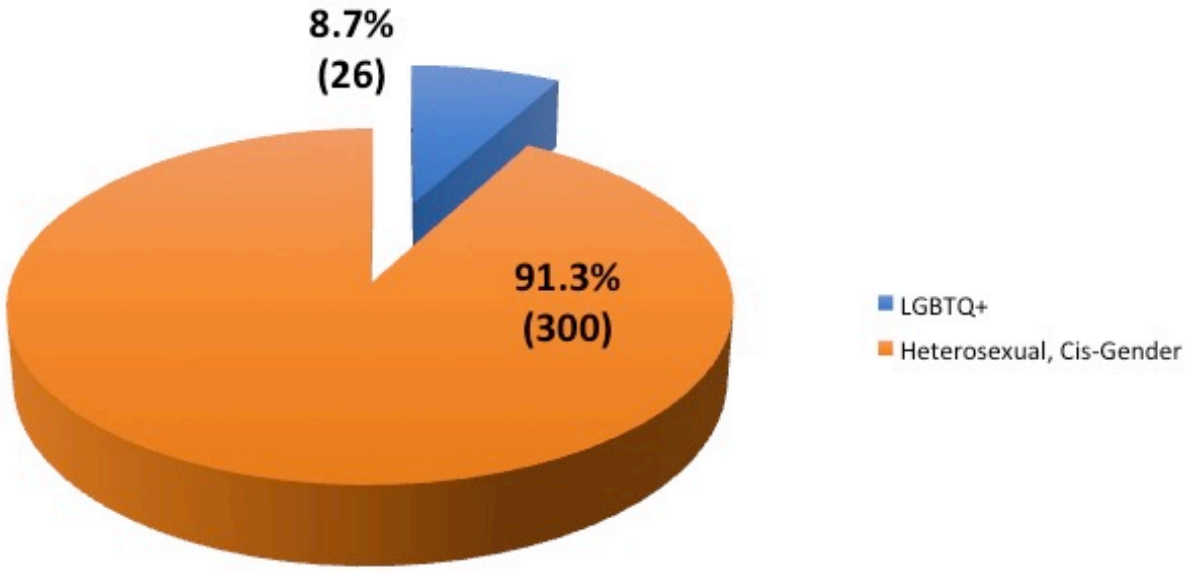
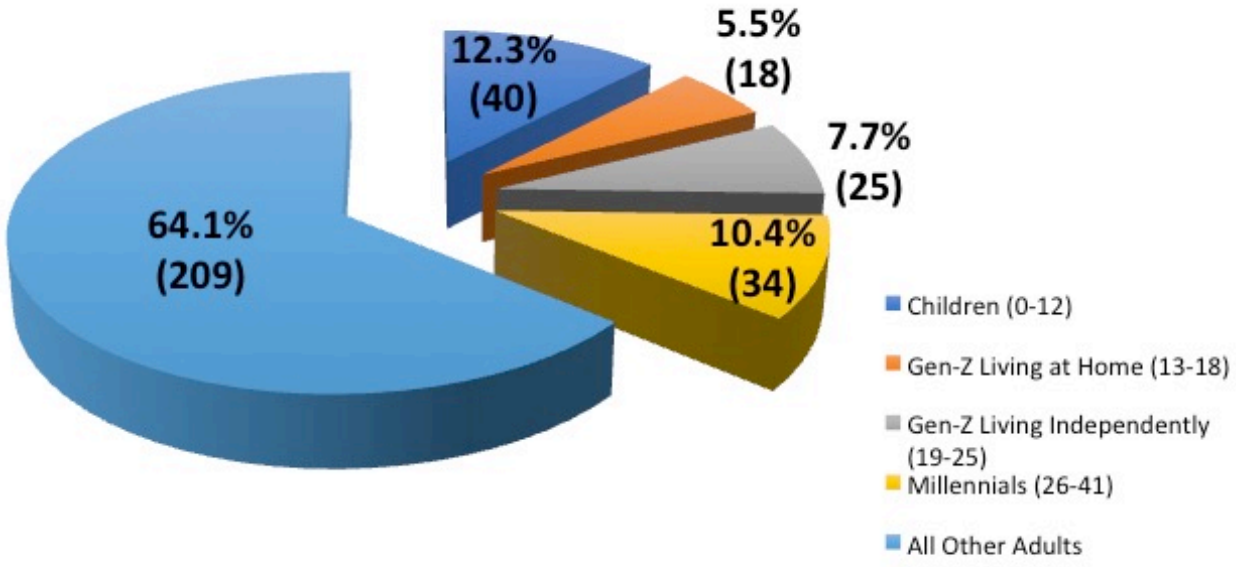


Table 8: Distribution by age.



Appendix: Exhibits

Exhibit 1. Quoted verbatim, though edited for style with emphasis added, from a conversation held on April 18, 2023, with a late twenty-something mixed-race, cis-gender, heterosexual queer woman enrolled among the UCC constituents of the community.

> No offense, Pastor, sometimes, when I have to slip out on Sunday to go someplace else other than church, I try to make it at least to early morning Bible Study, because I like Scripture. It's why I exist. I like Scripture, and I like wrestling with it. And, then, if I have to slip out because I have to go to be with family, or whatever else, I can, because at least I know I got this first part, *whereas during sermons we don't get a chance as a community to wrestle with Scripture*.

Exhibit 2. Part I, Article 4 of the founding constitution of the Evangelical and Reformed Church.

> a. The doctrinal standards … are the Heidelberg Catechism, Luther's Catechism and the Augsburg Confession. They are accepted as an authoritative interpretation of the essential truth taught in the Holy Scriptures.
>
> b. Wherever these doctrinal standards differ, ministers, members and congregations, in accordance with the liberty of conscience inherent in the gospel, are allowed to adhere to the interpretation of one of these confessions. However, in each case the final norm is the Word of God (General Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church 1936).

Exhibit 3. Open & Affirming (ONA).

> Open & Affirming (ONA) is the designation for "congregations, campus ministries, and other bodies in the UCC which make a public covenant of welcome into their full life and ministry to persons of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions" < https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do/wider-church-ministries/gsjm/lgbtqia/lgbt_ona/ >. While ONA is normatively construed as a designation narrowly applied to members of the LGBTQ+ community, the people of St. Peter's — and now Holy Trinity — have widened the scope to include a commitment to extravagant welcome and unbounded hospitality extended to all who might find their way into the community. Although this commitment is broad and expansive, there are limits to communion. In the language of Paul in Galatians 1:9, ἀνάθεμα ἔστω ("let them be anathema'") any who would vow harm to those whom the community loves and cherishes and whom the community is confident have a claim on welcome and hospitality in the divine economy.

Exhibit 4. Verbatim from a conversation dated November 16, 2022, edited for style and intonation.

> As a person of color, I grew up in all white spaces, and that doesn't necessarily bother me. But I'm always a little bit anxious. And then, being queer? *This* is the place where all of that is just accepted. It's not just accepted. It literally is a place where you are *so accepted* that there's not a space in which my identity is ever in question. Within this church, your identity is always embraced.

Exhibit 5. Augustine's quotation of Cicero's text in full at IV.xii.27.

> *Dixit ergo quidam eloquens, et verum dixit, ita* dicere *debere eloquentem ut doceat, ut delectet, ut flectat. Deinde addidit:* Docere *necessitatis est, delectare suavitatis, flectere victoria.*
>
> Therefore a certain eloquent person said — and that one spoke the truth — that an eloquent orator ought to speak in order *to teach*, to delight, to persuade. Then that person added: '*To teach* is a matter of necessity, to delight a matter of sweetness, to persuade a matter of victory (emphasis added).
>
> The locus of Augustine's citation of Cicero is *Orat.* 21.69:
>
> *Erit igitur eloquens … is qui in foro causisque ciuilibus ita dicet, ut* probet*, ut delectet, ut flectat.* Probare *necessitatis est, delectare suauitatis, flectere uictoriae….*
>
> The eloquent person, then, will be ... the one who thus in the forum and civil cases speaks in order *to prove*, to delight, and to persuade. *To prove* is a matter of necessity; to delight is a matter of sweetness, and to persuade is a matter of victory.
>
> In Augustine's substitution of *docere* for Cicero's *probare*, one can see the beginnings of a Christian scholasticism that, in time, would come to supplant the classical orator's concern for the jurisprudence of the courtroom. Nevertheless, Augustine, by equating the skill of preaching with the art of persuasion, the success of which is *victoria* (νίκη, in Greek, "victory"), suggests that the locus of preaching is *agon* (ἀγών, in Greek, "a place of contest or struggle"), as per Gleason (1995). The Latin texts are: Augustine 1861, 101 [regrettably, Minge introduced confusion in the secondary literature by mistakenly citing Cicero's text here as *De oratore*]; and Cicero 1911. The translations are my own. On Augustine's debt to Greco-Roman rhetorical culture in general and with respect to *Doctr. chr.* in particular, see Kennedy 1999, 170-182; Dunn 1998, 220-35; and Dunn 2018, 110-114.

Exhibit 6. *Doctr. chr.* IV.iv.6.

> *Debet igitur divinarum Scripturarum tractator et doctor, defensor rectae fidei ac debellator erroris, et bona docere et mala dedocere atque in hoc opere sermonis*

conciliare aversos, remissos erigere, nescientibus quid agatur quid exspectare debeant intimare.

Therefore, the interpreter and teacher of the divine Scriptures, the defender of the right faith and the destroyer of error, must both teach good and unlearn evil, and in this work of preaching, reconcile the apostate, arouse the lax, and to make known to those who do not know what is happening what they ought to expect.

Exhibit 7. Apostolic and Post-Apostolic evidence for the model of the solitary orator through its Early Modern (1600-1800) challengers.

Notwithstanding the centuries long hegemony of the sermon-as-monologue, the history of Christian preaching has not been entirely bereft of direct and immediate dialogue between homilist and congregation in the preaching moment. In fact, the texts of the New Testament bear witness precisely to such engagement. From Luke 24:14 — in which two among Jesus' disciples walking on the road to Emmaus were ὡμίλουν (*homiloun*) πρὸς ἀλλήλους περὶ πάντων τῶν συμβεβηκότων τούτων ("*homilizing* among themselves about all the things that had happened") — to Acts 24:7 — where in Troas ἐν δὲ τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων συνηγμένων ἡμῶν κλάσαι ἄρτον, ὁ Παῦλος διελέγετο αὐτοῖς ("on the first day of the week, when we had gathered to break bread, Paul began holding discussion with them [his traveling companions]") and, finally, — to 1 Cor 14:27-29 — and Paul's advice to the worshipping assemblies in Corinth that, though those who possess ecstatic forms of revelation are indeed permitted to speak in the assembly, they must, however, be limited for the sake of good order κατὰ δύο ἢ τὸ πλεῖστον τρεῖς καὶ ἀνὰ μέρος ("to two or, at most, three at one time") and his concession by way of command προφῆται δὲ δύο ἢ τρεῖς λαλείτωσαν καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι διακρινέτωσαν ("let two or three prophets speak and others adjudicate what is said"), the apostolic witness is not constrained by the sermon-as-monologue. [29]

The subsequent history, however, of Christian proclamation confirms the hegemony of the sermon-as-monologue. Paucity of evidence to the contrary proves the rule. Even when Augustine, on occasion, appears to encourage direct and immediate response from his listeners, either by a series of rhetorical questions [30] or non-rhetorical statements engaging his listeners, [31] the former

---

[29] *Cf.,* Thompson and Bennett 1969, 16-17. The Greek text is Aland *et al.* 2012; all translations are my own.

[30] *Cf.,* the plethora of rhetorical questions in Sermon 109. For an accessible English translation, see Augustine 1990, 132-135.

[31] *Cf.,* Sermon 101.9, where Augustine reports, parenthetically, his good natured *repartie* with his audience:

Video vos cito intellexisse, nec tamen debeo jam finire. Non enim omnes *cito intellexistis. Vidi in voce intelligentes, plures video silentio requirentes. Sed quia*

expecting merely a mental response whereas the latter acknowledges energetic *riposte*, the trope was always in the service of the declamation of the lone orator — the preaching of the solitary voice — and in accord with Augustine's rhetorical theory. [32]

It is perhaps not unexpected, then, that any challenge to the primacy of monological preaching would have to wait for the rise of sundry English speaking non-conformist ecclesial communities arising in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The earliest examples are separatists who fled to the Netherlands in the early seventeenth century, and, later, non-conformists who, seeking religious freedom, settled in and around Plymouth in New England. In the first case, John Robinson, spiritual leader of Puritans taking refuge in Leiden, in the tract "The People's Plea for the Exercise of Prophesy" (1618), defends the practice of "preaching out of office" — followed by a time of "questions … even disputations" from the people — against the charge of being contrary to the apostolic witness (1618):

> Neither … are they that speak in the exercise of prophecy to make a sermon by the hour glass...: that, were to abuse the time and wrong the gifts of others; but briefly speak a word of exhortation as God enableth, and that, after the ministerial teaching be ended, as Acts xii, questions also about things delivered, and with them, even disputations, as there is occasion, being part, or appurtenances of that exercise. [33]

In the second, John Cotton, often called "Boston's Puritan patriarch," [34] in a pamphlet dating from 1642 and setting out in question and answer form "The

---

de via *loquimur, tanquam* in via *ambulemus: veloces tardos exspectate , et pariter ambulate.*

I see that you have understood quickly, and yet I ought not now end. For you have not *all* understood quickly. I have seen by their voice those who understand. I see by their silence more who don't understand. But since we are speaking of *the way*, let us walk as if on *the way*: the swift wait for the slow, and all walk together.

Emphasis added. For the Latin text, see Augustine 1845, 601. Although the translation is mine, the entire sermon in English with notes can be found in Augustine 1990, 64-72.

[32] See in particular *Doctr. chr.* IV.30, accessible in English in Augustine1887, 1323-1324.

[33] Robinson 1851, 327; *cf.,* Adams 1981, 28-31, 58-64. I am indebted to Rose 1997, 130, for this evidence.

[34] Adams 1981, 19.

True Constitution of a Particular Visible Church" (1984), outlined that which properly takes place after the proclamation of the word in separatist churches in Boston:

> Question: What part of public worship is next to be administered?
>
> Answer: Before prophesying it will be seasonable to sing a Psalm (1) and by some of the Teachers of the Church to read the Word, and therewith to preach it by giving the sense, and applying the use (2) In dispensing whereof the minister was wont to stand above the people in a pulpit of wood and the elders on both sides (3) while the people harkened unto them with reverence and attention (4) where there may be prophesy two or three (5) and if the time permit the Elders may call any other of the Brethren, whether of the same church or any, to speak a word of exhortation to the people (6) and for the better edifying of a man's self or others, it may be lawful for any (young or old) save only for women to ask questions at the mouth of the prophets (7). [35]

While Robinson's stipulation of the propriety of questions raised in response to prophecy proffered and Cotton's recognition of the speech of "two or three" prophets both cohere with Paul's stipulations in 1 Cor 14, the addition of a "word of exhortation" in both coupled with questions — "any save women" in Cotton — is a decided innovation that is in keeping with non-conformist's fierce commitment to individual "liberty." [36]

Exhibit 8. The continuing influence of Augustine on homiletic theory into the present.

Although undermined, Augustine's image of the preacher-as-orator continued to inform homiletic analysis even into the early part of this century when, for example, in the published report of a Lilly Endowment survey querying how listeners in North America "listen" to sermons, respondents were asked questions that "were inspired by categories of rhetoric. Rhetoric, in this context, refers to the use of written or spoken language to persuade a person or group to adopt a particular point of view. It includes all the means and modes of persuasion" (McClure *et al* 2004, 7). While the authors do acknowledge the limits of Aristotelian taxonomy in conceding to the "'messy' moments in listener responses" (127) — namely those instances in which sermon responses belie any "neat and clean" categorization with respect to "ethos, logos, pathos" (128) — regrettably they take as axiomatic that τὸ τέλος ("the end," "aim," or "goal") of a homily is the same as for a speech so construed by Aristotle — *i.e.,* τὸ πιθανόν

---

[35] The quotation is from "The True Constitution of a Particular Visible Church," 6 (Cotton 1984, 102; in an otherwise non paginated facsimile collection of tracts, edited here for style); emphasis added.

[36] Hudson 1981, 84-87.

("persuasion"). Although the assumption that the goal of a homily is "to persuade a person or group to adopt a particular point of view" (7) fits neatly with a Barthian, Neo-Orthodox preoccupation with "decision," it is decidedly less helpful in a postmodern context. Rose (1997) make the same observation in critiquing McClure's work:

> I am uncomfortable with his continued use of the word 'persuasion' to describe preaching's purpose and ecclesial leadership. Persuasive preaching and leadership styles have been abusive to many in the church whose experiences and convictions have been consistently ignored or dismissed. I realize that McClure's collaborative method works against such abuse, but continued use of the word is potentially dangerous in sanctioning previous definitions and practices (133, n.1).

Exhibit 9.a. Prompt for 1st iteration of corporate preaching, emended for style.

This Sunday we will celebrate the baptism of a child of the church. Between now and then, think about the story of Jesus' own baptism in the Gospel of Mark (Mark 1:4-11) and think back to times in your life when you heard God name you and claim you and declare you to be God's own delight. If the Spirit moves, you might even share your story in worship so that together we can give thanks and praise for God's all embracing, all affirming grace. I look forward to seeing you Sunday and to hearing your stories of God's grace.

Exhibit 9.b. Additional observation and evaluation of 1st iteration of corporate preaching.

The anticipated problems, perils, and pitfalls that had earlier occupied the collaborators, for which no contingences were planned, never materialized (*vid. supra,* pp. 20-21; 30-31): the tone was respectful, the speech consistent with core values, the content was thoughtful, reflective and suggestive of new ways of understanding the presence of the Divine in everyday life. The congregation received the novelty of the experiment and the poignancy of stories shared with charity, affection, and appreciation. While there was no risk of any one interlocutor monopolizing the floor, concern for the total length of the sermon was raised. Whereas the congregation is accustomed to the typical sermon being twelve to fifteen minutes in length — and no more — the experiment ran to over twenty-five minutes. Rather than cutting short the participation of any individual or limiting the number of respondents, the decision was made going forward to better manage other elements of liturgy in order to accommodate the model (*vid. supra*, pp. 28-29; *infra*, p. 45).

Despite having anticipated the use of microphones and placement of video cameras with the virtue of hospitality in mind, a conflict in values was quickly identified. Whereas the longitudinal architecture of the worship space — *viz.,* nave with center aisle running from entryway to chancel — that, for millennia directed the people's gaze and voice to elevated altar and pulpit, the collaborators

in their planning had assumed the same: speakers would be invited to a stationary microphone at the front of the nave facing pulpit and altar, addressing the pastor. That assumption was challenged by one collaborator-as-participant who — both in the moment of corporate preaching and in the discussion afterward —suggested that the values of hospitality and inclusion offered a compelling reason for the speaker to turn and face the congregation, thereby embodying that dialogue is to be among all the people and not just with the pastor (*vid. supra,* p. 21, 31; *infra*, p. 45). After adjudicating the competing interests of the virtual congregation, particularly with respect to direction and camera placement, with those of the actual congregation, all while being aware that public speaking is often intimidating, not the least reason for which is having to face a multitude of faces in dialogue rather than simply one (*i.e.,* the pastor's), the decision was made not to change the configuration of the worship space but to be open to creative alternatives in the future.

A more intriguing observation was raised by the very first collaborator-as-participant during the sermon itself, when, in introducing their remarks, began somewhat flippantly and decidedly facetiously: "Fortunately, I grew up United Pentecostal, so I'm used to a testimony service." Described simply, "testimony" in pentecostal piety is a highly stylized narrative of personal regeneration, enacted in the context of worship, whereby an adherent narrates a story in which "God is a character … the Spirit is an agent" and the storyteller a participant in God's salvation history. "In testimony, then, pentecostals enact an identity by writing themselves into the larger story of God's redemption: 'Crucifixion, resurrection, Pentecost, *parousia*, all formed one great redemption, one story in which they were participants with assigned roles to play'" (Smith 2017). To the extent, then, that the divine voice spoken at Jesus' baptism is echoed at Mark's story of Jesus' μεταμόρφωσις ("transfiguration") at 9:2-8, precisely for the benefit of Jesus' inner circle — *i.e.,* Peter, James, and John — the invitation to share stores of God having named and claimed and declared one to be God's own delight might, quite reasonably, prompt such personal narratives of spiritual regeneration. While the practice of pentecostal testimony could very well tilt toward the ecstatic and indulgent, that was a risk that collaborators were willing to take for the sake of a less authoritarian, more egalitarian, and purposefully inclusive form for the congregation's ministry of proclamation. It was recognized that, no matter how carefully scripted, any discussion prompt will undoubtedly, for better or worse, admit precisely similar ambiguity for some worship participants.

Exhibit 10.a. Prompt for 2nd iteration of corporate preaching, emended for style.

This Sunday will mark the last of three Sundays on which we have focused worship on our responsibility to support the congregations that gather at Ironwood and Corby with our prayers, our presence, our gifts, and our service. Our worship will be structured around Mark's story of a poor widow who made an infinitesimally small, inconspicuous gift to the temple treasury, giving all that she had — her very life. Between now and then, think about the story of the widow in Mark (Mark 12:38-44) and about what her example might mean to you. If the

Spirit moves, you might even share your insight or example of selfless giving as an inspiration for us all. I look forward to seeing you Sunday and to hearing your voice added to my voice as we proclaim God's Word for the day!

Exhibit 10.b. Additional observation and evaluation of 2nd iteration of corporate preaching.

With the unexpected participation of so many worshippers in this iteration of corporate preaching, time became a matter of particular concern, if not for the congregation, at least for its pastor. In an effort to respond to the unforeseen addition to worship time created by nine participants, the planned frame for the sermon — *specifically* the planned pastoral conclusion to the sermon — was abandoned in the moment and the final act of congregational sharing was followed by a brief summary reprising individual contributions and a concluding doxology. As with the first experiment, however, the collaborators repeated their advice never to cut short or otherwise curtail the participation of any worshipper. Instead, they advised flexibility and better planning going forward so as to for added worship time (*vid. supra*, p. 28-29*;* 43).

This decision was reiterated as the collaborators recalled the participation of one particular speaker who struggles with Tourette syndrome (*vid. supra,* p. 30). In halting words, with a plethora of *lacuna*, and accompanied by countless *anacolutha*, this participant labored to communicate their intention. The more they labored, the more uncomfortable the assembly became, not in frustration at the time consumed, but out of empathy. Notwithstanding any awkwardness or discomfort, the collaborators were adamant: No one should ever be denied the opportunity to speak to completion.

Finally, as with the first iteration, the mundane issue of use of electronic amplification of participants' voices was revisited. Surprisingly, no one who chose to speak during this second iteration chose to do so at the prepositioned microphone at the front of the worship space. Without exception, all spoke from where they sat, an eventuality that audio-video equipment was well prepared to accommodate. To the extent that such a choice corresponds to the community's longstanding practice of speaking prayer intentions during the corporate Prayers of the People suggests that, in the future, provision for a prepositioned microphone will no longer be made. All will be welcome to speak, instead, from where they sit (*vid. supra,* pp. 21, 31, 43-44).

Exhibit 11.a. Prompt for 3rd iteration of corporate preaching, emended for style.

This Sunday is Epiphany Sunday for us — and the time when we will see our third experience with Corporate Preaching in worship. Microphones will be available for anyone to share, right from where they sit, their own experience of God's epiphany in their life. The essence of our faith is that epiphanies are real and that epiphanies are now — that God continually makes appearances in our lives in places and through people we consider unlikely, unexpected, and

unworthy to be bearers of divine presence. Just as the magi came looking for God's Messiah in mighty Jerusalem, only to find God in lowly Bethlehem, so do we. Just as they came looking for a mighty King only to find God as a vulnerable babe, lying in a manger, so do we. Between now and this Sunday, think about where you have experienced God in your life — in places, through people, in experiences as improbable as they are unimaginable. I look forward to seeing you all in worship this Sunday and to hearing your own story of God's epiphany in your life.

Exhibit 11.b. Additional observation and evaluation of 3rd iteration of corporate preaching.

Several collaborators wondered if the process had strayed too far from the original design and, as a consequence, lost some of its effectiveness. Suggestions were made to return not only to group bible study, with collaborators being encouraged to share their own lived experiences with the texts for preaching — "that really set the tone" for positive and productive corporate preaching — but also to line up in advance two or three of the cohort to share during the sermon and, then, "strategically provide space for infrequent speakers to share." It was also suggested that offering people the opportunity of submitting a written contribution ahead of time to be read as a part of the sermon event might encourage the participation of those who are "a little shy about speaking off the cuff."

Notwithstanding the perception of less than exciting storytelling with this Iteration, one collaborator spoke for all in declaring, "I actually hope this continues. I think that, with continued refinement, this model will develop into providing true community sermons as intended."

Exhibit 12. Extended comments of a twenty-something, gender queer member of the LGBTQ+ community.

I drive past this church every single day that I go to school. I go to IUSB (Indiana University South Bend). I noticed the sign out front, the digital billboard. I noticed especially the trans flag. I looked up the church online, and I said to my friends, "Hey, why don't we go to this church next week?" The second that we walked in we were immediately greeted by people. I'm getting teary-eyed just talking about it. We were immediately greeted by people, and we had people coming up and talking to us. At other churches we visited, if we even made a blip of noise, people would look at us and glare at us. I just want to say that I am so amazed by all of you people, and by how kind and welcoming you are. I have to deal with a lot of really hard stuff…. Coming here and seeing how nice and welcoming everyone is has brought a sense of peace to my life. My friends can't come every Sunday, but they have fallen in love with this church. I want to say thank you for being so welcoming because it's something that I really needed. I've felt lost for a very long time. I think for the first time in my life I have found

> a church that truly cares for me for who I am. That's just something that I can't even describe.... So I just want to say thank you to all of you. [37]

Exhibit 13. Prolegomenon for a homiletic of corporate preaching.

> Without exception, every instance of participation in each of three iterations of corporate preaching took the form of a story of personal experience or a narrative of a particular encounter and *not* the form of syllogistic discourse as envisioned by Pagitt's (2005; 2014) "progressional dialogue" (*vid. supra,* pp. 10-11, 19-20, 32; *cf.,* Thomson 1996, 22, where the significance of narrating experience is already anticipated). While such privileging of experience is consistent with a post-modern sensibility (Rose 1997, 104), here it serves a decidedly liturgical function, namely that which the Psalmists invoke as הללויה and their Greek and Latin translators introduce into the language of liturgy with ἀλληλουϊά and *alleluia — viz.,* a call to the assembly to offer glory and honor, praise and thanksgiving to the Most High God for God's gracious acts in life. This liturgical function, then, of ἐγκώμιον ("praise," "encomium") or of πανήγυρις ("celebration," "panegyric") can be seen to serve as a rationale and strategy or, indeed, as a nacent homiletic for corporate preaching.
>
> This preoccupation with personal testimony points toward a marked shift in theological understanding not simply of *verbum dei* ("Word of God") but also, and perhaps more importantly, of the *locus divinae operae* ("the location of divine work") in the world. By no means confined to the texts of Ancient Israel and the history to which they allude, not at all bound by the lived experience of the early church as witnessed in canonical writings, not even limited to the musings of patristic writers or the challenges of the Protestant reformers and their Catholic respondents, participants in this experiment of corporate preaching were merely living out their commitment to the notion that "God is still speaking." What began as an exercise in Madison Avenue identity branding for the United Church of Christ in the first decade of the millennium, the advertising tagline "God is still speaking," along with its corollary "God is still acting," has become something of a *vade mecum* for this particular ecclesial community. A quintessentially postmodern notion, this conviction of the currency of divine word and deed is grounded not in *omniscience* or in *omnipotence* but in *omnipresence* and has decided consequences for the ministry of proclamation:
>
> > … if God is everywhere, then everyone has experienced God and can participate in give-and-take God-talk. They can proclaim what

[37] While it would be too much to claim that cultivating communities of trust and mutual respect is both necessary and sufficient for successful corporate preaching, the example of this particular visitor-participant suggests that the judgment of at least one critic does not hold — *viz.,* that corporate preaching is (off-putting and) not a viable option "for friendly churches that welcome people hoping they will consider joining them for worship once a week" (Reid 2006, 39).

> they experience, think, feel, believe, and interpret to be meaningful at an ultimate level. And what they experience, think, feel, believe, and interpret to be meaningful will evolve as they listen to and reflect on the experiences, thoughts, emotions, faith, and interpretations of others (Allen, Jr. 2005*,* 44).

Expressed with a decidedly different sense of piety — *viz.*, from the notion of "sacramental imagination" — Mary Catherine Hilkert, OP (1994), in a quest for a current "understanding of where the word of God is located and what the preaching event is meant to be," emphasized precisely the same sentiment:

> The sacramental imagination claims a different foundational perspective (*i.e.,* from modern instantiations of Reformation traditions), asserting that God's word of salvation, hope, healing, and liberation is being spoken in new ways today in people's daily lives. According to this vision of revelation, the same creative Spirit of God who was active in the history of Israel, in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, in the church of the past, in the lives of the saints, is still active today. Therefore reflection on culture, people's lives, and human experience is necessary not merely to make a homily relevant but to hear God's word today. From the sacramental perspective, preachers listen with attentiveness to human experience because they are convinced that revelation is located in human history, in the depths of human experience — a mystery that should not come as such a surprise to those who profess a belief in the incarnation (Hilkert 1997, 48-49).

In the context of this experiment of corporate preaching, then, all preachers — lay and clergy alike — proclaimed from unwavering conviction grounded in unambiguous experience that not only God's "revelation" but God in God's very self "is located in (their) history, in the depths of (their) experience" — a *realia* that might be "a mystery" to some but is by no means "a surprise" to this ecclesial community because of its continued experience of God's still speaking and still acting presence.

For this particular ecclesial community, if experience of God's presence is the *what* of corporate preaching and story or narrative the *how,* then the *why* is nothing less than ἐγκώμιον ("praise," "encomium") and πανήγυρις ("celebration," "panegyric") of the Most High God for God's gracious acts. At the outset, it was noted how the spirit of Vatican II not only guided the shape of the liturgy of this community to insure "the full, conscious, and active participation" of the assembly but also provided impetus to corporate preaching in order to make the event of proclamation the true work of the people (*vid. supra,* pp. 8-9). Here, mention of a third effect of Vatican II on the ministry of proclamation is in order — *viz.,* that preaching itself is an act of liturgy, indeed is integral to liturgy, that

witnesses to and effects the movement from death to life for the assembly in its ἀνάμνησις ("remembering the past into present existence") of the paschal mystery: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. The "liturgical homily" in Roman Catholic parlance, then, serves this mystery, by celebrating the life-giving presence of the divine in human experience, thereby persuading the assembly that the author of that life-giving presence is worthy of nothing less than thanksgiving and praise:

> The homilist's starting point is a belief that there is movement from death to life, and the homily becomes the moment when the homilist seeks to demonstrate this for the assembly through proofs: from the life of Jesus and from the life of this assembly and others. The point being proven, the homilist invites the assembly to thank God for it (Dunn 1998, 234; *cf.,* 2018, 110-114).

In the language of LG the sermon becomes "the tribute of lips which give praise to God's name" (Chapter II, Article 12). [38] To be sure, ἐγκώμιον ("praise," "encomium") and πανήγυρις ("celebration," "panegyric") are sub-species of Aristotle's ῥητορικὸς ἐπιδεικτικός ("epideictic rhetoric") that has as its subject ἔπαινος δὲ ψόγος ("praise or blame"). Though not validated here, the content of corporate preaching would need to be tested to determine whether it might encompass a corollary to the rhetoric of blame in the Christian scriptures — *viz.,* **קינה** ("lament"). That extension would be required in order for this homiletic of corporate preaching to be faithful to the totality of the paschal mystery.

If the *what* of corporate preaching is the experience of God's presence, the *how* is story or narrative, and the *why* is ἐγκώμιον ("praise," "encomium") and πανήγυρις ("celebration," "panegyric") of the Most High God for God's gracious acts in life, what remains, then, is the *when*: when and how often this model ought be utilized in the context of an ecclesial community's ministry of proclamation.

The "liturgical homily," again to use Roman Catholic language, is but one scene in a larger liturgical drama. The creative force for this drama is nothing less than the "sacramental imagination" cultivated by drawing on "… the living tradition of the Christian community" in a way that exploits not only the story of Israel as עם האלהים ("people of God") but also "the story of Jesus as recounted in the Scriptures, as remembered, lived and celebrated in the community, and as retold uniquely in every age and culture" (Hilkert 1994, 33). This sacramental imagination is leveraged in liturgy to create a shared community of meaning thereby offering a coherent vision of the world under the providential care of the Divine, the "truth," "validity," "authority" of which is self-evident and self-authenticating for the worshipping community. That is to say, the ministry of

---

[38] < https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html >.

proclamation, along with the larger liturgical ministry of the community, labors to create a novel vision of the world-as-it-ought be, a vision that is consistent with the collective ethos of the ecclesial community, informed and restrained by the liberative impulse of sacred scripture in a way that imagines human flourishing, indeed the flourishing of creation, in all its fullness. In terms of practice, then, the ministry of proclamation necessarily plots a new, contemporary narrative of human flourishing that parallels the narratives emplotted in the texts of sacred scripture and in the stories of people of faith through the ages, a plot that, in turn, constructs a new vision of the world in which the ecclesial community lives and for which it labors for full completion.

Therein lies the rub for corporate preaching. It takes time for such a shared community of meaning to be cultivated. Though drawing on the motif of "language," Allen, Jr.'s (2005) assessment holds no less for "sacramental imagination":

> It takes time for the traditional "language" of ancient Christian communities to truly become the "language" of a citizen of the twenty-first century. It takes time for words and ideas like *prophecy, atonement, judgment, vocation, trinity*, and *Pentecost* to become words that one uses with the same ease that one speaks the words *tree, good, purple, Ireland*, and *anger*. It takes time for the biblical stories of creation, exodus, exile, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and eschaton to become stories that one recounts with the same passion that one tells stories about grandparents and grandchildren. It takes time for the church's creeds and doctrines to become beliefs that are shared as comfortably as one expresses strong opinions about what was seen on the evening news last night. Indeed, it takes time for us to be able to name and describe God-in-Christ as God-with-us and as God-in-our-world with the same sense of assurance that we can name and describe relationships with family, friends, colleagues, or enemies (55-56).

While Allen, Jr.'s (2005) insistence that the role of preaching is, in part or in whole, to remediate the biblical or theological literacy of members of the ecclesial community is rightly contested (*cf.,* O'Day 2016, 3-11), the underlying sentiment holds: it takes time for preaching to nurture and form communities of shared meaning. Corporate preaching in itself is unable to carry that burden apart from a variety of other forms and sundry other practitioners of the ministry of proclamation. It remains for the ecclesial community itself — for pastor and people together — to determine the proper balance between the various forms of proclamation.

Bibliography

Primary Texts

Aland, Barbara, *et al.*, eds. 2012. *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece*. 28th Revised Edition. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

Augustine. 1861. *De Doctrina Christina*. In *Sancti Aurelii Augustini, Hipponensis Episcopi: Opera Omnia*. *Patrologie Latinae. Tomus XXXIV*. Pp. 15-120. Edited by J.-P. Migne. Paris: Migne.

_____. 1887. *St. Augustine's City of God and Christian Doctrine*. Translated by J. F. Shaw. Edited by Philip Schaff and M. B. Riddle. *NPNF*1/2. Buffalo, NY: The Christian Literature Company.

_____. 1845. *Sermones de Scripturis Veteris et Novi Testamenti.* In *Sancti Aurelii Augustini, Hipponensis Episcopi: Opera Omnia*. *Patrologie Latinae. Tomus XXXVIII.* Edited by J.-P. Migne. Paris: Migne.

_____. 1990. *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*. Part III. Vol. 4. Translated by Edmund Hill. Edited by John E. Rotelle. Brooklyn, NY: New City Press.

Cicero, M. Tullius. 1911. *M. Tulli Ciceronis Rhetorica*. Tomus II. Edited by A. S. Wilkins. Oxford Classical Texts. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Cotton, John. 1984. *The New England Way.* Library of American Puritan Writings: The Seventeenth Century 12. New York: AMS Press, Inc.

Robinson, John. 1851. *The Works of John Robinson, Pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers.* Vol. III. Edited by Robert Ashton. London: John Snow.

Articles, Essays, & Reviews

Allen, Jr., O. Wesley. 2008. Review of *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of Sermon Communities of Faith,* by Doug Pagitt. *Encounter* 69(3): 98-100.

Bauman, J. Daniel. 1972. "Chapter Sixteen: Behavior Change—Dialogue Preaching." In *An Introduction to Contemporary Preaching,* 259-273. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Bleidorn, Eugene. 1967. "Dialogue Preaching: Practice." *Preaching* 2(1): 10-15.

Bohannon, John S. 2006. "Preaching and the Emerging Church." *Faith and Mission* 23(2): 55-77.

Bowie, Ewen Lyall. 2003. "Second Sophistic." In *The Oxford Classical Dictionary,* 3rd Edition Revised, ed. Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth, 1377-1378. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brueggemann, Walter. 2002. "Biblical Authority: A Personal Reflection." In *Struggling with Scripture*, ed. Walter Brueggemann, William C. Placher, and Brian K. Blount, 5-31. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Cleator, Gerald. 1968. "Experiments in Dialogue Homily." *Preaching* 3(5): 22-31.

Dimock, Michael. 2019. "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins." Pew Research Center (January 17, 2019) < https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/ >.

_____. 2025. "5 Things to Keep in Mind When You Hear about Gen Z, Millennials, Boomers and Other Generations." Pew Research Center (May 22, 2025) < https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/05/22/5-things-to-keep-in-mind-when-you-hear-about-gen-z-millennials-boomers-and-other-generations/>.

Dunn, Geoffrey D. 1998. "Aristotle and the Art of Preaching," *Worship* 72(3): 220-235

_____. 2018. "Rhetoric in the Patristic Sermons of Late Antiquity." In *Preaching in the Patristic Era: Sermons, Preachers, and Audiences in the Latin West.* Pp. 103-134. Edited by Anthony Dupont, Shari Boodts, Gert Partoens, and Johan Leemans. Leiden: Brill.

Fosdick, Harry Emerson. 1928. "What's the Matter with Preaching." *Harper's Magazine* 157: 133-141.

Gatzke, Nicholas G. 2006. "The Future of Preaching? An Initial Exploration of Preaching in the Emerging Church." *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletic Society* 6(2): 66-76.

Graves, Mike. 2009. "Deeply Dialogical: Rethinking the Conversation Called Preaching." *Journal for Preachers* 32(2): 24-31.

Greet, Brian A. 1967. "Dialogue Preaching." *Expository Times* 78(5): 148-150.

Hilkert, Mary Catherine, OP. 1994. "Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination." In *That the Word May Be Proclaimed: Selections from the Marten Lectures — Volume 1*." Edited by Richard Stern. Saint Meinrad Studies in Pastoral Ministry 3 (Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology) < https://pressbooks.palni.org/martenlecturesvol1/ >.

Holland, Richard L. 2006. "Progressional Dialogue & Preaching: Are They the Same?" *Master's Seminary Journal* 17(2): 207-222.

Holston, James. 1981. "Dialogue Preaching." *Restoration Quarterly* 24(2): 89-97.

Jacobsen, David Schnasa. 2018. "Two Cheers for Proclamation: Toward a More Promising, Conversational Homiletic." *Encounter* 78(2): 29-33.

Knauss, Keith and Michael Matuszak. 1993. "Relocation of a Torrington Plant." In *Grand Designs: The Impact of Corporate Strategies on Workers, Unions, and Communities*. Pp. 92-118. Edited by Charles Craypo and Bruce Nissen. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Leliaert, Richard. 1967. "The Dialogue Homily: Theory." *Preaching* 2(1): 16-24.

Linkins, Liz. 2023. "Gen Z Christians Want Leaders to Keep It Real." *Christianity Today* (March 24, 2023) < https://www.christianitytoday.com/2023/03/gen-z-christian-faith-pastors-church-generation-authentic/ >.

Lower, David M. 2017. "Collaborative Preaching: Occasional Co-Preaching with Church Members to Align the Medium with the Message and Build Disciples." Doctor of Ministry Final Project. Atlanta: Candler School of Theology.

Marty, Peter. 2008. "Shaping Communities: Pastoral Leadership and Congregational Formation." In *For Abundant Life: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, 306-326. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

McClure, John S. 2004. "Preaching Theology." *Quarterly Review* 24(3): 249-261.

McClure, John S., Ronald J. Allen, Dale P. Andrews, L. Susan Bond, Dan P. Moseley, and G. Lee Ramsay, Jr. 2004. *Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press.

O'day, Gail R. 2016. "Shaped by Hearing: Living Our Stories Together." In *Questions Preachers Ask: Essays in Honor of Thomas G. Long*, ed. Scott Black Johnston, Ted A. Smith, and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, 3-11. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press.

Orr, J. M. 1970. "Dialogue Preaching and the Discussion Service." *Expository Times* 82(1): 10-13.

Parrott, Jeff. 2017. "South Bend Mulls Roundabout, Seeks Public Opinion." *South Bend Tribune* (online edition published June 28, 2017) < https://www.southbendtribune.com/story/news/local/2017/06/28/south-bend-mulls-roundabout-seeks-public-inpu/45810419/> .

Rainer, III, Sam S. 2011. "Next Generation Needs: Leading Millennials Requires a Different Type of Authority." *Leadership: A publication of Christianity Today, Inc.*, 32(3): 49.

Reid, Robert Stephen. 2006. Review of *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of Sermon Communities of Faith,* by Doug Pagitt, *Christian Century* 123:17 (2006): 39.

Rose, Lucy A. 1995. "Conversational Preaching: A Proposal." *Journal for Preachers* 19(1): 26-30.

Smith, James K. A. 2017. "Pentecostalism." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology. Edited by* William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino (online edition, Oxford Academic, 6 July 2017), < https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199662241.013.20 >.

Thompson, John. 1967. "When Preaching Is Dialogue." *Preaching* 2(4): 4-13.

Monographs

Adams, Doug. 1981. *Meeting House to Camp Meeting: Toward a History of American Free Church Worship from 1620 to 1835.* Saratoga, CA: Modern Liturgy-Resource Publications.

Allen, Jr., O. Wesley. 2005. *The Homiletic of All Believers: A Conversational Approach*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox.

Burbules, Nocolas. 1993. *Dialogue in Teaching: Theory and Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

General Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church. 1936. *The Constitution and By-Laws of the Evangelical and Reformed Church.* Philadelphia: Eden-Heidelberg Bookstores.

Gleason, Maude W. 1995. *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hannan, Shauna K. 2021. *The Peoples Sermon: Preaching as a Ministry of the Whole Congregation*. Working Preacher 5. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Hilkert, Mary Catherine, OP. *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination*. New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1997.

Howe, Ruel L. 1967. *Partners in Preaching: Clergy & Laity in Dialogue*. New York: Seabury Press.

_____. 1963. *The Miracle of Dialogue.* New York: Seabury Press.

Hudson, Winthrop S. 1981. *Religion in America: An Historical Account of the Development of American Religious Live.* 3rd Edition. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Kennedy, George A. 1999. *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*. 2nd Edition Revised and Enlarged. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Lantzer, Jason S. 2012. *Mainline Christianity: The Past and Future of America's Majority Faith*. New York: New York University Press.

McClure, John S. 1995. *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Worship and Leadership Meet.* Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Pagitt, Doug. 2005. *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

_____. 2014. *Preaching in the Inventive Age.* Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Reid, Clyde. 1967. *The Empty Pulpit: A Study in Preaching as Communication*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.

Rose, Lucy A. 1997. *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press.

Schaff, Phillip. 1949. *History of the Christian Church*. Vol. 7. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Thompson, William D. and Gordon C. Bennett. 1969. *Dialogue Preaching: The Shared Sermon.* Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press.

Thomson, Jeremy. 1996. *Preaching as Dialogue: Is the Sermon a Sacred Cow?* Grove Pastoral Series 68. Nottingham, England: Grove Book.