

Integrating Youth into Worship Leadership

by

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

This thesis explores significant theological and pastoral questions associated with the integration of youth into worship leadership in Anabaptist-Mennonite congregations. Chapter 1 develops an Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of worship. Chapter 2 outlines an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective on worship leadership. Chapter 3 addresses adolescence from developmental, cultural, biblical, historical and contemporary theological perspectives. In Chapter 4 the theology of worship and worship leadership, and the understanding of adolescence are brought together in a proposal that encourages the integration of youth into regular involvement in collaborative congregational worship leadership. The conclusion describes a *Youth Worship Sourcebook* that is currently being developed as a resource to equip youth for and integrate youth into worship leadership in Mennonite churches.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Anecdotal and practical context	1
Theological context and terminology	3
Chapter 1: Exploring an Anabaptist-Mennonite Understanding of Worship	7
Descriptive definition of worship	8
1) Actions	10
2) Functions	10
3) Purposes	12
Normative definition of Anabaptist-Mennonite worship	13
3) Normative purposes	13
2) Normative functions	18
1) Normative actions	26
Worship culture	33
Describing worship culture	34
Normative worship culture	35
Worship in the context of postmodernism	37
Defining postmodernism	37
Implications of postmodernity for Christian worship	40
Conclusion	44
Chapter 2: Exploring an Anabaptist-Mennonite Understanding of Worship Leadership ..	47
Participation in Worship	47
Confessional Anabaptist- Mennonite ecclesiology: A baptized community of believers	47
Broadening Anabaptist-Mennonite ecclesiology: A worshipping community	49
Worship Leadership	52
Worship leadership in the context of the normative definition of worship	52
Worship leadership as ministry	58
Qualifications for worship leadership	59
The giftedness of the entire worshipping community	59
Qualifications and attributes for worship leadership	62
Conclusion	68

Chapter 3: Exploring an Anabaptist-Mennonite Understanding of Adolescence	71
Contemporary developmental and cultural perspectives on adolescence	72
A developmental perspective on adolescence	72
A cultural perspective on adolescence	74
A theological perspective on adolescence.....	76
Biblical perspectives on adolescence	77
Sixteenth century Anabaptist perspectives on adolescence	82
Contemporary theological perspectives on adolescence	86
Nurture	91
The role of the community in nurturing the spirituality of youth	91
The role of youth in nurturing the spirituality of the community	94
Conclusion.....	95
 Chapter 4: Integrating Youth into Worship Leadership	 97
The Nature of Youth Worship Leadership.....	98
Youth worship leadership in the context of the threefold definition of worship	98
Youth worship leadership in the context of collaborative worship planning.....	102
Outcomes of Youth Worship Leadership.....	108
Youth Worship Leadership as Catechism	108
Youth worship leadership addresses the needs of youth.....	112
Youth Worship Leadership as Ministry	118
Youth worship leadership addresses the needs of the congregation	119
Barriers to Youth Worship Leadership	122
Conclusion.....	128
 Conclusion.....	 131
A practical resource: the Youth Worship Sourcebook.....	131
Future directions for research.....	134
 Bibliography	 135

Introduction

What is a Mennonite theology of worship? What is the role of Mennonite worship leaders? Who is qualified to plan and lead Mennonite worship? How is adolescence understood from a Mennonite perspective? What are the theological implications of integrating youth into the leadership of Mennonite worship? What are the benefits and challenges of youth worship leadership? How can youth be adequately equipped to provide leadership in worship? This thesis addresses these questions in order to explore major theological, sociological, and developmental issues related to the integration of youth into worship leadership in Anabaptist-Mennonite congregations.

The thesis begins by examining Anabaptist-Mennonite theology of worship and worship leadership. It then reviews developmental, cultural and theological understandings of adolescence. Finally, the theology of worship and worship leadership, and the understanding of youth are brought together in a proposal that encourages the integration of youth into regular involvement in congregational worship leadership.

Anecdotal and practical context

As a youth at First Mennonite Church, Kitchener around the turn of the twenty-first century, on many occasions I found myself leading the congregation in various aspects of the Sunday morning worship service. The Youth Worship Team contributed praise and worship music on a monthly basis. The annual spring youth service, a highly anticipated event, provided the opportunity for the youth to lead worship as a group. Sharing experiences following service trips and conferences again brought the youth to the front of the church. Families took turns planning services in the summer, and I was excited to choose the music and prayers with the help of my parents. Receiving the offering as an occasional usher gave me a sense of responsibility. I

was among the first women trained to operate the sound system. These experiences shaped my relationship with the church and reflection on church leadership.

Despite opportunities to be involved in worship along with the other young people during my high school years, I do not recall explicitly learning about worship, worship leadership or worship planning. I relied on my own intuition and experience in my forays into worship leadership. As I reflect on these experiences now, and recognize that Sunday morning worship is the primary activity of the gathered church community, I wonder why discussion of worship did not form a significant part of the Christian education I received as a Mennonite youth. If worship is central to the life of the church, why is it not central in Christian education programs? If youth are asked to provide leadership in worship, are they being given the necessary training to do so with competence and confidence? Is the Mennonite community intentionally teaching youth about worship and providing opportunities for worship leadership development?

As an undergraduate student, I was invited to teach “worship skills” at First Mennonite Church as part of a midweek program based on the Logos model.¹ The weekly 40 minute session was an opportunity to discuss worship with the youth and to prepare to lead elements of Sunday morning worship as a group every four to six weeks. It was intended to give youth a deeper understanding of worship and train youth as worship leaders not only for the future but also the present. I quickly discovered no worship curriculum was available for use in a Mennonite context, and ecumenical resources were limited. Therefore, I began to develop Mennonite worship curriculum for youth.

After observing the youth grow as worship planners and leaders, the gifts and excitement they brought to involvement in worship, and the energy youth leadership contributed to the

¹ *The Logos Ministry: Transforming Lives and Congregations*. 1 June 2008. <<http://www.thelogosministry.org/>>. The Logos model for a midweek program for preschool to high school participants with four components: games, bible study, fellowship meal, and worship skills.

worship of the entire congregation, I contacted Mennonite Publishing Network, Conrad Grebel University College, and Mennonite Church Eastern Canada regarding developing and publishing a youth worship curriculum. The resulting project, the *Youth Worship Sourcebook*, will be published by Mennonite Publishing Network in the winter of 2009.² The *Sourcebook* includes background information on worship planning and leadership, and curriculum modules that teach youth about worship and result in the youth planning and leading aspects of the Sunday service as a group. The *Sourcebook* and this thesis are mutually enriching parallel projects.

Theological context and terminology

Before exploring an Anabaptist-Mennonite theological framework for the integration of youth into worship leadership, I will clarify how the terms “church”, “worship”, “worship leadership”, and “youth” are used in this thesis.

The term *church* refers to: 1) the Mennonite church, recognizing the ecumenical nature of the Christian church; 2) the North American church, recognizing the global nature of the Mennonite and ecumenical church; and 3) the twenty-first century church, recognizing the historical nature of the Christian tradition spanning from ancient Israel to the present, and the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century. The resources of the ecumenical, global and historical church are engaged and integrated in the discussion, yet the implications of the study do not claim to extend beyond the twenty-first century North American Mennonite church. Confessional documents are recognized as non-binding starting points for conversation. Recent confessional documents endorsed by the North American Mennonite Church include the 1995 *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*,³ *A Mennonite Polity*

² Johnson, Sarah Kathleen. *Youth Worship Sourcebook*. Waterloo: Mennonite Publishing Network, forthcoming 2009.

³ *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1995.

for Ministerial Leadership published in 1996,⁴ and the *Shared Convictions* of Mennonite World Conference adopted in 2006.⁵

In the context of this study, *worship* as a noun and *worship service* refer to the primary, intergenerational, weekly gathering of a local church community, most often convened on Sunday morning. While weekly gathering for worship is the focus of the study, the numerous other ways youth are involved in worship leadership, including an annual youth service, Christian camp and school contexts, services marking special occasions such as marriage or Christmas, and worship at youth conferences or retreats, are acknowledged. Chapter 1 develops an Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of worship.

Worship leadership is understood to include both visible involvement in leading public worship and behind the scenes planning, preparation and coordination. Diverse forms of worship leadership, reflecting the diverse gifts of the members of the congregation, are considered. It is assumed that both lay and ordained church leaders are involved in worship leading. Chapter 2 explores an Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of worship leadership.

For the purpose of this study, the categories *youth* and *adolescence*, used interchangeably, refer to individuals experiencing “middle adolescence,” age 14 to 17, approximately the age of most high school students in North America. Older and younger youth may also fall into the developmental category of “middle adolescence.” Much of this discussion can be extended to “early adolescents” 10 through 13 years of age and “late adolescents” age 18 through 22, although these developmental stages are not the focus.⁶ The cultural context in which youth exist is viewed as distinct yet related to the culture of children and adults. It is presumed to

⁴ *A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership: A Statement by the Joint Committee on Ministerial Leadership*. Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1996.

⁵ *Shared Convictions*. Mennonite World Conference. 2006. 30 May 2006. <<http://www.mwc-cmm.org/en/files/Shared%20Convictions/Shared%20Convictions%20EN.pdf>>.

⁶ Steinburg, Laurence. *Adolescence*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2005. 7.

be predominantly postmodern, recognizing the continuing influence of modern and premodern worldviews. It is viewed as primarily urban, recognizing significant rural components. It is assumed to reflect diverse economic and ethnic backgrounds. An understanding of adolescence is explored in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 brings together the theology of worship and worship leadership developed in Chapters 1 and 2 and the understanding of adolescence described in Chapter 3 to explore the nature of the integration of youth into worship leadership and the associated opportunities and challenges. The conclusion describes a *Youth Worship Sourcebook* that is currently being developed as a resource to equip youth for and integrate youth into collaborative congregational worship leadership in Mennonite churches.

Chapter 1: Exploring an Anabaptist-Mennonite Understanding of Worship

Worship, the primary weekly gathering of local faith communities, is a central practice of the church. Participation in worship is a primary means through which many individuals and communities express and explore their faith. It is the public activity that society associates with Christianity.

The significance of worship in the global Anabaptist-Mennonite family of faith communities is clearly stated in the *Shared Convictions* of Mennonite World Conference. Worship is the sixth article in this document: “We gather regularly to worship, to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, and to hear the Word of God in a spirit of mutual accountability.”⁷

However, worship does not occupy nearly as prominent a place in the *Confession of Faith* of the North American Mennonite Churches. It does not even receive an independent article.⁸ Although worship is central in the life of the North American Mennonite church today and worship practices have changed dramatically over the past half century, there has been very little intentional theological reflection on worship within the Mennonite community. In recent decades, only two significant Mennonite studies on worship have been published: *Preparing Sunday Dinner: A Collaborative Approach to Worship and Preaching*, authored collaboratively by June Alliman Yoder, Marlene Kropf and Rebecca Slough (2005);⁹ and *Enter His Gates: Fitting Worship Together*, by Eleanor Kreider (1990).¹⁰ In this study, I engage both of these sources and draw on biblical, historical and ecumenical resources to articulate an Anabaptist-Mennonite theology of worship.

What is worship? If this question would be posed to a group of youth they might reply

⁷ *Shared Convictions*.

⁸ *Confession*.

⁹ Yoder, June Alliman, Marlene Kropf and Rebecca Slough. *Preparing Sunday Dinner: A Collaborative Approach to Worship and Preaching*. Scottdale: Herald Press, 2005.

¹⁰ Kreider, Eleanor. *Enter His Gates: Fitting Worship Together*. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1990.

“singing,” “praising” or “encountering God.” Each response is partial, yet each is valid. A single, clear definition of worship is elusive due to the multiplicity of practices associated with the Sunday gathering of the faith community. Defining worship is further complicated because a definition could focus on a descriptive analysis of current worship practice or a normative understanding of worship based on biblical, historical and theological study. Realistically, both descriptive and normative definitions are required, for worship is both practical and theological.

In this chapter, I define worship on three levels: actions, functions and purposes. *Actions* delineate the concrete, observable components that make up a worship gathering (for example, “singing”). *Functions* express the roles of these actions in worship (for example, singing “praise”). *Purposes* point to the objective of the worship gathering as a whole (for example, “encountering God”). Worship can also be described and analyzed in terms of its *culture*, that is, the style, mood and nature of the context and expression of the actions of worship. For example, worship could be described as “traditional,” “contemporary” or “liturgical”. I illustrate the threefold definition of worship descriptively before exploring actions, functions and purposes normatively. I also indicate how the characteristics of worship can be addressed descriptively and normatively. This understanding of worship is then located in the postmodern cultural context of twenty-first century North America.

Descriptive definition of worship

A descriptive definition of worship originates in current worship practice. Analysis of worship according to actions, functions and purposes is relevant for all ecclesial traditions and all styles of worship; “contemporary” worship, worship in the style of Taizé, Roman Catholic Mass, a Quaker meeting, and acts of personal devotion in daily life can all be described by means of the threefold definition. A *specific* worship gathering or the *general* pattern of worship in a

congregation, denomination or geographic region can be defined descriptively. I use the worship service celebrated at First Mennonite Church, Kitchener on March 9, 2008 marking the Fifth Sunday of Lent (Figure 1) to demonstrate how the three-fold definition of worship can be used to describe and analyze the worship of a congregation.

Figure 1

<p>First Mennonite Church Pastors: Gary Knarr Catherine Hunsberger Sarah Pinnell Yangjin Namu Worship Coordinator: Leader: Ross Muir Song Leader: Jane Gingerich Congregational Hosts: Trevor Metzger & Derphine Sauman March 9, 2008 Fifth Sunday of Lent Into New Life</p>	<p>Congregational Prayer Catherine Hunsberger TO PROCLAIM OUR FAITH Children's Time Roger Kehl Hymn # 291 HWB <i>Holy Spirit, by whose breath</i> Reader's Theatre Scott & Kathy Albrecht Scripture Ezekiel 37:1-14 Sermon "Life Restored" Gary Knarr</p>
<p>WE GATHER AS A COMMUNITY</p> <p>Prelude Welcome Call to Worship Opening Prayer Hymn # 349 HWB <i>Spirit of the living God</i></p> <p>TO PRAISE OUR GOD</p> <p>Hymns # 63 HWB <i>Praise, my soul, the God of heaven</i> Hymn # 151 HWB <i>Marvelous grace of our loving Lord</i></p> <p>TO PRAY TOGETHER</p> <p>Prayer of Confession L: Out of the depths we cry to you, O Lord! Hear our voice. P: Clutching our securities and rewards, ruled by our fears and desires, resenting and resisting your ways, we are as good as dead. L: We have no recourse but you. P: If you kept an accounting of sins, who would be left standing? L: But you are forgiveness itself. P: So we place our hope and trust in you.</p> <p>Words of Assurance # 584 HWB <i>They that wait upon the Lord</i></p>	<p>TO RESPOND TO GOD'S WITNESS</p> <p>Congregational Response The law of sin and death ruled over us; we were condemned to death. But in the Son, Jesus Christ, God personally took on the human condition to set things right once and for all. So, God's own Spirit lives in us, giving us life, real life — life both of spirit and of body.</p> <p>Hymn of Response # 356 HWB <i>Breathe on me breath of God</i> Offering</p> <p>AS WE GO OUT INTO THE WORLD</p> <p>Announcements Sending Hymn # 77 STJ <i>The peace of the earth be with you</i> Benediction Postlude The nursery is available for infants & children to age 3 years.</p>

1) Actions

On the most basic level, worship is defined by the *specific actions* that comprise a particular worship gathering. A quick survey of the order of worship for March 9 at First Mennonite Church reveals specific actions: singing “Spirit of the living God,” hymn number 349 in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*; reading the words of the prayer of confession printed in the bulletin; a congregational prayer offered by pastor Catherine Hunsberger; and a reading from Ezekiel 37:1-14. The entire service can be described as a series of actions.

These specific actions can also be identified more generally. As a regular participant at First Mennonite, I expect the service to include a prelude, welcome, call to worship, opening prayer, opening hymn, hymn of praise, prayer of confession, words of assurance, congregational prayer, time with children, scripture reading, sermon, hymn of response, collection of the offering, announcements, sending hymn, benediction and postlude. These, with some variation, are the general actions that usually comprise the Sunday worship of this congregation. Many of these actions are also included in the worship of other congregations.

The specific and general actions of worship are always instrumental. They have functions within the larger purposes of worship. Actions are what can be observed in worship, but they do not in themselves fully express their function or the purposes that they serve. Merely noting that Ezekiel 37:1-14 was read, or that there was a scripture reading, provides a limited understanding of worship.

2) Functions

Identifying the functions accomplished by specific and general actions constitutes the second level definition of worship. Functions are accomplished by groups of actions or individual actions. Functions can also be described in specific and general terms.

On March 9 at First Mennonite *specific functions* are expressed in the headings used to group the actions of the service into broad categories. The headings form the sentence: “We gather as a community/to praise our God,/to pray together,/to proclaim our faith,/and] to respond to God’s witness/as we go out into the world.” Thus the explicit functions of the worship service are gathering the community, praising God, praying, proclaiming faith, responding to God, and being sent into the world. The actions grouped under each category accomplish the function described in the heading. For example, the prelude, welcome, call to worship, opening prayer and opening hymn perform the function of gathering the community. Multiple actions accomplish a certain function.

Single actions also achieve multiple functions. A specific call to worship may recognize God’s presence, name one another as members of the community, identify the theme of the service, proclaim the word of God in scripture, and focus the attention of participants. General actions such as music or prayer can serve diverse and potentially quite different functions. For instance, music may function both as joyful praise and meditative prayer.

The headings subdividing the order of worship are also *general functions* of worship. The same categories are applied each week at First Mennonite to categorize different specific and general actions. The function headings also describe the worship of many Christian communities. Even the words commonly used to describe worship are indicative of general functions. The term “worship” derives from “worth-ship,” to attribute worth or respect. The word “service,” means to do something for others. “Liturgy” literally translates “the work of the people”, and thus reflects the nature of worship as a communal activity.¹¹

Defining worship in terms of functions already moves into the consideration of the larger

¹¹ White, James F. *Introduction of Christian Worship: Third Edition Revised and Expanded*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000. 25-30.

purposes of worship.

3) Purposes

Defining the dynamic, overarching purposes of worship is the third level of definition. The purposes answer the question, “*Why* worship?” Why read Ezekiel 37:1-14? Why sing “Marvellous grace of our loving Lord”? Why read scripture? Why praise? Why pray? The purposes of worship are both specific and general.

Specific purposes may be associated with a worship gathering. The heading, “Into New Life,” hints at the specific purpose of the service marking the fifth Sunday of Lent at First Mennonite. The central purposes of a worship service are sometimes expressed through a purpose statement, as is the case in seasonal *Leader* magazine worship resources published for use in MC Canada and MC USA congregations.¹²

The *general purposes* of worship are of greatest interest in this study. The general purposes of worship are engaged at the intersection of the descriptive and normative definitions of worship. The answer to the question: “Why do we worship?” is the culmination of description and is the starting point for considering the question, “Why should we worship?”

The descriptive threefold definition of worship is summarized in the following box:

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Descriptive Threefold Definition of Worship</i></p> <p><i>Level 1 – Actions</i> Concrete, observable components that comprise a worship gathering</p> <p><i>Level 2 – Functions</i> Roles that are fulfilled by single actions or groups of actions Mediate between actions and purposes</p> <p><i>Level 3 – Purposes</i> Overall, dynamic, purposes of worship as a whole</p>

¹² *Leader: Equipping the Missional Congregation*. Mennonite Publishing Network. 30 May 2008. <<http://www.mph.org/leader/>>.

Normative definition of Anabaptist-Mennonite worship

The terminology illustrated descriptively in the preceding discussion is now employed as a framework for the development of a normative understanding of Anabaptist-Mennonite worship. I discuss the normative purposes, functions and actions of Anabaptist-Mennonite worship in conversation with contemporary Mennonite liturgical theologians Kreider and Yoder, Kropf and Slough, recent Mennonite confessional documents, ecumenical sources, Anabaptist history, and scripture. A significant portion of the normative definition is held in common with the ecumenical Christian community. I point to certain *distinctive* Anabaptist-Mennonite actions, functions and purposes. Naming distinctive understandings does not claim these ideas originate in the Anabaptist tradition or that they are exclusively Anabaptist. Rather, it highlights normative dimensions of worship that are especially compatible with Anabaptist-Mennonite history, theology and practice. To illustrate the dynamic relationships between the three levels of definition, I begin by exploring the normative purposes of worship before discussing functions and actions.

3) Normative purposes

The working definition of worship provided by June Alliman Yoder, Marlene Kropf and Rebecca Slough in *Preparing Sunday Dinner* is a starting point for discerning the normative purposes of Anabaptist-Mennonite worship:

Christian worship is an encounter with the triune God experienced in the midst of community, which transforms and empowers members of Christ's body for loving witness and service in the world.¹³

This definition introduces several important factors. First, Mennonite worship involves three parties: God, the community including the self, and the world.¹⁴

¹³ Yoder. 29.

¹⁴ Ibid. 32-35.

Second, Mennonite worship is Trinitarian. The worship of a triune God, Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit, has been the defining feature of Christian worship from the earliest days of the church. The Christological orientation of worship and the importance of the Holy Spirit set the worship of early Christian communities apart from other forms of Judaism¹⁵ and continue to be an essential mark of normative Christian worship today. Historically, the Mennonite tradition has been Christocentric, however the Trinitarian nature of God is affirmed by Mennonite theologians of the sixteenth and twenty-first centuries.¹⁶ The Trinitarian nature of worship shapes Yoder, Kropf and Slough's understanding of the central purposes of worship.

Third, Mennonite worship is shaped by three purposes reflecting the identities of the three parties and the triune God:

- 1) A *transforming encounter* with the living God,¹⁷
- 2) *Honest engagement* with self and community,¹⁸ and
- 3) *Lively empowerment* for faithful response.¹⁹

Preparing Sunday Dinner tentatively parallels the persons of the Trinity and purposes of worship associating God with encounter, Christ with engagement and the Holy Spirit with empowerment.²⁰ The authors also use vertical, horizontal and centrifugal spatial movement to image the purposes of worship.²¹

Yoder, Kropf and Slough argue that the three purposes of worship are sequential. Encountering God is the beginning of all worship. Honest self-reflection as individuals and a

¹⁵ Bromiley, Geoffrey W. "Elements of New Testament Worship." *The Complete Library of Christian Worship: Volume 7, The Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship*. Ed. Robert E. Webber. Nashville: Star Song, 1993. 110.

¹⁶ Snyder, C. Arnold. *Anabaptist History and Theology: Revised Student Edition*. Kitchener: Pandora Press, 1997. 142.

Reimer, A. James. *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics*. Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2001.

¹⁷ Yoder. 32.

¹⁸ Ibid. 33.

¹⁹ Ibid. 35.

²⁰ Ibid. 38.

²¹ Ibid.

community necessarily follows. Personal and communal engagement must have consequences for all creation. This does not imply that global transformation is the ultimate purpose of worship; rather it indicates that the three purposes are integrally related:

On the one hand, worship is an end in itself. It is pure praise, an offering given in response to God's love and grace, with no utilitarian goal. But when true communion occurs, when worshipers meet the loving God, such encounters set loose dynamic consequences.²²

I challenge Yoder, Kropf and Slough's claim that divine encounter is always the beginning of worship. The other two purposes of worship, honest engagement with self and community and lively empowerment for service, may prompt encounter with the divine and serve as an entry point to worship that is, "pure praise." This is evident in Kreider: "First do justice. Then come to worship. Care for the weak. Then come to worship."²³ In addition, lament can be as valid a response to God as praise, for humans are often faced with situations where love and grace is not evident. Difficult experiences can also lead to communication with God. Praise and lament are discussed in greater detail in the following discussion of normative functions.

The authors of *Preparing Sunday Dinner* anchor their definition of worship in two scripture texts, the call of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-8) and the encounter on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). The Isaiah narrative describes an encounter with the transcendent God: "I saw the Lord" (Isaiah 6:1-4), which leads to honest engagement with self and community: "I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5-7), and concludes in empowerment for faithful response: "Here I am; send me!" (Isaiah 6:8). A similar pattern is followed when Luke describes an encounter with the immanent nature of God in Jesus: "Jesus himself came near and went with them" (Luke 24:15), which prompts the disciples to admit their sentiments and the sentiments of the community: "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem

²² Yoder. 37.

²³ Kreider. 25.

Israel” (Luke 24: 21); after which they are inspired to report to their companions: “They told what had happened on the road” (Luke 24:35). The purposes of worship described by Yoder, Kropf and Slough are embodied in these two Biblical narratives.

Contemporary liturgical theologians, Eleanor Kreider and Peter Craig-Wild, enrich the definition of worship proposed in *Preparing Sunday Dinner*. The purposes of worship expressed by Eleanor Kreider are characterized by communication, listening and obedience:

Worship! This word, when defined biblically, will prove to be a large and life-embracing word. We cannot be content with a definition in which, too simply, worship equals praise. Biblical worship happens when we as individuals and as communities of faith communicate with the holy and loving God who made us. It involves not only our personal lives, but also our economic and social lives. Worship engages our emotions, our minds, our desires. Through it we listen to and obey God. All our lives are bound up in worship that is “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).²⁴

The association of worship with communication roughly mirrors *Preparing Sunday Dinner*’s encounter, engagement and empowerment model although it adds a more personal, if less precise, dimension. Communication and response are the normative purposes of worship described by Kreider; however, the normative content of the purposes of worship receives far more attention in her analysis.

Kreider describes the role of Yoder, Kropf and Slough’s three parties, God, the community, and the world, in terms of *truth*: being true to the triune God in creating worship that reflects God’s character, actions and concerns; being true to the community in recognizing diversity and one another’s strengths and weaknesses; and being true to the world by bringing the world before God in worship and participating in conveying the love and grace of God for healing of all creation.²⁵ Kreider’s emphasis on truthful content adds to the focus on action in *Preparing Sunday Dinner*. The challenge is determining the truth about God, the community,

²⁴ Kreider. 17.

²⁵ Ibid. 21-46.

and the world. This question is addressed in greater detail in the discussion of postmodern worship.

Church of England theologian Peter Craig-Wild explores the transformative dimension of Yoder, Kropf and Slough's definition of worship. He advocates that the long term effect of worship on worshippers is the means of evaluating whether worship is pleasing to God: "Worship that is pleasing to God must be related to the impact it is having on those who engage in it."²⁶ In essence, the primary purpose of worship is *lasting transformation*:

Worship forms the individual worshipper into the person God wants them to be; worship forms individual Christians into the people of God, the Body of Christ; worship transforms the world and the whole created order.²⁷

A true test of liturgy is whether it enables this transforming encounter with God, whether or not we are conscious of the encounter or the transformation.²⁸

Craig-Wild highlights the concrete results associated with worship, making visible the often intangible purposes of worship. He provides one measuring stick for evaluating worship that diverts attention away from personal preference. However, focusing only on transformation is misleading. It directs worship towards humanity rather than God. For example, the three parties in Craig-Wild's model are the individual, the community and the world. God is not included. Furthermore, the observable results of worship are, in many cases, exceptionally difficult if not impossible to measure and occur almost imperceptibly over extremely long periods of time. This may tempt worship planners and leaders to create worship that produces quick results, analogous to dramatic conversion experiences, rather than long term spiritual growth. Craig-Wild, in his emphasis on transformation, and Kreider, in her emphasis on truthful content, illuminate the purposes proposed by Yoder, Kropf and Slough.

²⁶ Craig-Wild, Peter. *Tools for Transformation: Making Worship Work*. London, England: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002. 32.

²⁷ Ibid. 34.

²⁸ Ibid. 52.

Truthful and transformative encounter, engagement and empowerment describe the purposes of worship of diverse Christian communities and denominations. However, the prominence of engagement with *community*, empowerment to do *justice*, and continual visible *regeneration* or transformation, is especially compatible with distinctively Mennonite theological themes. The centrality of community, although present in Kreider and Craig-Wild, is particularly strong in *Preparing Sunday Dinner*, which describes a collaborative approach to worship.²⁹ Peace and social justice are central themes in Kreider:

First do justice. Then come to worship. Care for the weak. Then come to worship. Have mercy. Then come to worship. In our Bible, and in our world, too, these things belong together!³⁰

An emphasis on regeneration, visibly transformed living, although borrowed from a non-Mennonite scholar, has deep roots in sixteenth century Anabaptism. In the early years of the Anabaptist movement, encouraging one another to live faithful transformed lives regenerated by the Spirit was the purpose of gathering for worship.³¹ These three distinctive emphases shape Anabaptist-Mennonite worship.

In the context of this study, the normative purposes of worship are: *transforming encounter with the true triune God; truthful, transformational engagement with self and community; and lively empowerment for faithful, truthful, transformative response in the world.* Defining the normative purposes of worship informs analysis of the normative functions of worship.

2) Normative functions

The normative functions of worship emerge from the normative purposes. I consider the

²⁹ Yoder.

³⁰ Kreider. 25,

³¹ Snyder, C. Arnold. *Following in the Footsteps of Christ: The Anabaptist Tradition*. Traditions of Christian Spirituality. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004. 123.

functions of worship from the perspective of contemporary Mennonite liturgical theology, scripture, current Mennonite confessional documents and Anabaptist history.

Yoder, Kropf and Slough connect three functions to the three purposes of worship: 1) encounter with God leads to *praise*, 2) engagement with self and others leads to *confession and reconciliation*, and 3) empowerment by the Spirit leads to *service*, “hearing and responding to God’s call.”³² *Preparing Sunday Dinner* portrays praise, confession and service as the human response to the three purposes, encounter, engagement and empowerment. In contrast, I describe praise, confession and service as functions facilitating the three purposes of worship. The truth of both perspectives reveals the integration and dialectic relationship between the functions and purposes of worship. Praise, confession and service both facilitate and respond to the purposes. Additional normative functions also accomplish the three normative purposes of worship.

Lament, in addition to praise, must be reclaimed as a vehicle of encounter with God and response to God. There are four reasons the church needs to reclaim a place for lament in Christian worship. First, at times, lament rather than praise is the only honest form of encounter with God for an individual or community. Worship must honestly recognize the darker side of life: “Authentic worship must mirror and reflect authentic life. In it the human/divine drama is ritually enacted in all its splendour and complexity. It speaks of tragedy, as much as triumph.”³³ Unbalanced worship composed only of praise is indicative of a facile relationship with God. Lament candidly expresses the reality rather than the ideal.

Second, the gathered community of faith must lament as an act of solidarity. Lament allows individuals to enter one another’s experiences, share each other’s pain and hope, and pray as part of a community that spans time and space. Duff states that practices of lament, “allow us

³² Yoder. 38.

³³ Russel, Keith, ed. *The Living Pulpit*. Oct.-Dec. 2005: 1-48. 19.

to rely on God and the community to carry forth hope on our behalf when we ourselves have no hope in us.”³⁴ It also allows members of the community of faith to carry one another’s sorrows.

Third, lament enables transformation, a crucial aspect of the normative purposes of worship. Lament can lead to social and personal transformation. Brian Blount describes the potential for social transformation: “Lament breeds fury at the oppressions and the people who caused them, and...it drives those who lament to resist.”³⁵ Bozak describes the importance of lament in a three phase process of personal healing, beginning with silence, moving into the articulation of suffering, and concluding with the ability to look carefully at the situation and take action.³⁶

Finally, the church must practice the discipline of lament in communal worship to learn how to lament in times of personal, communal and global suffering. Lament must be learned and practiced as part of the worship life of Christian communities. The discipline of lament in Christian worship allows public worship to honestly express reality, to enact solidarity and community, and to effect personal and social transformation. It is not only a form of encounter with God, but also engagement with self and community and empowerment for service.

Serving others in worship is not enough: individuals and the community must also *receive service*. In contemporary North American culture it can be difficult to ask for and accept help on personal and communal levels. It is easier to pray for others than to be prayed for. It is easier to offer financial resources to the church than receive resources from the church. Empowerment for faithful response should lead to both “loving and serving God in the world”³⁷

³⁴ Duff, Nancy J. “Recovering Lamentation as a Practice in the Church.” *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew and Public Square*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005. 4.

³⁵ Blount, B. K. “Breaking Point: A Sermon.” *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew and Public Square*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005. 149.

³⁶ Bozak, Barbara A. “Persons Living with AIDS: Elements of a Christian Spirituality.” *Eglise et Theologie* 23.3 (1992): 325-228. 328-329.

³⁷ Yoder. 38.

and the humble ability to be served, as expressed in the hymn:

Will you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you?
Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.³⁸

Yoder, Kropf and Slough's normative functions are therefore expanded to include: 1) *praise and lament*, 2) *confession and reconciliation*, and 3) *giving and receiving service*.

Eleanor Kreider extracts three similar worship functions in her analysis: praise, confession, and intercession. She expands Yoder, Kropf and Slough's analysis in closely linking praise and thanksgiving, describing confession as both confession of faith and confession of sin, and connecting intercession with empathy and love of neighbour.³⁹ Unfortunately, Kreider also fails to provide a place for lament alongside praise and there is a noticeable lack of emphasis on reconciliation in her discussion of confession. Intercession is an important, but unfortunately narrow understanding of service and being served. However, Kreider enriches Yoder, Kropf and Slough's analysis by solidly grounding the three normative functions in scripture.

Yoder, Kropf and Slough briefly connect their threefold model of praise, confession and service to the call of Isaiah paralleling their original analysis of the text. Lament is present alongside praise in the Isaiah narrative, although it is omitted from Yoder, Kropf and Slough's analysis. Although the authors claim the pattern of praise, confession and service is followed in the road to Emmaus narrative, I find praise to be notably missing from the encounter with God described in the text. If anything, the disciples lament rather than praise when they encounter the risen Christ.

There are firm scriptural foundations for the role of praise and lament, confession and reconciliation, and service and being served in worship throughout the Old and New Testaments. The Psalms are a particularly rich resource. The book of psalms has long been associated with

³⁸ *Hymnal: A Worship Book*. Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1992. 307.

³⁹ Kreider. 124-125, 138-139, 162-164.

praise due to texts such as Psalm 150, the concluding doxology of the collection:

Praise the LORD!
Praise God in his sanctuary;
 praise him in his mighty firmament!
Praise him for his mighty deeds;
 praise him according to his surpassing greatness!

Praise him with trumpet sound;
 praise him with lute and harp!
Praise him with tambourine and dance;
 praise him with strings and pipe!
Praise him with clanging cymbals;
 praise him with loud crashing cymbals!
Let everything that breaths praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD!⁴⁰

Despite the prominent place of praise in the book of psalms, the largest proportion of psalms can be classified as laments voiced by either individuals or communities. Lament in the Psalms is not without hope. In all cases except one⁴¹ lament is followed by assurance and confidence that prayer has been heard and in some cases answered.⁴² Psalm 13 is one example:

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
 How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul,
 and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and answer me, O LORD my God!
 Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
 and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed";
 my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

But I trusted in your steadfast love;
 my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the LORD,
 Because he has dealt bountifully with me.⁴³

⁴⁰ Psalm 150. NRSV.

⁴¹ Psalm 88 is a lament without a hopefully ending.

⁴² Brueggemann, Walter. *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003. 277-291.

⁴³ Psalm 13. NRSV.

A Biblical foundation for confession of sin and confession of faith is also present in the Psalms. Psalm 51 is an example of a penitential psalm:

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love,
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.⁴⁴

Great hymns confessing faith in the LORD as the liberator, the source of salvation, and the law as the good instruction of God are also prevalent in the book of Psalms:

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.
Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.⁴⁵

The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the degrees of the LORD are sure,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is clear,
enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;
the ordinances of the LORD are true
and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey,
and drippings of the honeycomb.⁴⁶

Examples of confession of both sin and faith are found throughout the ministry of Jesus.

Peter first confesses his sin when he is called by Jesus: “Go away from me, Lord, for I am sinful

⁴⁴ Psalm 51:1-2. NRSV.

⁴⁵ Psalm 90:1-2. NRSV.

⁴⁶ Psalm 19:7-10. NRSV.

man!”⁴⁷ He later voices the great confession of faith of the New Testament: “You are the messiah, the Son of the living God.”⁴⁸ Peter honestly engages with himself in light of his encounter with God and he encounters God in light of honest self-reflection.

John’s account of Jesus’ last meal with his disciples, identified as the Passover, provides a liturgical context for serving and being served:

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. And during supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded. He came to Simon Peter; and Peter said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part in me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over; and you are clean, but not every one of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "You are not all clean." When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."⁴⁹

In the narrative Jesus exemplifies and symbolizes what it means to serve by washing the feet of his disciples, and teaches his disciples how to be served, as expressed in his exchange with Peter.

Does scripture point to other functions of worship beyond praise and lament, confession and reconciliation, and giving and receiving service? There are very few explicit descriptions of the worship of the New Testament Church. Where mentioned, such texts generally describe the

⁴⁷ Luke 5:8. NRSV.

⁴⁸ Matthew 16:16. NRSV.

⁴⁹ John 13:1-17. NRSV.

actions of worship, and therefore will be addressed in the following section.⁵⁰

The biblical and theological functions of praise and lament, confession and reconciliation, and giving and receiving service are framed by a *distinctive* emphasis on the formation of communal identity in contemporary Mennonite confessional documents and historical Anabaptist sources. The *Confession of Faith in Mennonite Perspective* hints at the threefold formulation with different nuances:

The church's identity as God's people of faith is sustained and renewed as members gather regularly for worship. Here the church celebrates God's boundless grace, reaffirms its loyalty to God above all else, and seeks to discern the will of God.⁵¹

The three functions roughly mirror praise (celebration), confession of faith (reaffirming loyalty), and service (assuming discerning the will of God leads to acting according to God's will). However, lament and confession of sin are not present and service is only implied. The *Confession* instead emphasizes the functions as a source of *communal identity formation*, maintenance and renewal. The worshipping community is formed in imitation of Christ:

The church, the body of Christ, is called to become ever more like Jesus Christ, its head, in its *worship*, ministry, witness, mutual love and care and the ordering of its common life.⁵²

The distinctive emphasis on communal identity formation is also revealed in the inclusion of the discussion of worship in the article on "The Church" in the *Confession of Faith*. The placement of worship only in a communal context suggests that, in Mennonite thought, the functions of worship are inseparable from the community in which they are practiced.

The formation of communal identity in worship has roots in sixteenth century Anabaptism. This is evident in Balthasar Hubmaier's "Pledge of Love," included in his liturgy

⁵⁰ Bromiley.

⁵¹ *Confession*. 39-40.

⁵² *Ibid.* 39. Italics mine.

for the Lord's Supper.⁵³ In the Pledge, participants commit themselves to the love of God and neighbour and the imitation of Christ in life and death made possible through mutual admonishment and encouragement in the community of faith. The document loosely parallels the praise, confession and service triad in its emphasis on love of God, mutual admonition and peacemaking, and love of neighbour. It emphasizes communal formation into the body of Christ as a function resulting from the action of the Lord's Supper and leading to the purposes of encounter with God, each other and the world. A modernized version is included in the contemporary *Minister's Manual*.⁵⁴ The action of forming communal identity in imitation of Christ through praise, confession and service is distinctively Anabaptist-Mennonite.

In an Anabaptist-Mennonite context, the normative functions of worship: 1) *praise and lament*, 2) *confession and reconciliation*, and 3) *giving and receiving service*, are framed by a distinctive emphasis on *communal identity formation* in imitation of Christ. An understanding of the normative actions of worship emerges from the normative worship functions.

1) Normative actions

Each action of worship must be judged according to the functions and purposes of worship. Each worshipping community has its own explicit or implicit normative understanding of the actions of worship. However, denomination-wide normative statements about the actions that constitute worship with regards to the specific orders of worship, worship components and words of local communities are rare in Mennonite contexts. Despite diversity in practice, two actions emerge as normative for Mennonite and Christian worship: *Scripture* and the *Lord's Supper*. I explore the place of Word and Table in biblical and historical perspective before

⁵³ Hubmaier, Balthasar. "A Form for Christ's Supper." *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*. Trans. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1989. 403-405.

⁵⁴ Rempel, John, ed. *Minister's Manual*. Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1998. 88.

turning to contemporary confessional documents and liturgical theology.⁵⁵

The New Testament unambiguously describes the early Christian movement gathering to celebrate the Lord's Supper.⁵⁶ There is no reference to reading from the Jewish scriptures as a gathered community in the New Testament, although reading from the letters of Paul (documents in the process of becoming scripture) is mentioned.⁵⁷ Despite a lack of direct reference, Geoffrey Bromiley argues that other evidence, including the pervasive use of the Old Testament later, references to preaching seen primarily as exposition, the high value placed on scripture throughout the New Testament, and an emphasis on demonstrating Jesus as the fulfillment of the scriptures, indicates the clear use of readings from the now "Old" Testament in early Christian worship.⁵⁸ Word and Table were central dimensions of New Testament worship but were there other normative actions?

Scriptural texts point to other actions of worship, for example: "When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation."⁵⁹ However, it is not possible to deduce a normative structure for worship beyond noting certain general actions that may have been present in specific communities. Bromiley summarizes:

Though the New Testament does not give any detailed information on the structure of the first Christian services, it leaves little room for doubt concerning the basic elements of primitive worship: prayer, praise, confession of sin, confession of faith, Scripture reading and preaching, the Lord's Supper and the collection.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Believers baptism is a significant liturgical element in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. It was a defining feature of the early Anabaptist community and continues to be an important marker of the Mennonite church. For the purposes of this study, baptism is not considered a normative element of worship as it is not part of the regular worship practice of committed Christians. It is instead a distinct, one time event for each individual and is only celebrated by the community of faith on the request of new believers.

⁵⁶ 1 Cor. 11: 17-34. Koenig, John. *The Feast of the World's Redemption: Eucharistic Origins and Christian Mission*. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000. Willimon, William H. *Word, Water, Wine and Bread: How Worship has Changed over the Years*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1980. 22.

⁵⁷ 1 Thessalonians 5:27. Bromiley. 108.

⁵⁸ Bromiley. 108.

⁵⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:26.

⁶⁰ Bromiley. 106.

Despite awareness of these general “basic elements” very little is known about the specific content and form in which they were manifest. Even details regarding how scripture was used and how the Lord’s Supper was celebrated are unavailable.⁶¹ Underlying the examination of New Testament practice is the question of whether the specific actions of the worship life of the early church would be normative today if it were possible to reconstruct them. The particular actions that compose worship are tightly bound to language and culture. It is therefore necessary to consider the development of the actions of worship over time.

The proclamation of scripture and celebration of the Lord’s Supper have been consistent actions of worship throughout the history in almost every Christian group, although they have taken many forms and meanings.⁶² In high liturgical traditions, such as Roman Catholicism, a precise normative set of actions and even particular words that compose worship developed over time and are clearly mandated and consistently practiced today.⁶³ In contrast, Protestant worship has been subject to far more variation.

Claiming the Word and Supper as normative actions of Protestant worship parallels Martin Luther’s statement that the church found “wherever the Word is rightly preached and the sacraments are rightly administered.”⁶⁴ Ronald P. Byars moves beyond Word and Table, claiming four normative actions of Protestant worship:

I believe that one can evaluate any service, whether it calls itself “traditional” or “contemporary,” by the same criteria. Does the service make large the central things, Book, Bath, Meal, attentiveness to the poor? Or does it contribute to the diminishment of one or

⁶¹ Willimon. 25.

⁶² Crockett, William R. *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990.

⁶³ *The Living with Christ Sunday Missal: 2007-2008*. National Liturgy Office, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Toronto: Novalis, 2007. The Missal incorporates almost every word of each mass for the entire liturgical year in Roman Catholic churches in English speaking Canada.

⁶⁴ Martin Luther in Webber, Robert E. *Journey to Jesus: The Worship Evangelism, and Nurture Mission of the Church*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001.

more of those central things?⁶⁵

These four actions: scripture read and preached; baptism before or after teaching; the Lord's Supper; and attentiveness to the poor which translates into prayer, mission and financial giving (and therefore, may be more appropriately described as a worship function), are normative actions of Protestant worship according to Byars. These four dimensions are often present, although understood differently, in Mennonite worship. However, being "neither Catholic nor Protestant" it is necessary to explore distinctively Anabaptist-Mennonite actions of worship.

Examining sixteenth century Anabaptist worship practice is challenging, since liturgy was not a focus for the early Anabaptist community. Early Anabaptists emphasized obedience in daily life over participation in organized worship. Nevertheless, small Anabaptist groups gathered for Bible study, the Lord's Supper, prayer, singing hymns, and mutual encouragement and admonishment. The core of early Anabaptist worship was the reading and exposition of scripture.⁶⁶ Through the oral/aural study of scripture, the predominantly illiterate Anabaptist community produced martyrs able to provide scriptural defence in court and engage in vigorous biblically grounded theological debate.⁶⁷ The Lord's Supper was also celebrated by early Anabaptist communities, and it was closely linked to adult baptism and church discipline. Balthasar Hubmaier's liturgy for the Lord's Supper is one example of the early Anabaptist celebration of the Lord's Supper.⁶⁸ Despite these common actions, there was diversity in early Anabaptist worship practice and theology.

As the Anabaptist movement developed and received increasing toleration in various

⁶⁵ Byars, Ronald P. *The Future of Protestant Worship: Beyond the Worship Wars*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002. 63.

⁶⁶ Snyder. *Following*. 122-126.

⁶⁷ Beachy, Alvin J. "The Theology and Practice of Anabaptist Worship." *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. 40 (1966): 163-178. 168-170.

⁶⁸ Hubmaier. 393-408.

regions, the worship of Anabaptist descendents was influenced by that of regional State churches. Patterns soon developed in different regions and subgroups with increasing emphasis on the sermon. Three actions emerged as central in the centuries following the sixteenth: singing, prayer and sermon. In the final decades of the twentieth century, North American Mennonite worship has been increasingly characterized by a diverse variety of actions influenced by evangelical Christianity and the ever more global nature of the Mennonite church.⁶⁹ This history is not necessarily normative. I turn now to confessional documents and contemporary Anabaptist-Mennonite liturgical theology to discern which aspects of the history of Anabaptist-Mennonite worship twenty-first century Mennonites continue to embrace.

The *Shared Convictions* of Mennonite World Conference identify two “normative” worship actions: hearing the word of God and celebrating the Lord’s Supper.⁷⁰ This document reflects rather than prescribes the faith and life of the global Anabaptist-Mennonite family of faith.⁷¹ It is clear that Word and Table are normative actions for contemporary Anabaptists around the world. The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* provides less guidance as to the specific, normative actions of worship although it does include articles on scripture and the Lord’s Supper, highlighting the importance of Word and Table. Articles on baptism and foot washing are also present. The relative significance of the particular practices associated with these worship actions is not addressed in the *Confession*. It is, however, addressed by contemporary liturgical theologians.

The actions of worship are reflected in Eleanor Kreider’s treatment of how to “fit worship together.” Two actions stand out: Scripture and the Supper. The importance of the Bible

⁶⁹ Bender, Harold S., Nanne van der Zijpp, Cornelius Krahn and Rebecca Slough. "Worship, Public." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1989. 5 March 2008. <<http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/W74ME.htm>>.

⁷⁰ *Shared Convictions*.

⁷¹ “Faith and Life Council.” *Courier* 21.1&2 (2006): 9.

in worship is the dominant theme in *Enter His Gates*. It is clear that reading scripture is the central action of worship. It permeates every other topic and element.⁷² The Lord's Supper receives a less prominent place in Kreider. However, it is the only other element that is given an independent chapter. Kreider affirms the broader Christian emphasis on Word and Table.

In contrast, Yoder, Kropf and Slough emphasize the many actions that compose worship:

Worship is a series of actions through which the congregation responds to the living God present in our midst in Christ and the Holy Spirit. Worship is not primarily a feeling, although joy, peace, and well-being are outcomes of worship. Worship is not an intellectual exercise, although new knowledge, insight and clarification of beliefs may result. A coherent arrangement of worship actions opens the way for God to communicate with the congregation and gives the congregation ways to respond to God.⁷³

They identify ten basic "worship actions," which can be understood as either general actions or functions of worship: gathering, praising, confessing, receiving assurance, offering, proclaiming, affirming faith, witnessing, praying and sending.⁷⁴ They also identify four common actions not present on this basic list: singing and music, a time for children, silence and announcements.⁷⁵ Yoder, Kropf and Slough claim these ten actions can be used to analyze all forms of worship with the exception of Quaker meetings.⁷⁶ They also emphasize there are many ways to practice and organize the actions and thus, they are not normative.⁷⁷ Yoder, Kropf and Slough avoid using actions to define a normative understanding of worship. The greatest weakness in *Preparing Sunday Dinner* is a failure to emphasize the centrality of scripture and the Lord's Supper. This is a significant break with the broader Christian and Anabaptist traditions.

The Word and Table can be traced from the worship of the earliest Christians to the 2006 Mennonite World Conference *Shared Convictions*. Affirming scripture and the Lord's Supper as

⁷² Kreider.

⁷³ Yoder. 87.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 112.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 110.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 112-116. Examples of "Basic," "Blended," "Contemporary," and United Methodist worship orders are provided.

the core normative actions of worship reflects an ecumenical and historical consensus and not a distinctively Anabaptist perspective. It is the content of scripture and Supper that is *distinctive*. The selections and interpretation of scripture read and the meaning given to the Lord's Supper set Mennonite worship apart. A greater emphasis on Word than Table is also characteristic of Anabaptist-Mennonite worship, although both are present in historical and contemporary worship practice. Many other actions have become common practice in Anabaptist-Mennonite congregations at various points in history; however only two normative actions: 1) *scripture* and 2) the *Lord's Supper* remain normative for Mennonite worship today.

Conclusion

The normative threefold definition of worship is summarized in the following box:

<p><i>Normative Threefold Definition of Worship</i></p> <p><i>Level 1 – Actions</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Scripture 2) The Lord's Supper <p><i>Level 2 – Functions</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Praise and lament 2) Confession and reconciliation 3) Giving and receiving service <p><i>Level 3 – Purposes</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Transforming encounter with the true triune God 2) Truthful, transformational engagement with self and community 3) Lively empowerment for faithful, truthful, transformative response in the world

The three normative levels of worship are integrally related and mutually derivative. Each action, function and purpose is related to every other action, function and purpose. As an example, I explore the relationships between the each normative function and the three purposes of worship.

Praise and lament facilitate and result from encounter with God. Praising God or

lamenting together is a way in which the worshipping community engages one another and shares in one another's joy and sorrow. Praise, recognizing the greatness of God, and lament, naming the pain of the world, can empower the church for faithful service. Confession and reconciliation facilitate and result from engagement with self and other. Encounter with God may also prompt confession, as worshippers consider themselves in relation to the greatness of God. Confession may be the beginning of a reconciling encounter with God. Confession and reconciliation can also lead to empowered service, as individuals and groups recognize their role in systems of injustice. Giving and receiving service facilitates and results from empowerment for faithful response. Service given and received is a form of engagement with self and others, as the ones who serve and the ones served. Faithful service can also be an expression of praise and gratitude to God. Similar multifaceted relationships exist at each level of definition.

The threefold definition of worship responds to the questions "What is worship?" and "Why worship?"; however it does not address *how* communities worship.

Worship culture

Characterizing worship *culture* defines the context and expression of an entire worship gathering or specific worship action. It expresses *style* of worship, such as worship in the style of Taizé or "traditional" or "contemporary" worship. It refers to the *mood* or experience of worship. For example, a worship gathering or action may be described as contemplative or energetic. Worship culture also refers to other features that describe the *nature* of a worship gathering or action such as naming worship intergenerational or an action as symbolic. I address the culture of worship from a descriptive standpoint, drawing on the particular example of the Lent 5 service at First Mennonite, before analyzing the normative culture of contemporary Mennonite worship.

Describing worship culture

Characterizing the culture of a worship gathering describes its style, mood and nature. For example, the March 9 service at First Mennonite could be described as “traditional,” as it follows the pattern of worship practiced in this congregation for the past two decades. It could also be defined as “traditional” from an outside perspective as is composed of a series of discrete actions and uses music from the denominational hymnal.⁷⁸ A participant in the March 9 service may have found the mood “reflective” or experienced the service as “inspiring.” The nature of the gathering could be described as “intergenerational,” since some actions were directed to children and children remained in the worship space throughout the service. The culture of specific actions can also be characterized. The reader’s theatre could be described as “humorous” or a song as “energetic.”

The danger of defining worship in terms of culture is the subjective nature of these descriptors. What is “traditional” in one community may be “contemporary” in another. One participant may experience a worship gathering as “inspiring” and another “boring.” A five minute children’s time may not create truly “intergenerational” worship. Ronald P. Byars explores the difficulty of simply labelling worship “tradition” and “contemporary.”⁷⁹ Defining worship in terms of culture must be done cautiously and with careful attention to context.

Descriptive Definition of Worship Culture

Culture

Features of the context and expression of worship, including the style, mood and nature of a worship gathering or worship action

⁷⁸ Wright, Tim and Jan Wright, ed. *Contemporary Worship: A Sourcebook for Spirited-Traditional, Praise and Seeker Services*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997. Byars.

⁷⁹ Byars. 36-64.

Normative worship culture

There is no biblical, theological or historical basis on which to claim a particular style or mood of worship as normative. Worship is always inculturated. Patterns of worship develop over time and carry deep meanings for congregations. It is not reasonable to expect a common stylistic tradition for all Mennonite worship in all times and places. Nevertheless, it is possible to normatively characterize Anabaptist-Mennonite worship culture as *communal*, *inclusive* and *sensory*.

Characterizing the culture of public worship as *communal* seems obvious, especially because of the assumption that worship refers to the regular gathering of the faith community. There is ecumenical consensus that Christian worship is communal. Mennonite worship is characterized by a strong emphasis on community. This is evident in the confessional documents, which speak of worship primarily in the context of the discussion of the church,⁸⁰ and in the work of contemporary Mennonite liturgical theologians, who strongly emphasize the communal and collaborative dimensions of worship.⁸¹ The celebration of baptism and communion only in the context of communal worship also reveals a communal orientation.⁸² The communal culture of Mennonite worship is normative.

An *inclusive* worship culture is also normative. Worship is a gathering open to guests and even strangers. In addition, race, gender, age, economic and social status, and physical and mental disabilities should not be barriers to participation in worship. Certain natural barriers exist, such as language and location. However, congregations can work to overcome these challenges.

The Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition does not have a strong history of practicing inclusive

⁸⁰ *Confession*.

⁸¹ Yoder. Kreider.

⁸² *Confession*. Rempel.

worship. In times of persecution, such as the early years of the Anabaptist movement, worship was forced underground.⁸³ An emphasis on maintaining the purity of the church encouraged the development of boundary oriented, exclusive, sectarian worship grounded in ethnic as well as religious identities. In recent decades, North American Mennonites have identified with a missional ecclesiology and are trying to develop more inclusive worship practices.⁸⁴

Even a culture of inclusiveness involves some boundaries. It is important to reflect on where boundaries may exist and where they may be appropriate. For example, the Lord's Supper has traditionally been bounded by baptism and church discipline in Mennonite communities. Worship leadership is another place where boundaries have been established.

Worship is also *sensory*. This is the final normative characteristic of worship culture. Christian worship engages the senses. Worship is not an inward retreat away from the world of the senses, although silence and inward reflection may constitute one element of worship; but rather, worship involves active engagement with the surroundings:

The Christian liturgy—taking this word now in its most general sense—is the artistic embodiment of this social yet personal life [of worship,] ... the classic medium by which the ceaseless adoring action of the Bride of Christ is given visible and audible expression.⁸⁵

On the most basic level, in worship participants listen, speak and sing. They also stand and sit, look, touch and eat. In doing these things, they pay attention to what their senses are experiencing. Mennonite worship has traditionally been primarily oral/aural in sensory focus. In recent decades Mennonites have become increasingly interested in exploring the role of the other senses. Worship is more than sensory, it is multisensory. The multisensory character of worship has been rediscovered in the postmodern era. This theme will be addressed further in the following discussion of postmodernism.

⁸³ Snyder. *Following*. 123.

⁸⁴ *Leader*.

⁸⁵ Underhill, Evelyn. *Worship*. New York: Crossroad, 1936. 85.

Worship culture can be normatively characterized as: 1) *communal*, 2) *inclusive*, and 3) *sensory*. Mennonite worship has always been shaped by a strong communal focus and, in recent decades, interest in the inclusive and sensory aspects of worship has increased. The normative characteristics of worship culture are summarized in the following box:

<p><i>Normative Characteristics of Worship Culture</i></p> <p><i>Worship culture</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Communal2) Inclusive3) Sensory

Worship in the context of postmodernism

The basic interpretive framework of understanding worship as actions, functions and purposes and being attentive to worship culture is the foundation for developing an understanding of worship leadership and the integration of youth into the worship leadership of the Mennonite church. Before addressing questions of participation and leadership, it is necessary to consider the postmodern context of contemporary worship.

Defining and evaluating postmodernism is complex. Postmodern terminology is used differently by various commentators. There is consensus that postmodernity is a reaction against modernity, however there are diverse interpretations as to what characterizes postmodernity itself and even more divergent evaluations of postmodernity. I begin by engaging the definitions of postmodernism proposed by Robert Webber, Marva Dawn, Peter Craig-Wild, Brian McLaren and Wendell Loewen before considering the impact of postmodernity on the theology and practice of worship.

Defining postmodernism

Robert Webber describes postmodernity as a return to a premodern worldview, makes

this assumption his starting point, and therefore casts postmodernity in a positive light:

Today's world no longer sees the world in terms of modern categories. Therefore it is called postmodern. In the modern world, Christians interpreted Christianity using the dominant categories of science and reason. ... Because of the new revolutions in science and philosophy, there is wide scepticism about the modern rational approach to Christianity. At present, many theologians argue that we should never have been reliant on science and reason. Likewise, many Christians leaders argue that the church must return to classical Christianity. ... This new theological thrust takes us back to the common roots of our faith in the early church. It says, *You do not interpret Christianity through the world, but the world through Christianity*. This book is written from the perspective of a postmodern adaptation of classical Christianity and suggests that new Christians be formed by a Christian faith consistent with the biblical and historic tradition.⁸⁶

It is difficult to object to Webber's interpretation of postmodernism. Reformers throughout the ages have called for deeper grounding in scripture and history. However, postmodernism is more than the rejection of modernism and a return to the past. It is impossible to return to a premodern worldview in a post-enlightenment world that continues to be deeply informed by the assumptions of modernity.

In contrast, Marva J. Dawn, exhorts the Christian community to resist postmodernism entirely, largely due to her interpretation of postmodernity as characterized by despair, relative truth,⁸⁷ and a rejection of meta-narrative. She presents postmodernism as a series of slogans:

- the Enlightenment project is a bust – there is no such thing as progress;
- life has no meaning – it's just a game;
- you are the only one who cares about you;
- no story is universally true;
- there is no such thing as truth except what you create for yourself;
- every claim to truth is a power play;
- therefore, everything must be mistrusted (or deconstructed, the philosophers say);
- there is no order – all is random;
- you only go around once, so do it with gusto⁸⁸

Given her interpretation of postmodernity, it is no surprise that Dawn is highly critical of the

⁸⁶ Webber. *Journey*. 15-16.

⁸⁷ Dawn, Marva J. *Is It a Lost Cause?: Having the Heart of God for the Church's Children*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997. 22.

⁸⁸ Dawn. *Lost Cause*. 23.

influence of postmodernism on children and youth: “My concern here is for how postmodern notions – often without our awareness – have hit the streets, our homes and our children and lead to a rejection of truth, authority, meaning and hope. The philosophy rightly spurns many modern myths, but offers nothing to take their place.”⁸⁹ She emphasizes the positive value of the absolute truth of the Biblical Christian meta-narrative and the necessity of making this truth central in worship.

Clinging to modern notions is clearly not an option in a postmodern world, according to Craig-Wild, McLaren and Loewen. Craig-Wild celebrates postmodernity due to the renewed interest in spirituality that accompanies the release of the hold of scientific reason.⁹⁰ However, he laments that the church is not responding to the reality of the postmodern era: “In the eyes of the postmodern seeker it is an institution clearly wedded to the old word/mind axis, and addicted to a meta-narrative that is past its sell-by date.”⁹¹ He describes postmodernism as a more holistic approach to life and calls the church to embrace postmodern values.⁹²

Brian McLaren also interprets postmodernism positively and appeals to the church to embrace it. He is unsatisfied with the claim that postmodernity is merely the rejection of enlightenment rationality, and instead defines it in terms of synthesis:

A lot of people seem to think that since modernity was rationalistic, postmodernity will have to be antirationalistic or irrational. No: that’s not postmodernity – it’s antimodernity. Postmodernity will more likely seek to integrate rationality with things beyond rationality, things like imagination, intuition, even faith. In fact, if the medieval era ... was seen as an era of faith, and the modern era ... as an era of reason, we could expect the postmodern era to be a synthesis of faith and reason. ... Again, a lot of people think that modernity was all about progress and optimism. Therefore, they surmise, postmodernity will be about despair and pessimism. Not quite. Early modernity was generally optimistic about human progress. But late modernity (after World War II) seemed to become cynical, jaded, disillusioned about progress. Postmodernity, I would expect, would seek to be both optimistic and

⁸⁹ Dawn. *Lost Cause*. 22.

⁹⁰ Craig-Wild. 18.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 19.

⁹² *Ibid.* 98.

pessimistic about progress. Again, one would expect a synthesis, not a rejection. Also, people become confused when they think that a culture is monolithic, homogenous. . . . The modern era was largely rationalistic, but it had a strong romantic strain protesting rationalism all through it. Thus modernity is best defined not by a monolithic opinion about reason, but rather by an ongoing argument about reason and its relationship to feeling, faith, etc. The culture takes on a postmodern cast when we begin to assume that there is some sort of dynamic tension between reason and feeling, faith, etc., and we don't expect one side to win over the other. The old reason-feeling argument doesn't disappear, but it now becomes an accepted dynamic tension.⁹³

Wendell J. Loewen provides a balanced summary of postmodernism from an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective. He describes postmodernity as characterized by relative, local and experienced truth rather than absolute, universal, scientific truth; subjectivity rather than objectivity; community rather than autonomy; and cynicism rather than optimism.⁹⁴ Postmodernity has positive dimensions, including spiritual openness, desire for community, preference for story, and a relational understanding of truth.⁹⁵ Loewen suggests the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition is particularly well equipped to address postmodernity due to its emphasis on lifelong discipleship, authentic community and narrative.⁹⁶

Webber, Craig-Wild, McLaren and Loewen's more appreciative and dialectical definitions of postmodernity, and Dawn's strong opposition to a certain type of postmodernism, shape how they propose the church should react to a postmodern worldview in the context of worship.

Implications of postmodernity for Christian worship

Each aspect of Christian worship, actions, functions, purposes and culture, is affected by the emerging postmodern worldview. I first engage the impact of postmodernity on the

⁹³ McLaren, Brian. "Why I still use the word postmodern." *Emerging Church Info*. 30 May 2008. <<http://www.emergingchurch.info/reflection/brianmclaren/index.htm>>.

⁹⁴ Loewen, Wendell J. *Beyond Me: Grounding Youth Ministry in God's Story*. Scottsdale: Faith and Life Resources, 2008. 49-52.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 56-57.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 10.

normative characteristics of worship culture before turning to actions, functions and purposes.

Worship culture

Worship culture is profoundly affected by a shift from a modern to a postmodern worldview in North American culture. The communal, inclusive and sensory character of worship is intensified. Craig-Wild describes three shifts that manifest the cultural transition from modernity to postmodernity: from textual to visual, understanding to experience, and presentation to engagement.⁹⁷ The impact of these three shifts on worship can be assessed in light of Dan Kimball's description of emerging worship in *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations*.⁹⁸ Kimball is hesitant to use the term postmodern, yet he unmistakably addresses postmodern realities.

The *communal* culture of worship is particularly important in a postmodern era shaped by a yearning for community in reaction to modern individualism. Consequently, increasing the emphasis on community formation in worship is important in a postmodern context.⁹⁹ To form community in a postmodern worship, individuals must experience active engagement with one another, especially in terms of sharing experiences of God.

Postmodern worship culture is not only *inclusive* in welcoming and facilitating the attendance of all, but is also inclusive in inviting worshippers not only to observe but to participate in worship. Emerging worship, as described by Dan Kimball, "moves away from a spectator type of gathering."¹⁰⁰ It is experiential and engaging, actively inviting the participation of worshippers. To include individuals deeply shaped by a postmodern worldview, worship must attend to the fact that, "We have rediscovered the multi-dimensionality of our human nature, and

⁹⁷ Craig-Wild. 98.

⁹⁸ Kimball, Dan. *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 118.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 74.

the experiential and the relational have taken over from comprehension and fact as the ways we relate to the world.”¹⁰¹ Worship must centre on experiencing relationship with God rather than expounding theology. Experiencing and engaging rather than presenting and understanding the gospel is required.

Finally, postmodern worship culture is not only *sensory*, meaning it engages external realities in addition to internal realities, but is multisensory. This involves recognizing that “we are now a visual rather than verbal people.”¹⁰² Kimball goes further in his understanding of multisensory worship:

Multisensory worship involves seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, and experiencing. This means our worship of God can involve singing, silence, preaching and art, and move into a much greater spectrum of expression. It goes outside the box and then throws away the box that limits how we can express our love and worship to God when we gather. We move past listening and singing to a whole new level of ways to participate in worship through all our senses.¹⁰³

In addition, it is essential to note, alongside Webber, that worship in a postmodern context *recovers ancient traditions* of Christian worship. Kimball’s description of emerging worship places a high value on, “a retrieval of liturgy, ancient disciplines, Christian seasons and Jewish roots.”¹⁰⁴ The intensification of worship culture characterized as communal, inclusive and sensory and an emphasis on recovering ancient liturgical traditions has implications for the actions, functions and purposes of worship.

Actions, functions and purposes

The *actions* of worship are influenced by postmodernity. The increasing importance of symbol and ritual is strongly emphasized by Yoder, Kropf and Slough:

Broadly understood, symbolic language, actions and objects form the essential

¹⁰¹ Craig-Wild. 98.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Kimball. 81-82.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 92.

infrastructure of worship in a postmodern world. They offer expansive possibilities for communicating the mystery of faith to worshipers who may be inoculated against faith by secularism, who may be stumbling in confusion, or who may be alienated from God. Because they communicate effectively with children and young people as well as adults, symbolic language, actions and objects have the capacity to touch everyone who gathers for worship. In short, worship leaders must understand them well and use them purposefully if worship is to have meaning in the twenty-first century.¹⁰⁵

Ritual is communal, visual, experiential and engaging, reflecting the worldview of postmodernity and connecting with postmodern generations in ways other practices cannot:

Although personal prayer and other spiritual practices may seem futile, when we gather with the faith community and engage in the actions of ritual, we find ourselves reconnected with God and able to trust—even if only momentarily.¹⁰⁶

The communal nature of ritual is especially crucial in postmodern contexts. Kimball describes communion, the Lord's Supper, as a central part of emerging worship.¹⁰⁷ The postmodern emphasis on Table as equal to Word goes against historic Anabaptist-Mennonite patterns. The role and value of the Biblical meta-narrative is addressed in the following discussion of the purpose of worship in a postmodern context.

The *functions* of worship are least affected by postmodernity. It is not the functions themselves, but rather how they are expressed in the actions and purposes that are shaped by postmodernism. For example, the functions praise and lament remain, yet the actions of praise and lament are altered, perhaps including ritual action or sharing personal experience, and the purposes of praise and lament are transformed.

The *purposes* of worship as transforming encounter with the triune God, truthful engagement with self and community, and lively empowerment for faithful response in the world remain central and viable in a postmodern context. In fact, encounter, engagement and community are important postmodern values. However, describing the content of worship as true

¹⁰⁵ Yoder. 18.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 324.

¹⁰⁷ Kimball. 94-95.

in an absolute sense, reflecting Eleanor Kreider and Marva J. Dawn's emphasis on truth in worship, is challenging from a postmodern perspective in which truth is relative, relational and particular. In addition, many postmodern thinkers reject the Christian meta-narrative, the scriptural foundation of Christian worship, as inadequate for addressing contemporary life and oppressive and exclusive of minority and marginalized groups.¹⁰⁸

One response to these challenges, in a postmodern context, is worship that claims truth and narrative within a particular setting and grounds them in the community. Postmodern Christian worship may not claim that non-Trinitarian worship is false, but rather that it is not Christian worship. It does not claim that the Biblical narrative is universally and absolutely true, but rather that it is true for the particular worshipping community in the broader context of the Christian community around the world and throughout history. It is therefore the understanding of the truthful nature of the content of worship rather than the purposes of worship themselves that are altered in a postmodern culture.

Conclusion

It is necessary to locate an Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of worship within a postmodern context that still has elements of modern and even premodern culture. Dialogue between cultural worldviews and Christian theology is an essential task of the church:

While the God we worship is unchangeable, the culture we live in is constantly evolving. If the worship of the Church is going to be in the cultural vernacular we need to be aware of, and take account of, the changes taking place around us.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

This definition of worship as actions, functions and purposes, all characterized by distinctive cultural features within postmodernity is the framework for this study. It is useful and

¹⁰⁸ Yoder. 162. Dawn. *Lost Cause*. 34-37.

¹⁰⁹ Craig-Wild. 98.

necessary to deconstruct and analyze worship to create clear descriptive definitions and normative expectations. It is equally important to recognize worship as *mystery*. The mystery of worship is conveyed in images describing worship as “the mirror of heaven” or the “arena of transcendence”¹¹⁰ but ultimately it is beyond human language and symbol.

¹¹⁰ White, Susan J. *Foundations of Christian Worship*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006. 3, 11.

Chapter 2: Exploring an Anabaptist-Mennonite Understanding of Worship Leadership

Public worship is an expression of the life and faith of the church. In the *Confession of Faith in Mennonite Perspective*, worship is addressed only in the context of the church:

The *church*, the body of Christ, is called to become ever more like Jesus Christ, its head, in its worship, ministry, witness, mutual love and care, and the ordering of its common life. ...The *church's* identity as God's people of faith is sustained and renewed as members gather regularly for worship.¹¹¹

An Anabaptist-Mennonite theology of worship is rooted in ecclesiology. Issues of leadership in worship also revolve around an understanding of the church, since “all Christian ministry is grounded in a theology of the church.”¹¹² In this chapter I begin by considering participation in worship, addressing the questions “Who is included in the church?” and “Who participates in worship?” I then turn to the nature of and qualifications for worship leadership, examining issues such as “What is the form of worship leadership?” “Who plans and leads worship?” and “What qualifications are required for worship leadership?”

Participation in Worship

The church worships. This simple declaration requires close examination. First I consider current confessional understandings of the church and locate them in scripture and the early Anabaptist ecclesiology of Pilgram Marpeck. Then I explore how Believers Church ecclesiology can be expanded in relation to worship.

Confessional Anabaptist- Mennonite ecclesiology: A baptized community of believers

The *Confession of Faith* states “We believe the church is the assembly of those who have accepted God's offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.”¹¹³ The *Shared Convictions* of Mennonite World Conference provides greater detail: “As a church, we are a community of

¹¹¹ *Confession*. 39.

¹¹² *Mennonite Polity*. 13.

¹¹³ *Confession*. 39.

those whom God's Spirit calls to turn from sin, acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, receive baptism upon confession of faith, and follow Christ in life."¹¹⁴ Identifying participants in worship as "baptized" or "unbaptized" rather than "believing" or "unbelieving" is the terminology that is employed in this study. Baptism is a clear, objective marker of relationship to the church. Baptism is not equated with any particular level of understanding or belief. However, it is regarded as an important ritual marker reflecting faith and commitment to the church.

Baptism is integrally connected to church membership.¹¹⁵ Identifying baptism with membership in the church has biblical foundations:

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.¹¹⁶

The link between baptism and church membership was firmly established at the origin of the Anabaptist movement in the sixteenth century by thinkers such as Pilgram Marpeck. Marpeck affirmed baptism as the "portal of entrance into the holy communion or church of Christ"¹¹⁷ employing the language of Paul:

We have been united in the unity of faith and the covenant of love, and are henceforth one body, for Paul says we have been baptized into one body. This one body is the holy church into which we have been baptized, that is, through one Spirit and one faith; we must be united into one confession of God.¹¹⁸

Baptism marks initiation into the community of believers that is the body of Christ on earth. It indicates church membership on local and universal levels.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ *Shared Convictions*.

¹¹⁵ Rempel. 38. *Confession*. 46.

¹¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 12:12-13.

¹¹⁷ Pilgram Marpeck in Klassen, William and Walter Klaassen, trans. *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*. Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1978. 186.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 198-199.

¹¹⁹ Jeschke, Marlin. *Believers Baptism for Children of the Church*. Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1983. 47.

Broadening Anabaptist-Mennonite ecclesiology: A worshipping community

In a Believers Church baptism is a voluntary and adult decision: “Baptism is for those who are of the age of accountability and who freely request baptism on the basis of their response to Jesus Christ in faith.”¹²⁰ There is no consensus regarding a specific age of accountability. Baptism between early adolescence and young adulthood is most common for children and youth raised in the church.¹²¹ As a result, it is extremely likely unbaptized children and youth are present and engaged in the worship of local communities despite the fact that, according to the *Confession of Faith*, they are not part of the church. Not only are children present, but efforts to nurture their faith through worship with the hope of eventual baptism are explicit in many congregations. Time is set aside in worship for children and opportunities for children to participate in many aspects of the gathering are available. The place of youth in the church is addressed in Chapter 3 and the role of youth in worship is explored in Chapter 4.

The *Confession of Faith* states, “We believe that the church is called to proclaim and to be a sign of the kingdom of God. Christ has commissioned the church to be his witnesses, making disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to observe all things he has commanded.”¹²² This impetus is mirrored in the vision statement of Mennonite Church Canada:

God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ
and, by the power of the Holy Spirit
to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace
so that God’s healing and hope
flow through us to the world.¹²³

In addition to the unbaptized children and youth raised in the church who are present in the

¹²⁰ *Confession*. 47.

¹²¹ Jeschke. 77.

¹²² *Confession*. 42.

¹²³ *Vision Statement of the Mennonite Church*. Mennonite Church Canada. 31 May 2008.
<<http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/about/beliefs.htm>>.

worshipping community, such a missional theology of the church assumes that there will also be unbaptized adults present during worship. Some of these may be new believers who are being incorporated into the church. Others may be individuals exploring faith. In addition, healing and hope may be communicated through worship to individuals and groups with no expectation that they will become baptized members of the church. Limiting the description of participants in Anabaptist-Mennonite worship to baptized church members does not reflect a Mennonite theology of baptism and mission.

Eleanor Snyder proposes an alternative understanding of the relationship between baptism and church membership that stands in opposition to historic and contemporary Mennonite belief and practice:

I argue that the rite of believers baptism is neither the beginning of one's faith journey nor the entry point into church membership. Such an understanding dismisses years of the nurture that took place up to the point of baptism. I take a minority Anabaptist view when I insist that believers baptism and membership need not be so closely intertwined and argue for church membership that is based on participation in *community*, not on baptism. However, baptism is an important marker in the individual's life; it signifies a voluntary and personal decision to *fully* participate in a commitment to the reign of God within a particular community of believers. Baptism, then, becomes the public declaration of an *owned* faith.¹²⁴

Rather than rejecting the union of baptism and church membership, I propose a mediating position that recognizes a *worshipping community* extending beyond baptized church members to include all active participants in the local church community. The worshipping community is the community of participation rather than a church of baptized members, although the baptized church is the core of the worshipping community.

Darrell Guder describes the church as a bounded and centered community. As *bounded covenant communities*, "congregations and denominations have functioned by

¹²⁴ Snyder, Eleanor Koch. "Including Children in the Life of the Congregation: A Contemporary Mennonite Exploration." Diss. Toronto School of Theology, 1999. 108-109.

providing...spiritual, social, and cultural boundaries. They have established at the outset the rules, expectations and folkways of the particular denomination.”¹²⁵ The Mennonite church has marked membership with baptism. Guder also describes churches as *centred missional communities* that, “do not define membership and identity at entrance points or boundaries. The centered-set organization invites people to enter on a journey toward a set of values and commitments.”¹²⁶ The church, as a centred community, includes all active and engaged participants. Guder argues a continuum exists between the church as a bounded and centred community and that both levels of involvement are crucial.¹²⁷ This thesis regards the worshipping community to be an inclusive, centred community incorporating all active participants rather than a bounded church of baptized members.

Conclusion

The worshipping community extends beyond the community of baptized believers to incorporate all participants, including children and youth who are descendents of members, and individuals and families from the wider community who are exploring faith.

It is important to acknowledge that theological definitions are not the only way to understand the composition of a worshipping community. Participants of different ages, life stages, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, economic statuses, educational experiences, relationship statuses, personality types, spiritual types and theological orientations engage in worship together. Newcomers, as well as families who have attended for decades, may be present. Worship is experienced differently by each participant. Each worshipping community encounters God, each other and the world in a distinctive manner. Congregational composition

¹²⁵ Guder, Darrell, ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998. 205.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 206.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 208-209.

and culture¹²⁸ are crucial factors when addressing participation in worship. Worship leaders must attend to the unique culture of the worshipping community as they plan and lead worship.

Worship Leadership

Worship leadership includes planning and preparing for worship in advance, and guiding worship when the community is gathered. Individuals or groups are usually designated to plan and lead worship. With the possible exception of the meetings of the Society of Friends, small charismatic communities and house churches, worship requires advance preparation and careful direction to shape the normative actions, functions, purposes and culture. In high liturgical traditions, a significant quantity of preparation for worship occurs outside the local community in the composition of liturgical documents detailing the specific actions of worship such as the Roman Catholic Mass or the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*. In the Believers Church tradition, local worship planners and leaders exercise a great deal of freedom in shaping the content and form of worship. I address the role of the worship leader and the nature of worship leadership in the context of the normative definition of worship before considering worship leadership as a form of ministry.

Worship leadership in the context of the normative definition of worship

Worship leaders are called to shape the actions and functions of weekly worship into a time of transforming encounter with the triune God, truthful engagement with self and community, and lively empowerment for faithful response in the world within a worship culture characterized as communal, inclusive and sensory. This is a high calling. I analyze the role of worship leadership in the context of the purposes, functions and actions of worship before proposing a collaborative model of worship leadership emerging from the normative characteristics of worship culture.

¹²⁸ Yoder. 41-64.

Worship leadership in the context of purposes, functions and actions

Yoder, Kropf and Slough employ three metaphors that parallel the normative *purposes* of worship, describing the role of the worship leader as shaman, host and prophet. The task of the worship leader as *shaman* is to “guide the congregation’s encounter with God.”¹²⁹ As a shaman, the worship leader exemplifies the experience of intimate personal encounter with God. The task of the worship leader as *host* is to “care for the context and comfort of the community.”¹³⁰ The worship leader “hosts the community’s engagement with one another.”¹³¹ As a host, the worship leader is actively engaged in pastoral care. I would add that the worship leader also encourages each participant to engage in self reflection. The task of the worship leader as *prophet* is “to inspire and empower action in the community and the world.”¹³² The worship leader hosts “God’s vision for the world.”¹³³ The worship leader is called to bring an awareness of the world into worship and respond in faithful prayer and action. Worship leaders must attend to all three purposes and all three roles in planning and leading worship.

The *Worship Sourcebook*, emerging from the Reformed tradition, describes worship leaders as priests and prophets. As *priests*, worship leaders facilitate encounter with God through shaping the “prayers of God’s people.”¹³⁴ As *prophets*, worship leaders have “the holy task of being stewards of God’s Word.”¹³⁵ The *Sourcebook* grounds these images in the language of the Old Testament: “Just as Old Testament priests would represent the people to God, so we help shape the prayers that God’s people offer today. ... Just as Old Testament prophets declared

¹²⁹ Yoder. 219.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 214.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid. 225.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ *The Worship Sourcebook*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004. 18.

¹³⁵ Ibid. 19.

God's Word, so we also shape how God's written Word is heard in congregations today."¹³⁶

The *Sourcebook* provides three important additions to Yoder, Kropf and Slough's description of the role of the worship leader. First, the *Sourcebook* points to the *representative* role of worship leaders. Historically, the Mennonite tradition has been reluctant to understand church leaders as representatives, due to the anticlericalism and emphasis on the "priesthood of all believers" in the early Anabaptist movement. Despite resistance to the idea of representational leadership, it is necessary to recognize that although Mennonites believe each person has direct access to God, worship leaders embody and facilitate encounter with God as shamans, hosts and prophets. Worship leaders symbolize the voice and action of the entire worshipping community.

Second, the worship leader as a *curator of language* is a focus in the *Worship Sourcebook*. The role of the worship leader as one who provides words for worship in the context of all three roles, as shaman, host and prophet, is essential. However, an overemphasis on language in worship can diminish the importance of silence and the use of other senses – sight, smell, touch and taste.

Third, the *Sourcebook* calls attention to the role of the worship leader as a *steward of scripture*. Stewardship of scripture is central to the worship leader's role as shaman, host and prophet, connecting the normative purposes and actions of worship. The pairing of scripture and prophecy makes the crucial point that worship leaders are not called to any form of prophecy, but to the proclamation of the message of scripture in contemporary contexts, holding the community accountable to action and transformation emerging from the Bible. Eleanor Kreider does not address the role of the worship leader explicitly in *Enter His Gates*; however, the logical extension of her argument would be to understand the worship leader as a scriptural

¹³⁶ *Worship Sourcebook*. 18-19.

guide.¹³⁷ This is in keeping with the strong early Anabaptist emphasis on scripture in worship.

The mediating functions of worship point to the role to the worship leader as one who brings together the roles of shaman, host and prophet in enacting the purposes of worship and the specific skills of attending to the actions of worship. In this process, the functions of praise and lament, confession and reconciliation, and giving and receiving service are fulfilled.

On the most basic level, worship leaders facilitate a worship gathering through organizing and leading the actions of worship. This involves coordinating both content and mode of presentation. Actions must be presented with confidence and clarity in voice and movement, through carefully chosen ideas and words, images and gestures and skilful public speaking and leadership.¹³⁸ There are less public dimensions of worship leadership such as creating visual displays, preparing worship resources, and caring for technological equipment.

Worship leaders have particular responsibility for the two normative actions, Word and Table. These central actions must be “made large.”¹³⁹ Worship planners and leaders consider the role of scripture in every aspect of the service. Kreider emphasizes the role and value of scripture in shaping praise, confession, intercession and the Lord’s Supper.¹⁴⁰ The Bible must be allowed to speak to contemporary communal and individual life.¹⁴¹ The Supper ought to be similarly integrated. Leaders should give careful attention to how often and with what emphasis communion is shared. Worship leaders have a clearly defined role in shaping the words, movement, and sensory experience of worship through which the functions and purposes of worship are fulfilled.

¹³⁷ Kreider. 89-123.

¹³⁸ Yoder. 246-247.

¹³⁹ Byars. 63.

¹⁴⁰ Kreider.

¹⁴¹ *Worship Sourcebook*. 19.

Worship leadership in the context of worship culture: A collaborative approach

Creating a worship culture that is communal, inclusive and sensory requires worship leadership that embodies these characteristics. A *collaborative* understanding to worship leadership serves this purpose. Yoder, Kropf and Slough articulate “a collaborative approach to worship and preaching” in *Preparing Sunday Dinner*.¹⁴² They describe worship leadership as the combined work of preacher, music leader and participants in dramatic and visual presentations during the service, and call for the integration of other leaders in the planning process, for example, in determining preaching topics and envisioning seasonal actions and themes.¹⁴³ Worship is planned *communally*, not by a single pastor or worship leader. Yoder, Kropf and Slough suggest the formation of a worship team: “People with a variety of gifts [who] are called to work together to give overall leadership to the worship planning process.”¹⁴⁴ The worship team is *inclusive* in representing a broad spectrum of the congregation in age, gender, education, occupation and spiritual maturity,¹⁴⁵ and also in finding ways to incorporate others in worship planning and leadership. Gift discernment is addressed in the following discussion of qualifications for worship leadership. Communal and inclusive collaborative worship planning has the potential to result in increasingly *sensory* worship, as individuals who learn and express themselves in different ways contribute to the worship planning process. Dan Kimball comments that in the “creative community planning” of worship, “the goal is to put the design of your emerging worship gatherings into the hands of many people – not just one or two.”¹⁴⁶ A worship gathering that is “colourfully designed from a palette of multisensory ideas” is the result.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Yoder.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 186.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 187.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 45.

¹⁴⁶ Kimball. 108.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 110.

Preparing Sunday Dinner identifies the benefits of a collaborative worship planning process: (1) a richer vision of God: “Although each worship planner has favourite images of God and particular theological understandings that arise from scripture and experience, the dialogue that emerges from a broader range of experiences strengthens worship planning;”¹⁴⁸ (2) the ability to meet more individual and congregational pastoral needs: “the wider their circle of contact, the more likely worship leaders are to make wise and sensitive choices;”¹⁴⁹ and (3) expanded engagement:

The use of more gifts in worship planning and leading enriches worship for both the congregation and its leaders. Because individual worshipers experience and respond to God in unique ways, worship leaders need to provide various modes for engagement in worship. ... Depending on whether worshipers process their experience in primarily auditory, visual or kinaesthetic ways, they will tend to connect more readily with one or another of the typical modes of presentation. Over time, however, worshipers can expand their capacity for responding to many more modes of engagement if worship leaders and preachers offer them a varied diet.¹⁵⁰

The collaborative worship planning process does not guarantee worship that is communal, inclusive and sensory; however, it increases the likelihood that it will be.

Accountability is necessary in a collaborative worship planning process that allows for great diversity in both the content and form of worship:

In the midst of diversity, what is required of leaders is an ability to respond wisely and compassionately to varied preferences but also to remain committed to the congregation’s central biblical and theological convictions regarding worship.¹⁵¹

Accountability exists within the broader church in area conferences and national church bodies.¹⁵² Pastors and lay leaders are subject to systems of accountability within congregations

¹⁴⁸ Yoder. 191.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 192.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 192-193.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 193.

¹⁵² *Confession*. 64.

and church conferences.¹⁵³ Within local congregations, baptized believers commit to being accountable to one another in faith and life,¹⁵⁴ including worship participation and leadership. Systems of accountability must also include unbaptized members of the worshipping community who participate in worship planning and leadership. It is necessary to develop communal and inclusive methods of reflecting on and assessing the collaborative worship leading process.

Conclusion

In the context of the threefold definition of worship, worship leaders are called to enact the purposes of worship as shamans, hosts and prophets and to direct worship through a collaborative and accountable worship planning process that reflects and forms a communal, inclusive and sensory worship culture. In this context, worship leadership can also be understood as a form of ministry.

Worship leadership as ministry

Worship leadership has often been the work of trained pastors and church musicians. Leading worship is an important pastoral role, and pastors continue to play a central role in a collaborative worship planning process:

The office of pastoral ministry will normally include particular responsibility for *leading congregational worship*, preaching and teaching, providing pastoral care...[and] *helping to call forth and nurture the ministries of others in the congregation*.¹⁵⁵

The *Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership* suggests that: “Authority for ministry consists of at least three related but separate realities: *task, office* and *being*.”¹⁵⁶ Worship leadership is similar to other forms of ministry and can also be described in terms of task, office and being,¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ *Mennonite Polity*. 106-108.

¹⁵⁴ *Rempel*. 40.

¹⁵⁵ Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. “Ministerial Formation and Theological Education in Mennonite Perspective.” *The Heart of the Matter: Pastoral Ministry in Anabaptist Perspective*. Ed. Erick Sawatzky. Telford: Cascadia Publishing House, 2004. 241.

¹⁵⁶ *Mennonite Polity*. 22.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 22-23.

or function, office and identity. Worship leaders, like ministers, must hold together what they do, the specific tasks of preparing for and leading worship, who they represent, the “representational role that a [worship leader] fulfills on behalf of the church,”¹⁵⁸ and who they are, their spiritual, emotional and relational identity.¹⁵⁹

Conclusion

Worship leaders are called to be ministers as shamans, hosts and prophets, representatives of the congregation, curators of language and stewards of scripture, event planners, logistical specialists, skillful orators, discerning theologians, compassionate caregivers, and creative artists. To expect all of this of each individual may seem unreasonable. The collaborative nature of inclusive and communal worship planning and leadership relieves this burden, as individuals contribute diverse gifts to the worship of the community.

Qualifications for worship leadership

An exploration of the qualifications for worship leadership takes into account the nature of worship leadership and the recognition that the entire worshipping community participates in worship. I first explore the spiritual giftedness of the whole worshipping community before considering the specific qualifications and attributes associated with worship leadership and the significance of ritual markers.

The giftedness of the entire worshipping community

In some of the earliest writings of the New Testament, Paul describes the giftedness of each member of the worshipping community:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of

¹⁵⁸ *Mennonite Polity*. 22.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 23.

knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.¹⁶⁰

In the sixteenth century, this Biblical assumption was expressed in the Reformation slogan, “the priesthood of all believers.” Mainline Reformers, including Martin Luther, spoke of the priesthood of all believers in contrast to the creation of a particular social class of clergy by means of ordination.¹⁶¹ The early Anabaptist community took the priesthood of all believers beyond Luther’s intentions and formed egalitarian communities with a heightened leadership role for the laity. Each believer was called to live the holy life of obedience previously expected only of the clerical class.¹⁶² Anabaptists also rejected separating the office of ministry from the faith and life of the ministering person.¹⁶³ Karl Koop argues that sixteenth century Anabaptists reformed rather than eradicated the clerical office, affirming “the importance of genuine and qualified leadership,” in addition to an ethically grounded and egalitarian priesthood of all believers.¹⁶⁴

In the twenty-first century, the Mennonite *Confession* continues to emphasize the giftedness of the entire community:

We believe that ministry continues the work of Christ, who gives gifts through the Holy Spirit to all believers and empowers them for service in the church and in the world. ... Christ invites all Christians to minister to each other in the church and on behalf of the church beyond its boundaries.¹⁶⁵

The seminal, ecumenical *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* document affirmed by the World

¹⁶⁰ 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.

¹⁶¹ Snyder. *Anabaptist*. 41

¹⁶² *Confession*. 60. Snyder. *Anabaptist*. 368.

¹⁶³ *Mennonite Polity*. 39.

¹⁶⁴ Koop, Karl. “Worldly Preachers and True Shepherds: Anabaptist Anticlericalism in the Lower Rhine.” *The Heart of the Matter: Pastoral Ministry in Anabaptist Perspective*. Ed. Erick Sawatzky. Telford: Cascadia Publishing House, 2004. 26.

¹⁶⁵ *Confession*. 59.

Council of Churches emphasizes “the calling of the whole people of God” as well as the importance of discerning gifts in community.”¹⁶⁶

All members are called to discover, with the help of the community, the gifts they have received and to use them for the building up of the Church and the service of the world to which the Church is sent.¹⁶⁷

Yoder, Kropf and Slough stress the need for gift discernment in the collaborative worship planning process:

Throughout the planning process, the members of the [collaborative] planning group seek to include others in leadership. Their first consideration is the gifts of the congregation. Both formally and informally, they encourage the development of gifts and call people to use those gifts in worship. Because *no good purpose in worship is served by a democratic approach*, in which everyone takes a turn reading scripture, acting in drama, or leading music – whether or not they have gifts – *those who invite others to lead spend time discerning whom the Spirit may be calling and gifting for leadership.*¹⁶⁸

Discerning the gifts granted to each participant in the worshipping community and providing opportunities for the sharing of gifts is an essential corollary of recognizing that all are gifted.

The gifts of the Spirit are associated with baptism in the confessional documents. However, the confessional documents also claim that the Spirit is not limited by the water of baptism and is active in the lives of unbaptized participants.¹⁶⁹ These individuals should also have the opportunity to offer spiritual gifts in worship. Children, youth and individuals exploring faith, may have gifts unavailable to baptized church members. At the same time, accountability to the community affirmed in baptism is foundational for a functional collaborative worship planning process. Systems of accountability must be established for worship participants who are from outside the baptized community.

¹⁶⁶ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Faith and Order Paper No. 111. World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1982. Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1983. 20.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Yoder. 204. Italics mine.

¹⁶⁹ *Confession*. 17-19.

Qualifications and attributes for worship leadership

Anabaptist-Mennonite theology affirms the giftedness of whole worshipping community, and the importance of discerning how gifts can be appropriately shared in worship leadership. The following *qualifications* and *attributes* identify certain gifts that enable individuals to lead certain aspects of worship. Qualifications for worship leadership refer to education, experience and skill. Attributes are related to spiritual insights, attitudes and matters of character. Attributes complement qualifications. There is no expectation that a single worship leader will possess every desired qualification and attribute, but rather, through collaborative worship planning, the qualifications and attributes of the entire worshipping community can be employed in worship. The roles of the worship leaders as shamans, hosts and prophets, facilitators of actions, guardians of functions, and inclusive collaborators require complementary qualifications and attributes.

Leadership of the purposes, functions and actions of worship

Worship leaders as shamans, hosts and prophets who attend to the purposes of worship are characterized by certain qualifications and attributes. A worship leader as shaman, according to Yoder, Kropf and Slough, is a, “person of spirit who has encountered God, knows the ancient stories and ritual pathways, is trusted by the people, [and] is equipped to guide others on the path to God.”¹⁷⁰ As host, a worship leader is a, “pastoral presence who cares for the community as a whole, is attentive to context, [and] is able to think through order and process.”¹⁷¹ The worship leader as prophet is a, “passionate truth teller who sees into the heart of reality, both the heights and depths of human experience, cares deeply for the word God loves, [and] inspires and motivates transformation.”¹⁷² Individual worship leaders have qualifications and attributes that enable them to fill a particular role. For example, a new participant in the faith community may

¹⁷⁰ Yoder. 219.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 214.

¹⁷² Ibid. 225.

have the voice of a prophet but not yet the required trust of the congregation to serve as a shaman. One individual can rarely fill all three roles. Collaboration makes it possible to integrate the shamanic, hosting and prophetic dimensions into worship leadership.

Certain attributes of worship leaders play a central role in allowing worship actions to fulfill the functions and purposes of worship. Eight such attributes are:

- *Compassion* for the congregation's need and concern about how those needs are addressed in worship
- *Discernment* about who is gifted to lead worship and in what way
- *Cooperativeness* for working on a team of people involved in planning and leading worship
- *Knowledge* of God's Word and of which portions of it are especially important for a congregation to hear at a given time, as well as knowledge of the community and its particular pastoral needs
- *Wisdom* to understand the psychological and theological issues involved when there is conflict about worship
- *Patience* when the congregation is slow to participate fully in certain acts of worship
- *Imagination* to generate ideas about which songs, scripts, prayers and elements will engage a congregation with the power and meaning of a given scriptural theme
- *Discipline* to avoid too much or too little innovation¹⁷³

These attributes reflect communal sensitivity that is best nurtured and expressed in a collaborative worship planning process.

While attributes are most easily considered in relation to the purposes and functions of worship, qualifications have immediate applications to the actions of worship. Worship leaders require organizational and public speaking ability. Music leaders require musical training or experience. Education and practical experience in liturgy, biblical studies and the celebration of the Supper is an asset. Familiarity with a large variety of worship resources is valuable. The capacity to assess congregational culture and the needs of particular members is essential. Specific qualifications may be required in certain settings for the leadership of Word and Table.

¹⁷³ *Worship Sourcebook*. 20.

The *Minister's Manual* suggests that the Lord's Supper should be, "presided over by someone whom the congregation trusts as a true shepherd of Christ, usually but not necessarily ordained."¹⁷⁴

Qualifications for worship leadership are the result of careful training and diligent practice. The attributes of worship leadership are gifts or personal characteristics, but they are also nurtured and developed by individual and corporate spiritual discipline:

Leaders need a regular discipline to maintain their own alertness and receptivity to the Spirit. Such discipline can take many forms. ... But what we stress is its importance to the sustenance of a leader's vision and to the impact upon the character of the leader. Congregations intuit whether or not their liturgical leaders are in fact people of prayer, and over time that has a profound impact upon the effectiveness of the services at which they preside.¹⁷⁵

The *Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership* affirms the importance of personal faith: "It is assumed, therefore, that a person cannot have a vital, living ministry without a personal growing faith in Christ."¹⁷⁶ A *growing faith* rather than a particular level of belief is required, making space for the involvement of the entire worshipping community in leadership. A collaborative worship planning process can be a valuable context for the spiritual formation of leaders. Together the worship planning team engages scripture, prays, cares for the pastoral needs of the congregation and one another, thinks creatively, depends on God, and grows in relationship with one another.¹⁷⁷ Spiritual attributes are developed through a collaborative worship planning and leading process.

Worship leadership as ministry

The *Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership* outlines ministry according to the three

¹⁷⁴ Rempel. 64.

¹⁷⁵ Doran, Carol and Thomas H. Troeger. *Trouble at the Table: Gathering the Tribes for Worship*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992. 44.

¹⁷⁶ *Mennonite Polity*. 99.

¹⁷⁷ Yoder. 207.

categories of function, office and identity. This is a helpful framework for reflecting on the distinct yet related qualifications and attributes for worship leadership.

Function is linked to the particular tasks of ministry. The qualifications associated with tasks are competencies, such as the skills required for worship leadership. The attributes of leadership are important, but they are secondary to the qualifications.

Office, in Mennonite contexts, has a strong emphasis on inward “authentic personal call” that is affirmed and sometimes even initiated by the congregation. This affirmation involves the discernment of both qualifications and attributes, including an assessment of the motivations of the person seeking an office. There is no predetermined sequence for the internal and external call.¹⁷⁸ Congregations call leaders, including worship leaders in both formal and less formalized ways. Considering methods of calling worship leaders and affirming their gifts ought to receive attention in worshipping communities.¹⁷⁹

Personal *identity* is strongly related to character, or to the attributes of leadership. The individual’s relationship with God is the central concern:

Ministry presumes that a person is committed to Christ and the church through believer’s baptism, has a membership covenant with a Mennonite congregation, and subscribes to the current Mennonite Confession of Faith. A genuine disciple of Christ is one who covenants to walk with Christ, expressing a dynamic and growing faith through consistent and regular devotion to the Word, prayer, fellowship with other believers, practicing obedience to Christ’s commands, and being willing to give and receive counsel in the body of Christ.¹⁸⁰

Church leaders are expected to be morally upstanding, and to have a friendly and kind nature and positive familial and friendship relationships.¹⁸¹ Worship leaders also benefit from these traits.

The expectations of worship leaders are related to their specialized role. They represent, serve and direct the worshipping community in its weekly gathering for public worship. All

¹⁷⁸ *Mennonite Polity*. 101-102

¹⁷⁹ Yoder. 197.

¹⁸⁰ *Mennonite Polity*. 100.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* 100-101.

members of the worshipping community can be “called” to worship leadership roles. Their roles may, however, be shaped by their status in the congregation as certified by ritual markers.

The importance of ritual markers

Rituals have tremendous power to offer security and boundaries, form physical, emotional and spiritual community, and enable transformation.¹⁸² Mennonites do not accept a sacramental theology in which rituals objectively effect transformation. At the same time, rituals such as baptism, child dedication, the Lord’s Supper and ordination inform Mennonite understandings of church membership and leadership, as well as participation in and leadership of worship.

Baptism has traditionally served as both an indicator of church membership and readiness for ministry. Ministry is expected of baptized believers.¹⁸³ Eleanor Snyder claims that “baptism marks one’s ordination to vocational ministry”¹⁸⁴ which entails “a conscious, adult rational decision to live intentionally, faithfully and vocationally in relationship with God within the context of the faith community.”¹⁸⁵ For certain individuals, worship leadership may be one aspect of vocation.

Baptism also marks a willingness to be accountable to the church community, in all areas of faith and life, including worship leadership.¹⁸⁶ There are no barriers that prevent baptized church members from participating in worship leadership if that is how they are called and gifted to minister in the community and world. The worshipping community also includes unbaptized participants. I propose that unbaptized participants who feel called to share their gifts in worship leadership should have the opportunity to do so, providing they are willing to be accountable to

¹⁸² Yoder. 310-312.

¹⁸³ *Confession*. 46.

¹⁸⁴ Snyder, Eleanor. 108.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*. 109.

¹⁸⁶ *Confession*. 47.

the community in this particular task. The development of rituals to mark the calling and commissioning of individuals and groups for worship leadership should be considered. These rituals should include affirmation as well as accountability.

For children of the church, the *consecration of infants* is a significant point of entry into the community of faith: “In the act of consecration...we bring the newborn child into a relationship with the body of Christ.”¹⁸⁷ The parents and congregation commit themselves to “the material and spiritual well-being of the child.”¹⁸⁸ Children must be “nurtured in faith as they participate in the worshipping life of the faith community.”¹⁸⁹ Eleanor Snyder emphasizes that the children of the church ought to be more than participant-observers in worship; they must be given opportunities to attend to their own spiritual experiences and understand that God also speaks to and cares for them.¹⁹⁰ I suggest nurture should include teaching about worship and practicing worship leadership.

Participation in the *Lord’s Supper* is limited to baptized church members according to current confessional documents.¹⁹¹ Welcoming children and non-members to the table is a topic under discussion in many denominational contexts; however it is beyond the scope of this study. If the Supper is offered only to baptized church members it clearly must be presided over by a baptized church member. If it is open to all participants in the worshipping community, questions of qualifications for leadership arise that must be addressed in other contexts.

Ordination is two fold. All believers are ordained for vocational ministry at baptism, as previously noted. At the same time, the church ordains individuals to particular ministries. Preaching and officiating at the Lord’s Supper have traditionally been worship leadership tasks

¹⁸⁷ Rempel. 121.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. 122.

¹⁸⁹ Snyder, Eleanor. 110.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ *Confession*. 50. Rempel. 75.

performed by ordained ministers, although this is not required in recent confessional documents. Worship leadership has become increasingly open to the laity. Is some form of ordination of lay worship leaders possible? The concluding affirmation of the historical review in the *Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership* affirms both professional ordained ministry and lay ministry, which also applies to worship leadership:

Today, we cannot and should not value one more highly than the other; both professional ministry and lay ministry need to be seen as valid and valued forms of ministerial leadership. We want to see them as two forms which complement each other and work together in harmony so as to contribute to the well-being and health of the church.¹⁹²

This perspective suggests that the development of rituals affirming the particular ministerial role of worship leaders would be valuable.

Conclusion

Ritual markers perform important functions in congregational life. Baptism, the consecration of infants, the Lord's Supper and ordination all create security in community, but they also have the potential to erect unnecessary barriers to worship leadership. The role of ritual markers in defining participation and leadership in the worshipping community must be carefully considered, especially when unbaptized participants are welcomed into worship leadership. New rituals should be developed to affirm the giftedness, qualifications and attributes of participants within the baptized community and the broader worshipping community, and to equip and hold accountable those who have the function, office and identity of worship leaders.

Conclusion

Worship is the activity of the entire worshipping community. Although baptized members are the core of the worshipping community, all participants, including children, youth and adults exploring their faith, participate in worship. Worship is inclusive and is planned

¹⁹² *Mennonite Polity*. 71.

collaboratively. It provides opportunities for each member of the worshipping community to offer gifts to God, the community and the world.

Worship leaders act as shamans, hosts, and prophets who prepare and facilitate worship. Individuals and groups are affirmed as worship leaders because of their qualifications and attributes. Their leadership is sometimes shaped and celebrated by ritual markers; yet these same markers can become barriers to participation and leadership. New rituals ought to be developed to affirm worship leaders and hold them accountable.

It is important to note that the worshipping community offers its worship with the theological understanding that *God is actively engaged in leading worship*. God Creator is present in all things and in each person. Jesus Christ is the true host of worship who enables transforming encounter with God, honest engagement with self and community and empowerment for response in the world.¹⁹³ The Spirit is a witness to the person of Jesus, is the source of the gifts in all participants, and is present and inspirational in the planning process.¹⁹⁴ From this perspective, the leadership of worship is not held entirely in human hands.

¹⁹³ Yoder. 233.

¹⁹⁴ *Worship Sourcebook*. 26-28.

Chapter 3: Exploring an Anabaptist-Mennonite Understanding of Adolescence

The emergence and identification of adolescence as a distinct life stage is a relatively recent phenomenon. Adolescence was first hinted at in the late nineteenth century¹⁹⁵ and the concept was solidified in the distinctive youth culture of the 1920's. Only in the 1960's did developmental psychologists reach the consensus that adolescence is a distinct phase of the human life span.¹⁹⁶

Adolescents are neither children nor adults. The terms adolescent, youth and teen, used interchangeably in this study, all refer to individuals occupying, "the period of life between childhood and adulthood."¹⁹⁷ It is a period of individuation, "becoming one's own person."¹⁹⁸ Adolescence begins with the biological onset of puberty and ends at a culturally determined point of adulthood.¹⁹⁹ The length of adolescence has increased dramatically over the past century. At the beginning of the twentieth century adolescence referred to youth age 14 to 18; at present it includes individuals age 11 to their mid to late 20s.²⁰⁰ The expansion of adolescence has prompted social scientists to define three stages of adolescence: early adolescence covers the period from 10 to 13, middle adolescence includes 14 to 17 year olds, and late adolescence spans age 18 to 22. Each stage of adolescence is characterized by different developmental challenges and areas of growth.²⁰¹ Middle adolescence, which includes most high school students, is the focus of this study.

¹⁹⁵ Cannister, Mark W. "Youth Ministry's Historical Context: The Education and Evangelism of Young People." *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry*. Ed. Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark and Dave Rahn. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001. 81.

¹⁹⁶ Clark, Chap. "The Changing Face of Adolescence: A Theological View of Human Development." *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry*. Ed. Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark and Dave Rahn. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001. 44.

¹⁹⁷ Loewen. 26.

¹⁹⁸ Clark. "Changing Face." 37. Loewen. 26.

¹⁹⁹ Clark. "Changing Face." 45-46.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. 52.

²⁰¹ Steinburg. 7.

This chapter begins by briefly exploring the significance of adolescence in the twenty-first century from developmental and cultural perspectives. I then develop a theological understanding of adolescence, first considering adolescence in the context of scripture and sixteenth century Anabaptist theology before turning to contemporary theological reflection. The Anabaptist-Mennonite theological community has published a single study of adolescence, *Beyond Me: Grounding Youth Ministry in God's Story* by Wendell Loewen. I rely heavily on this text as well as an ecumenical collection of essays, *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry*, and Anabaptist sources reflecting on theology of childhood and adulthood, to explore an Anabaptist-Mennonite theology of adolescence. I consider the constant factors in the relationship between youth, God and the community of faith, as well as the changing nature of this relationship and the diverse relationships that exist between individual youth and the church. The chapter concludes by addressing the role of the community of faith in nurturing the spirituality of youth and the role of youth in nurturing the spirituality of the community.

Contemporary developmental and cultural perspectives on adolescence

Theology is always an interdisciplinary endeavour. Psychological and cultural studies can contribute to a theological understanding of adolescence. I first describe the perspective of developmental psychology on adolescence before locating adolescence in the context of contemporary North American culture.

A developmental perspective on adolescence

Developmental theorists including Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson and James Fowler have developed theories describing “stages of development” and “stages of faith” that explore the

physical, cognitive, social and spiritual changes that accompany adolescence.²⁰² Rather than considering changing life stages, I focus on describing the particular developmental needs and tasks of the adolescent life stage.

Different types of needs reflect the developmental task of youth. Adolescents express certain needs. “*Felt needs* are those issues or areas that are described by adolescents as being important or significant.”²⁰³ Felt needs are revealed in what youth talk, worry, think and care about. In contrast, *real needs* are, “issues or areas that adolescents may or may not recognize as important or significant, but that supportive adults can recognize.”²⁰⁴ Real needs are revealed in reflection on scripture and the future and observation of life choices and worldviews.²⁰⁵

Felt and real needs exist on three levels. *General needs* apply to all adolescents and are evident in psychological and cultural analysis. *Specific needs* relate to a particular group of youth in a specific local community characterized by economic, geographic, ethnic, cultural and religious factors.²⁰⁶ Finally, the *individual needs* of each young person must be considered.²⁰⁷

Individuation, “becoming one’s own person,” is a real, general adolescent need. It is the primary goal of adolescence.²⁰⁸ Individuation describes the process of moving from the dependence of childhood through the independence of youth to the interdependence of adulthood.²⁰⁹ Adolescents address three primary issues in the process of individuation: 1) *Identity*, “Who am I?” 2) *Autonomy*, “Do I or my choices matter?” and 3) *Belonging*, “How do I

²⁰² Paloutzian, Raymond F. *Invitation to the Psychology of Religion: Second Edition*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996. 81-138. Kelcourse, Felicity, ed. *Human Development and Faith: Life-Cycle Stages of Body, Mind, and Soul*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004. Clark. “Changing Face.” 44.

²⁰³ Clark, Chap. “The Myth of the Perfect Youth Ministry Model.” *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry*. Ed. Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark and Dave Rahn. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001. 114.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. 114.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. 115.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. 116.

²⁰⁸ Clark. “Changing Face.” 47. Loewen. 26.

²⁰⁹ Loewen. 27.

fit into the world around me?”²¹⁰ Wendell Loewen states, “Answering the questions of identity, belonging and autonomy...offers the primary lens through which adolescents see life and faith.”²¹¹

The Christian tradition has a clear understanding of identity, autonomy and belonging: all people are, “created, gifted, chosen and called by God”²¹² and the community of faith is a place of belonging. The community of faith, therefore, must be attentive to the general need of youth for individuation expressed in the quest for identity, autonomy and belonging, and must find ways to support youth in their specific and individual needs as they pursue individuation.

A cultural perspective on adolescence

Christianity, theology, the church, and the youth of the church exist within culture.

The term *culture* refers broadly to the way of life of a society—the shared learned behaviour (thinking, feeling, and acting) and its products (art, laws, custom, etc.) that distinguish one community of people from another.²¹³

As a result, it is necessary to assess the twenty-first century North American culture in which adolescents exist in order to understand individuation today and develop a relevant theology of adolescence. Wendell Loewen describes three features of contemporary adolescent culture: adult abandonment, postmodernism and consumerism.

Adult abandonment is evident in North American culture that is, “preoccupied with the dreams, needs and stresses of adults, leaving adolescents in their own world.”²¹⁴ The physical and material needs of youth are met, however their psychosocial needs are dismissed. Family systems require increasing self-sacrifice from the young and changing cultural conditions isolate

²¹⁰ Clark. “Changing Face.” 55. Loewen. 27.

²¹¹ Loewen. 28.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Richter, Don C. “Growing Up Postmodern: Theological Uses of Culture.” *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry*. Ed. Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark and Dave Rahn. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001. 64.

²¹⁴ Loewen. 30.

generations. There is an absence of meaningful intergenerational relationships. Even the phenomenon of “helicopter parents,” who constantly involve their children in extracurricular activities, points to children becoming extensions of adults and serving the needs of adults rather than receiving support in developing their own sense of identity, autonomy and belonging.

Postmodernism, defined previously in the discussion of worship, is the dominant adolescent worldview. Friedrich L. Schweitzer describes a plural concept of self as the primary impact of postmodernity on individuation:

Concepts like the plural self are meant to capture the experience of not having just one answer to the question “Who am I” but several different answers and self-definitions. And the various self-definitions are also not held together or integrated by an overarching synthesis anymore. If there is any coherence to the different experiences of the self, it is at best a coherence accompanied by permanent discontinuity.²¹⁵

Divergent identities influence the development of autonomy and belonging. The separation of personal spirituality and traditional institutional religious spirituality is also characteristic of postmodernity.²¹⁶ Schweitzer exhorts the church to respond to these changes and find new ways of expressing and communicating the Christian tradition to postmodern youth.

Consumerism, the third defining feature of youth culture identified by Loewen, provides an alternative salvation story as a means of achieving fulfillment and community. Katherine Turpin describes consumer culture as the religion of many adolescents from which they must be converted through repentance, justification and regeneration.²¹⁷ Consumerism is overwhelming in scope, reach, clout and strategy. It sells, “pseudo-spirituality—belonging, love, community—that we used to get from other sources like family and church.”²¹⁸

These three cultural phenomena, adult abandonment, postmodernism and consumerism,

²¹⁵ Schweitzer, Friedrich L. *The Postmodern Life Cycle: Challenges for Church and Theology*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004. 50.

²¹⁶ Ibid. 53.

²¹⁷ Turpin, Katherine. *Branded: Adolescents Converting from Consumer Faith*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2006.

²¹⁸ Loewen. 62.

shape adolescent individuation. They provide answers to questions of identity, belonging and autonomy. Wendell Loewen summarizes:

Identity. Our culture of abandonment has protracted the adolescent quest for identity. Without a significant adult presence, identity is hard enough to find, must less form. Postmodern deconstruction has fragmented teens' sense of identity. One's identity has been decentered; it's nothing more than a self-made construct. Consumerism has led young people to believe their identity can be purchased. "You are what you consume."

Belonging. In the context of abandonment, belonging is most palpable in the peer cluster. The seemingly hostile adult world had driven adolescents underground where they feel they belong; in their own world. Postmodern thinking leads to a nomadic sense of belonging. There's no true self and no fixed reality; there's no home. Our consumer-driven culture had branded our teens. They not only wear the brand, they belong to the brand and its community.

Autonomy. In a culture marked by abandonment, adolescents might get the feeling they are valued only for the ways they contribute to the pursuits of the adults around them, not for the unique creations that they are. The postmodern de-centered self can make it very difficult for adolescents to be sure if, or how, they really matter. And consumer culture has commodified adolescents' sense of autonomy. Teens are valued as brokers of cool and for their cash.²¹⁹

Loewen challenges the church to form adolescents according to the counter-narrative of God's reign instead of allowing their identity, belonging and autonomy to be shaped by culture. He calls the church to move youth from "being 'in and of' the world to being 'in but not of' the world while also 'not out of' the world."²²⁰ Loewen calls for and provides a theological foundation for youth ministry grounded in the biblical paradigm of the reign of God.²²¹

A theological perspective on adolescence

A theological understanding of youth engages developmental and cultural understandings of adolescence from Biblical, historical and contemporary theological perspectives. Adolescence in its present form did not exist in ancient Israel, at the time of Jesus, or during the Radical Reformation. However, Mennonite forbears in faith offer insight into a theology of adolescence

²¹⁹ Loewen. 72.

²²⁰ Richter. 76. Loewen. 142.

²²¹ Loewen. 75-151.

for the twenty-first century in their reflections on childhood and adulthood.

Biblical perspectives on adolescence

Although a distinct developmental stage of adolescence did not exist when the scripture of the Christian community developed, the sacred story of the people of God still provides guidance for how to understand youth today.

Old Testament

The Old Testament speaks of and to youth as the next generation. The faith community is responsible for leading each generation of children to adulthood, as revealed in the *Shema*, the central text of the Jewish faith:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. *Impress them on your children*. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.²²²

The love of God infuses every aspect of daily life and is thus passed on to the next generation through example and teaching.²²³ The theme of teaching the next generation is woven throughout the Old Testament, from the Pentateuch to the Prophets to Proverbs.²²⁴

Faith is not only mediated by family and community, but is also the result of a direct, intrinsic relationship between creator and creation. The Old Testament makes it clear children are engaged with God from their conception to the consummation of all things. The psalmist writes: “For it was you [God] who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s

²²² Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

²²³ McGonigal, Terry. “Focusing Youth Ministry through Evangelism.” *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry*. Ed. Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark and Dave Rahn. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001. 127.

²²⁴ Joshua 4:20-24, Proverbs 1:8, 31:1.

womb.”²²⁵ Jeremiah echoes, quoting God: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”²²⁶ Connection with God is established before birth.²²⁷ Children are included in God’s ultimate vision for creation, described by Zechariah in his oracle depicting the restoration of the reign of God:

Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. *And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing.*²²⁸

People of faith at all stages of life, from children to seniors, have a place in God’s future. The New Testament offers additional insight into the role of children, youth and adults in the reign of God.

New Testament

Judith M. Grundy-Volf describes the particular significance of children in Jesus’ teaching and practice.²²⁹ Joyce Ann Mercer presents a liberating theology of childhood based on the Gospel of Mark.²³⁰ I combine the insights of these two authors to create a five part New Testament theology of childhood with implications for a New Testament understanding of adolescence.

1) *Children and youth are in relationship with God.* Relationship with God is not limited to adults. Children are also in relationship with God, receiving knowledge of God and the reign of God. Grundy-Volf argues that children were given knowledge of Jesus’ identity: “In the gospel tradition, children are not mere ignoramuses in terms of spiritual insight. They know

²²⁵ Psalm 139:13.

²²⁶ Jeremiah 1:5.

²²⁷ Snyder, Eleanor. 66.

²²⁸ Zechariah 8:4-5.

²²⁹ Grundy-Volf, Judith M. “The Least and the Greatest: Children in the New Testament.” *The Child in Christian Thought*. Ed. Marcia J. Bunge. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. 36-58.

²³⁰ Mercer, Joyce Ann. *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005. 66-68.

Jesus' true identity. They praise him as the Son of David."²³¹ Children are also primary recipients of the reign of God as they are among the poor and powerless of society. Jesus teaches that the reign of God belongs to children: "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs."²³² Furthermore, Paul's statements on the family address children directly, presuming an unmediated relationship between children and God.²³³ The relationship with God established in childhood does not disappear with the onset of puberty but continues to develop in adolescence.

2) *Children and youth serve as models for adults.* Not only are children in relationship with God, they are models of how to be in relationship with God and examples of the virtues associated with the reign of God. According to Mercer, in the Gospel of Mark, children model faithful discipleship. They are actively "called to purposive participation in the divine action in the world" and in doing so call the church to action and mission.²³⁴ Children embody the reign of God through their own faithful and loving actions²³⁵ but also in their role as recipients of the ministry of Jesus being blessed, touched, healed, and restored. Children are gifts that make God's reign known.²³⁶ Grundy-Volf describes children as models of entering the reign of God because of their low social status, existence outside the expectations of the law, humility, and dependence on grace.²³⁷ Youth can also be model recipients of the reign of God as they are blessed, touched, healed and restored by Christ. Adolescents may only partly demonstrate the humility, dependence and innocence of childhood; however, they also have a unique ability to model the persistent questioning, passion and growth demanded of all Christians.

²³¹ Matthew 21:14-16. Grundy-Volf. 47.

²³² Mark 10: 14. Grundy-Volf. 38.

²³³ Colossians 3:20-21, Ephesians 6:1-4. Grundy-Volf. 56.

²³⁴ Mercer. 67.

²³⁵ John 6:1-14.

²³⁶ Mercer. 66.

²³⁷ Mark. 10:15, Matthew 18:1-5. Grundy-Volf. 39-42.

3) *Welcoming and serving children and youth enacts the reign of God.* Treating children and youth with respect is central to enacting right relationships in the reign of God. Welcoming children, a social group not valued in first century Palestine,²³⁸ was both an actual and symbolic enactment of the coming of God's reign.²³⁹ Jesus taught receiving, serving and loving children as the foundation for greatness in the reign of God for men and women.²⁴⁰ It was a revolutionary social practice but also an expression of faith and a means of strengthening faith. To welcome children was to welcome Jesus as the humble and suffering child of God and to affirm Christ's mission.²⁴¹ In the twentieth century, youth are both a central economic force and a marginalized segment of society. Wendell Loewen describes youth as psychologically and socially abandoned by adults in a culture dominated by adult systems.²⁴² Attending to the real psychological and social needs and concerns of youth in addition to their physical needs is an opportunity to enact the reign of God. Jesus' reemphasis on the *Shema* calls his followers to love adolescents as neighbours in the church and in the world, as they are called to love all people:

'You shall love the Lord you God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'²⁴³

4) *Children and youth are valued as part of their families.* In addition to being respected for their unique role in the reign of God, children and youth are also valued as members of their families. Paul states that the children of believers are holy. It cannot be known whether this implies early baptism or transferred holiness; however, it is clear there are close connections between parents, children and God. The parent-child relationship is also a point where God's

²³⁸ Mercer. 51. "In ancient Palestine, as in most any traditional agrarian society, children were the human beings with the lowest status. They were, in effect, not-yet-people."

²³⁹ Mercer. 67.

²⁴⁰ Mark 9:33-37. Grundy-Volf. 43-44.

²⁴¹ Grundy-Volf. 44-45.

²⁴² Loewen. 31.

²⁴³ Matthew 22:37-40.

reign can be exemplified through mutual respect in the form of both obedience and non-provocation.²⁴⁴ In a twenty-first century North American culture that continually separates generations,²⁴⁵ valuing youth as part of their families, while encouraging individuation, is a crucial New Testament principle.

5) *Children and youth must not be elevated at the expense of others.* Finally, Mercer emphasizes that it is contradictory to the teaching and life of Jesus to elevate children at the expense of others, most especially their caregivers or other children.²⁴⁶ It is absolutely crucial to guide and support youth as they journey towards adulthood. However, it is also essential not to lose sight of the other people engaged in this process.

The New Testament provides a powerful theology of childhood and adolescence for both the first and twenty-first centuries. Children and youth are people in relationship with God and an essential part of faith communities. They contribute to the church and world as individuals and members of families. Children and adolescents should be actively involved in shaping the world of which they are a part. Grundy-Volf summarizes:

Children [and youth] are not only subordinate but sharers with adults in the life of faith; they are not only to be formed but imitated; they are not only ignorant but capable of receiving spiritual insight; they are not “just” children [or youth] but representatives of Christ.²⁴⁷

A Biblical understanding of adolescence can be extrapolated from a Biblical theology of childhood. However, the uniquely Anabaptist understanding of childhood and the associated perspective on adolescence must also be taken into account when exploring a Mennonite theology of youth.

²⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians. 7:12-14.

²⁴⁵ DeVries, Mark. “Focusing Youth Ministry through the Family.” *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry*. Ed. Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark and Dave Rahn. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001. 143.

²⁴⁶ Mercer. 67-68.

²⁴⁷ Grundy-Volf. 60.

Sixteenth century Anabaptist perspectives on adolescence

Adolescence in its present form did not exist in the sixteenth century. However, due to an emphasis on adult baptism, Anabaptist leaders, including Menno Simons and Pilgram Marpeck, devoted significant theological attention to exploring childhood and the transition to adulthood. Their insights into childhood and the age of accountability provide scope for developing a contemporary Anabaptist understanding of adolescence.

Menno Simons

Menno Simons' understanding of the complex innocence of children and the nurture of the entire community of faith plays a significant role in shaping contemporary Mennonite theology and contributes to the ecumenical conversation regarding childhood, according to Keith Graber Miller.²⁴⁸

In order to defend a theology of adult baptism, Menno found a unique balance between understanding children as sinful and innocent. In opposition to Catholic and Mainline Reformation perspectives, Menno argued that children are predisposed to sin rather than innately sinful. Children exist in an initial state of grace or innocence yet their virtuousness cannot be idealized. Only when a child is able to recognize and confess failings, and therefore ready to receive baptism, is he or she accountable to God. Until this point of moral and spiritual discretion, God's grace is sufficient to cover sin.²⁴⁹ Original sin is rejected. Menno did not specify the age of discretion; however his effort to define stages of faith development is mirrored in many other sources both religious and psychological.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Miller, Keith Graber. "Complex Innocence, Obligatory Nurturance, and Parental Vigilance: 'The Child' in the Work of Menno Simons." *The Child in Christian Thought*. Ed. Marcia J. Bunge. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001. 194.

²⁴⁹ Miller-McLemore, Bonnie J. *Let the Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003. 70. Miller. 201.

²⁵⁰ Paloutzian. 81-138. Kelcourse. Clark. "Changing Face." 44.

Menno's description of children as predisposed to sin yet covered by grace until the age of accountability highlights adolescence as a period in which accountability develops. It acknowledges an inclination towards sinful action, including poor choices made by youth, yet allows for grace. Menno's articulation of complex innocence permits a gradual process of development. There is room in Menno's theology for a *stage of accountability* rather than an age of accountability. Only after the adolescent journey is complete and individuation has been achieved, including the autonomous ability to take responsibility for one's own actions, is accountability demanded and baptism required.

The faith development of children, in Menno Simons' view, necessarily occurs within the faith community. Menno elevated the spiritual family over natural family structures.²⁵¹ Parents and all adults in the faith community are responsible for guiding and nurturing children towards accountability and celebrating important transitions through religious ritual, most importantly, baptism.²⁵² Adults are responsible for teaching and nurturing children, but children also play a teaching role in modeling how believers are called to be obedient to Christ in demonstrating submission and humility to their parents.²⁵³ Children both receive and give in the faith community. Miller describes Simons' understanding of the nurturing task of the church:

Implicit in his [Simons'] writings...is a valuing of childhood in its own right. Children...should be made conscious of the blessing and embrace of God, introduced to the Jesus who took them upon his knee and called adults to be as they are.²⁵⁴

Adolescents on the path toward accountability require the nurture of the faith community described by Menno. Youth is a crucial stage of nurture, for it is when autonomy and accountability emerge and baptism is offered and received. At the same time, adolescents also

²⁵¹ Miller. 223.

²⁵² Miller-McLemore. 72. Miller. 207-213

²⁵³ Miller. 214-215.

²⁵⁴ Ibid. 226.

have gifts to share with the community, and they can exemplify Christ-like virtues.

Although his description of a stage of accountability and the importance of nurture in the faith community is valuable, Menno Simons' theology of childhood and, by extension, adolescence should not be fully embraced in a contemporary context. In contrast to Miller, Eleanor Snyder points to the harsh emphasis on the sinful inclination of children and all humans in Menno Simons' thought:

Children have an inclination toward wrong-doing, and need to learn to be obedient by fearing God...[W]e all, no matter who or what, are born with an evil and sinful flesh from Adam. Yes, and in all our desires from our youth we are always inclined to the worst...If now the power of this native disposition is to be broken, suppressed and destroyed, it must be accomplished by the pure fear of the Lord.²⁵⁵

Snyder instead employs the theology of Pilgram Marpeck to explore an Anabaptist theology of childhood.

Pilgram Marpeck

Although the influence of the thought and writings of Pilgram Marpeck waned following the sixteenth century, there has been a resurgence of interest in his theology in recent decades. Eleanor Snyder identifies key theological statements articulated by Marpeck regarding the nature of children.

Children are blessed by God: “[Children] are without justification pronounced blessed by Christ, and regarded as belonging to the sanctified of the kingdom of God.”²⁵⁶ *Children are innocent.* Like Menno, Marpeck rejected the doctrine of original sin. However, Marpeck placed a stronger emphasis on children as created innocent and remaining innocent until the age of accountability: “No other innocent creature, animate or inanimate, only the child, was blessed by

²⁵⁵ Menno Simons in Wenger, J. C., ed. *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1984. 948-949. Snyder, Eleanor. 21.

²⁵⁶ Klassen. 128. Snyder, Eleanor. 21-22.

Christ and pronounced clean.”²⁵⁷ *Children are not held accountable for sin.* Adult thought processes are required for accountability. In the vein of Menno, Marpeck maintained that children have a tendency toward sin yet are not accountable for their actions: “Children have before the use of their reason no sin, for the proclivity to sin is the only thing they have and this does not harm their salvation until it actually breaks out into open sin.”²⁵⁸ *Children develop a growing awareness of sin.* Marpeck did not identify a particular age of accountability, but rather a gradual process through which one becomes aware of sin—a stage of accountability. Stephen Boyd describes Marpeck’s understanding of the gradual development of accountability:

One grows out of ‘created simplicity’ into the ‘general human, natural knowledge of good and evil.’ ... Marpeck insists that a process of individuation or personal transcendence must exist before sin has meaning.²⁵⁹

Baptism is not meant for children. As a sign and co-witness of death to sin with Christ and resurrection to a new life of discipleship, baptism is only possible at the age of accountability when individuation is achieved.²⁶⁰ Finally, *Christian nurture plays an essential role:* “Do whatever is needed to raise the child up to the praise and glory of God, and to commit the child to God until it is clearly seen that God is working in [him/her] for faith or unfaith.”²⁶¹ Nurture occurs in the faith community and the home.²⁶²

Marpeck’s theology of childhood is similar to Menno’s understanding. The softer tone of innocence and nurture makes Marpeck’s language and emphases more appropriate for younger children. In the context of adolescence, Menno’s ability to hold together a strong understanding of the inclination toward sin and an equally powerful commitment to innocence until adulthood

²⁵⁷ Klassen. 140. Snyder, Eleanor. 22.

²⁵⁸ Snyder, Eleanor. 24.

²⁵⁹ Ibid. 25.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. 25.

²⁶¹ Klassen. 147.

²⁶² Snyder, Eleanor. 27.

is invaluable. Both Anabaptist leaders allow for a *stage of accountability*, when innocence is in decline yet accountability has not been fully achieved, rather than identifying a particular age of accountability. The stage of accountability bears certain marks of childhood, including grace and innocence, but also dimensions of adulthood, including a growing awareness of self and sin. Individuals in the stage of accountability require careful nurture by the family of faith and biological family. The stage of accountability reflects an Anabaptist understanding of adolescence.

In addition to exploring the understanding of adolescence presented by sixteenth century Anabaptist theologians, it is essential to consider the theology of youth expressed by contemporary Anabaptist-Mennonite and ecumenical thinkers.

Contemporary theological perspectives on adolescence

What is the meaning of adolescence in a twenty-first century North American Anabaptist-Mennonite theological context? I consider the nature of the relationship between youth, God and the church taking into account developmental, cultural, Biblical and historical factors as well as contemporary Anabaptist confessional documents and theology. First, I examine the constant factors that shape the relationship between God, the community of faith, and youth. I then discuss the changing relationship between youth, God and the church during adolescence, including different starting points for relationship, different official statuses in the church, and different stages of faith.

Theological constants of adolescence

The *Confession of Faith* states:

We believe that God created human beings in the divine image. God formed them from the dust of the earth and gave them special dignity among all the works of creation. Human beings have been made for relationship with God, to live in peace with each other, and to take care of the rest of creation. We believe human beings were created good, in the image

of God.²⁶³

Children are of great importance. Jesus saw them as examples of how to receive the reign of God. Children are to be loved, disciplined, taught, and respected in the home and in the church.²⁶⁴

This confessional description of the creation and calling of human beings and the value of children applies to youth as well as adults and children. It is crucial not to lose sight of the goodness of adolescents as creations in the image of God, their inherent relationship with God, others and creation, and their unique value within the community of faith. Eleanor Snyder and Marcia J. Bunge develop theologies of childhood, closely connected to New Testament understandings of children, which reveal certain theological factors that remain constant throughout adolescence.

Eleanor Snyder makes five key statements regarding the nature of children which I appropriate and apply to adolescents: youth are spiritual beings created by God, youth have a relationship with God from birth, youth are blessed by Jesus and welcomed in God's reign, youth can teach adults how to be church, and faith is a journey with God in community that begins in childhood.²⁶⁵ These key theological statements, grounded in the biblical and historical Anabaptist foundations, proclaim a profoundly countercultural message regarding individuation in their answers to questions of identity, autonomy and belonging.

Similarly, Marcia Bunge highlights theological constants regarding the nature of children. I add to Snyder's reflections by extending several of Bunge's statements to include youth: youth are fully human and made in the image of God, youth are gifts of God and sources of joy, and

²⁶³ *Confession*. 28.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 72-73.

²⁶⁵ Snyder, Eleanor. 106-107.

youth are orphans, neighbours and strangers in need of justice and compassion.²⁶⁶ Bunge's reflections add an emphasis on adolescents as people made in the image of God and a gift rather than burden on congregational life. Both of these emphases are included in the Mennonite *Confession of Faith*. She also highlights the fundamental responsibility of Christians for caring for youth as neighbours, especially when they are the weak and powerless in society.

Despite these constant theological factors, adolescence is a period of transition as accountability develops and innocence declines. Emerging individuation, including increasingly defined identity and autonomy, changes the relationship between youth, God and the church. God's call remains the same, yet youth begin to choose how to respond and whether to allow their relationship with God to affect who they are, how they matter and where they belong.

Theological changes in adolescence

Adolescence is a period of growth and transition in all areas of life including faith. Youth address questions of identity, autonomy and belonging at different rates and define their relationship to the church in different ways at different times, for example, through participation, baptism, or departure. In the context of adult baptism, in which individuals may be baptized at various points during adolescence, the stage of accountability, youth exist in a wide range of relationships to the church relative to children and adults. I consider different starting points for relationship with the church, various official statuses in local congregations, and diverse levels of commitment to faith.

Youth enter adolescence with *different histories of relationship to the church*. Marlin Jeschke identifies four common patterns shaping the transition from childhood innocence to

²⁶⁶ Bunge, Marcia J. "The Dignity and Complexity of Childhood: Constructing Christian Theologies of Childhood." *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*. Ed. Karen Marie Yust, Aostre N. Johnson, Sandy Eisenburg Sasso and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006. 58-62.

adult accountability via adolescence. First, children of the church move from innocence to accountability remaining within the church community. Second, children who grow up outside the church remain outside the church. Third, children raised outside the church become involved in the church in childhood or adolescence. Fourth, children raised within the church choose to leave the community of faith.²⁶⁷

Jeschke's model points to two groups of adolescents actively participating in the community of faith: youth from within in the church community and youth from outside the church community. In a Mennonite context, these two categories can be further subdivided to identify youth in four different groups within the community of faith: 1) baptized youth from within the community, 2) unbaptized youth from within the community, 3) youth from outside the community baptized as infants or adults, and 4) unbaptized youth from outside the community. Each group exists in a unique relationship with the church. Baptized youth from within the community must be integrated as full church members. Unbaptized youth from outside the community experience the largest barriers to participation. Members of all four groups are involved in the worshipping community.

Rick Bartlett applies John Westerhoff's understanding of faith development to adolescents raised in the church and youth who become involved in the faith community during their teen years.²⁶⁸ According to Westerhoff, individuals raised in religious traditions pass through four stages, or four *different levels of commitment*, in the transition from childhood to adulthood: experiencing, joining, searching, and owning. Bartlett condenses the model to three stages for youth exploring a faith tradition during adolescence: experiencing and searching, joining, and owning. Belonging and believing are both essential dimensions of this process. One

²⁶⁷ Jeschke. 122.

²⁶⁸ Bartlett, Rick. "Belonging and Believing." *Direction*. 29.2 (2000): 185-190. 4 Sept. 2007. <<http://www.directionjournal.org/article/?1057>>.

may precede the other, yet both are required. Youth participating in the worshipping community may be experiencing, joining, searching or owning their faith. The community of faith can strive to be a welcoming place for adolescents at all stages of faith development.

Robert E. Webber, in *Journey to Jesus*, explores the place of new believers in worship. He moves beyond a focus on evangelism through worship to considering growth in discipleship as individuals pass through four stages of faith. The *seeker* period is a time of inquiry, the *hearer* period a time of instruction, and the *kneeler* period a time for intense spiritual preparation for baptism, after which the *faithful* are fully incorporated into the life of the church.²⁶⁹ These transitions are recognized in worship through rituals of conversion, covenant, baptism, and the Lord's Supper, pointing to the significance of ritual markers.²⁷⁰

Webber proposes a model of worship that emphasizes the fact that those who come to worship are at very different points in their spiritual lives. Rather than ignore these differences...Webber argues that churches should openly recognize the stages of faith through which their members are passing, structure their worship and ministry to celebrate those stages, and openly encourage Christians to move from spiritual infancy to maturity in Christ. ²⁷¹

In highlighting the stages of faith of new adult converts to Christianity, Webber describes the journey of adolescents both raised in and new to the church as they move towards claiming faith as central to their understanding of their identity, autonomy and belonging. Youth participating in the worshipping community may be seekers, hearers, kneelers or faithful.

Conclusion

A complex understanding of the theological nature of adolescence results from the many-staged journey toward faith described by Bartlett and Webber in combination with the diverse faith backgrounds and relationships to the church, described by Jeschke. Early Anabaptist

²⁶⁹ Webber. *Journey*. 11.

²⁷⁰ Ibid. 207.

²⁷¹ Ibid. Cover.

descriptions of childhood, implying adolescence is a stage of accountability characterized by both innocence and accountability, are evidence of the complexity of a Mennonite theology of youth. *Youth are an extremely heterogeneous group.* Certain youth are faithful, baptized church members, raised in the church and actively engaged in ministry. Other youth are seekers, encountering Christianity for the first time and exploring their faith. Youth exist at every point on the spectrum. The challenging calling of the community is to nurture and support youth in their faith journeys, whatever their relationship to the church or stage of faith.

Nurture

The role of the community in nurturing the spirituality of youth

All sources that develop a theology of adolescence, from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century, are unanimous in proclaiming that the Christian community must nurture the spirituality of its young people. “Do whatever is needed to raise the child up to the praise and glory of God,” writes Pilgram Marpeck.²⁷² “Nurturing faith in children is an important tenet of our Anabaptist and Mennonite theology,” according to Eleanor Snyder.²⁷³ Even the confessional documents, in their limited comments on the younger generation, emphasize nurture: “Children are to be loved, disciplined, taught and respected.”²⁷⁴ The sources also agree on who is responsible for nurture.

Menno Simons’ claims that, “parents and the Christian community together are responsible for nurturing children toward voluntary commitments of faith and discipleship.”²⁷⁵ The joint responsibility of cultivating faith remains present in the twenty-first century. The Minister’s Manual requires both parents and the congregation to commit to nurture the infants dedicated to God:

²⁷² Klassen. 147. Snyder, Eleanor. 27.

²⁷³ Snyder, Eleanor. 43.

²⁷⁴ *Confession*. 72.

²⁷⁵ Miller. 195.

[Leader]: Do you dedicate yourself/yourselves as a parent/s to bring up your child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, preparing him/her to come to an open confession of Christ?

Parents: I/We do. ...

[Leader]: (to the congregation): Do you accept responsibility for the well-being of this child, will you by prayer, example, and words support her/his parent/s in nurturing this child to respond to the grace and truth that are in Christ?

[People]: We will.²⁷⁶

The nurturing roles of parents and the community of faith continue when children reach adolescence.

Mark DeVries describes a strategy for focusing youth ministry through the family to encourage the formation of intergenerational relationships, primarily between youth and parents. He suggests that North American culture, “has systematically isolated young people from the very relationships that are most likely to lead them to maturity,”²⁷⁷ paralleling Wendell Loewen’s description of adult abandonment. DeVries claims integrating families into youth ministry is the solution to the cultural segregation of generations. Parents have the greatest influence on the formation of Christian identity, autonomy and belonging in youth²⁷⁸ and must be empowered to nurture their adolescent offspring.²⁷⁹ However, parents do not nurture adolescent spirituality alone, but in the context of the community of faith.

The entire worshipping community, including children, other youth, young adults, parents, single adults, and seniors is called to nurture the faith of adolescents:

Christian spirituality is not a solitary way. The spiritual journey of the child and adolescent is greatly enhanced when they are embraced by a family and faith community who love God and in response to God’s love live a life of love for others.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ Rempel. 124-125.

²⁷⁷ DeVries. 143.

²⁷⁸ Ibid. 145.

²⁷⁹ Loewen. 112-113.

²⁸⁰ Stonehouse, Catherine. “After a Child’s First Dance with God: Accompanying Children on a Protestant Spiritual Journey.” *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World’s Religious Traditions*. Ed. Karen Marie Yust, Aostre N. Johnson, Sandy Eisenburg Sasso and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006. 104.

Catherine Stonehouse describes the faith community as a place where youth learn through experience and faith practice, form identity in community and develop a sense of belonging and autonomy, process questions about faith and life, and learn to serve others.²⁸¹ Marva Dawn emphasizes the tremendous challenge nurture puts to the faith community:

I believe it takes great effort and deliberate action—praying, singing, struggling—to equip children [and youth] to counteract the many societal forces that would pull them away from the One who is, both for then and for us, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. I believe that it takes an entire community, faithful to God’s Word, for our children [and youth] to be immersed in, to welcome and to respond to the life of discipleship.²⁸²

The entire church must exist as an alternative community, in faith, ethics, and worship, in order to nurture youth in an alternative way of faith and life.

The nurturing task of the church is often isolated in youth programs and handed off to designated youth pastors and leaders. Youth ministry can be integrated into the life of the whole community rather than being segregated from the other ministries of a local church body:

Addressing the uniqueness of adolescence cannot be limited to the sole responsibility of a youth ministry leader, team, or program. The church, as a family of “families,” is called as a *community* to be the prime agent of nurturing this and any future generation. ... Youth ministry, then, is not an appendage of the body, it is rather an expressing of the whole body caring for a specific group. Adolescents need an adult community who will love them appropriately and with great care. This is the call of the church. ... Youth ministry is *everybody’s* job!²⁸³

Structures and programs for nurture are important, yet should not allow the congregation as a whole to abdicate its responsibility to nurture adolescent spirituality.²⁸⁴ Solid theological foundations²⁸⁵ and authentic incarnational relationships²⁸⁶ are the foundations of nurture in the church community and family life, not particular programs or charismatic youth leaders.

²⁸¹ Stonehouse. 104-105.

²⁸² Dawn. *Lost Cause*. 243.

²⁸³ Clark. “Changing Face.” 61.

²⁸⁴ Stonehouse. 105.

²⁸⁵ Dean, Kenda Creasy. “Theological Rocks—First Things First.” *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry*. Ed. Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark and Dave Rahn. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001.15.

²⁸⁶ Loewen. 152.

Nurturing spirituality is the objective of the church in relation to its youth. Wendell Loewen proclaims the fundamental purpose of youth ministry is, “helping youth in a particular place pay attention to God.”²⁸⁷ Chap Clark states, “the ultimate *reason* for youth ministry” is “to ‘declare [God’s] power to the next generation, [God’s] might to all who are to come’ (Psalm 71:81).”²⁸⁸ It is this that the nurture of families and the faith community strives to achieve. Nurturing youth through integration into worship leadership is explored in Chapter 4.

The role of youth in nurturing the spirituality of the community

We tend to view young people as *consumers* of theology rather than as people who help *construct* religious discourse. We are far more likely to consider youth *objects* of ministry rather than *agents* of ministry; people to be ministered *unto* rather than people Jesus has called into ministry in their own right.²⁸⁹

When considering the role of the community of faith in nurturing the spirituality of young people, it is essential not to lose sight of the ability of youth to nurture the spirituality of others in the community: “We can acknowledge to the young that we are as much on the journey as they are; although further along, we have not arrived.”²⁹⁰ Adolescents both give and receive nurture. Youth can serve as models of faith and life and as leaders in the community. As leaders, youth may be in charge of the youth ministry program²⁹¹ and take leadership in relationships with peers.²⁹² Youth leaders can also be, “enculturated into the church’s way of life”²⁹³ as they are integrated into broader systems of leadership. On one level, this is a pragmatic decision designed

²⁸⁷ Loewen. 152.

²⁸⁸ Clark. “Changing Face.” 42.

²⁸⁹ Dean, Kenda Creasy. “Fessing Up: Owning Our Theological Commitments.” *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry*. Ed. Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark and Dave Rahn. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001. 30.

²⁹⁰ Stonehouse. 105.

²⁹¹ Rahn, Dave. “Focusing Youth Ministry through Student Leadership.” *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry*. Ed. Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark and Dave Rahn. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001. 169.

²⁹² Rahn. 170.

²⁹³ Ibid. 169.

to enable the continuation of the church's ministry in the future.²⁹⁴ On another level, the integration of youth into church leadership recognizes their ability to contribute as equals in the community of faith in the present. Tim Neufeld describes the tension between “now” and “later” in youth ministry models:

Should youth ministry focus on engaging adolescents in present ministries of the church, or prepare them for future congregational involvement? ... Some churches decide to activate their adolescents and engage them in the present life and ministry of the congregation. Others understand their mission as one of preparing students for healthy roles in the church of the future. “Simply put, the question boils down to whether young people are the church of the future or of the present.”²⁹⁵

As active participants in the worship, youth compose the worshipping community today and are called to nurture the spirituality of that community through offering their unique spiritual gifts and abilities in the present.

Conclusion

The faith community has the responsibility to nurture adolescents who have diverse histories of relationship to the church, and who are at varying stages of faith development as they engage in individuation within a North American culture shaped by adult abandonment, postmodernism and consumerism. The community of faith can affirm the identity of youth as people created in God's image, their sense of belonging as participants in the faith community, and their autonomy as individuals who give and receive in the community as they gradually become accountable for their actions.

²⁹⁴ Rahn. 169.

²⁹⁵ Neufeld, Tim. “Postmodern Models of Youth Ministry.” *Direction*. 31.2 (2002): 194-205. 4 Sept. 2007. <<http://www.directionjournal.org/article/?1265>>.

Chapter 4: Integrating Youth into Worship Leadership

Marva Dawn asks:

If we believe—and I do—that the worship of the Church is a very important formative agent in the community, what should characterize that worship if we want to raise genuinely Christian children [and youth], and how can we get young people involved in it?²⁹⁶

Mennonite congregations have often thought the answer to this question is segregation, developing an alternative worship service in a contemporary style for younger generations or inviting the youth group to lead a special youth worship service once or twice a year. Segregation of style or special services has been an attractive and effective answer for many congregations. However, I believe there is another, more fruitful way to engage youth in worship and the church.

Youth can be *integrated* into congregational worship. Integration includes inviting youth to contribute their gifts to the church. It involves ministering *alongside* youth rather than directing ministry *at* adolescents. Integration incorporates youth into worship leadership:

For youth to learn the way of Christ, they cannot and must not be segregated or isolated from the worshipping community. ... This means youth (and children) must be physically recognized as equal partners in the worship of God. It is imperative that worship incorporates and makes room for the unique gifts and abilities that are present in young people. Youth should have opportunities to lead and shape worship—to the same extent as other members—and to engage in the communal practices of faith. They must be physically present—seen, heard, and welcomed within the worship of God.²⁹⁷

The integration of youth into all areas of church life, a central theme in Wendell Loewen's Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective on youth ministry,²⁹⁸ is important. The integration of youth into worship leadership is essential:

²⁹⁶ Dawn. *Lost Cause*. 66.

²⁹⁷ Yaconelli, Mark. "Focusing Youth Ministry through Christian Practices." *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry*. Ed. Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark and Dave Rahn. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001. 161.

²⁹⁸ Loewen. 93, 126.

Communal worship shapes and articulates our practices of faith—it is the most *fundamental* of all Christian practices. The whole Christian life is expressed and experienced in the gathering before God. ... If worship is the fundamental Christian practice, and the worshipping community is the container of all Christian practices, then it follows that adolescent spiritual formation must take place in the worship of God.²⁹⁹

If youth are not actively engaged in the worship, it is unlikely they will remain connected to the faith and life of the church. If youth are not actively engaged in worship, the worship of the entire community of faith is impoverished.

In this chapter, I explore the integration of youth into the planning and leadership of the primary, weekly, intergenerational gathering of the community of faith through individual and collective contributions. First, I describe the nature of youth worship leadership in the context of the threefold definition of worship and worship leadership, and the collaborative planning process developed in Chapters 1 and 2. I then consider the outcomes of youth worship leadership for youth and the community of faith in the context of the understanding of adolescence explored in Chapter 3. Finally, I recognize and address barriers to youth worship leadership. Integrating youth into worship leadership is both an exciting opportunity and a daunting challenge.

The Nature of Youth Worship Leadership

Youth can be engaged in planning and leading worship by means of various relationships and contributions. I consider involvement of youth in leading the actions, functions and purposes of worship before exploring the nature of youth worship leadership in the context of the collaborative worship planning process.

Youth worship leadership in the context of the threefold definition of worship

How can youth be integrated into worship leadership? What can they contribute? These questions are addressed in relation to the threefold definition of worship established in Chapter 1 and the corresponding definition of worship leadership described in Chapter 2.

²⁹⁹ Yaconelli. 161.

Actions

On the most basic level, integrating youth into worship leadership involves inviting youth to facilitate the concrete, observable components that comprise a worship gathering. Youth can be engaged in both planning and leading the actions of worship. Youth require specific training regarding the form and content of worship actions and the scope for the creative adaptation of these actions through their own ideas. Youth must also receive instruction on how to publicly lead the actions of worship.

Instruction as to the nature and significance of Word and Table, the two normative actions of worship, is essential. Scripture reading is often led by youth.³⁰⁰ Learning to read scripture well must be included in the training of youth worship leaders.³⁰¹ Youth leadership of the Lord's Supper is closely related to participation in the Lord's Supper and is therefore beyond the scope of this study.³⁰²

Youth offer particular gifts to leadership of the actions of worship. Youth may have musical, artistic or dramatic talents to share, aiding in the creation of multisensory worship. Music is one aspect of worship where youth have often been encouraged to take leadership. As primarily postmodern people, adolescents have a heightened ability to envision, prepare and introduce creative, symbolic and ritual actions to worship, thus contributing to increasingly multisensory worship. Involvement in the actions of worship may lead to a greater understanding of worship and a growing capacity for leadership that explicitly engages the functions and purposes of worship.

³⁰⁰ Yoder. 206.

³⁰¹ Jacks, G. Robert. *Getting the Word Across: Speech Communication for Pastors and Lay Leaders*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995. 59-63.

³⁰² Youth to be engaged in leading the Lord's Supper without addressing issues of participation through activities such as baking communion bread and leading music.

Functions

Youth can not only plan and lead the actions of worship, but they can do so in such a way that the functions and purposes of worship are achieved. The normative functions of worship—praise and lament, confession and reconciliation, and giving and receiving service—can be accomplished by youth worship leaders. The collaborative process of worship leadership is one context in which these functions can be learned. Youth can learn the importance of including all these functions in worship and how to link them to specific actions. They can learn to understand the congregation that they are leading, why the congregation worships the way it does, and where there is potential for the congregation to be led to worship in new and creative ways.

For the functions of worship to be achieved, youth worship leaders should be characterized by the attributes of compassion, discernment, cooperativeness, knowledge, wisdom, patience, imagination and discipline described in Chapter 2. Every youth is not expected to possess these traits, but rather, each quality is present in the collaborative process.

Youth have unique gifts that enable them to lead the congregation in the normative functions of worship. Kenda Creasy Dean describes youth in terms of passion: “adolescence is shot through with passion, young people number among God’s most combustible creations.”³⁰³ The extreme highs and lows of adolescence give the praise and lament of youth increased intensity. The emerging awareness of sin in relationship to God and others gives confession and reconciliation fresh urgency. Giving and receiving service takes on new significance when youth emerge from childhood dependence and begin to explore the interdependence of adulthood and share in the give and take of belonging to community.

³⁰³ Dean, Kenda Creasy. *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004. xiv.

Purposes

Enabling the functions of worship to accomplish the ultimate, dynamic, purposes of worship—transforming encounter with the triune God, truthful engagement with self and community, and lively empowerment for faithful action in the world—is a high calling for worship leaders and particularly for youth in worship leadership. However, it is not beyond the reach of adolescents. Youth possess attributes enabling them to serve as the shamans, hosts and prophets described in Chapter 2: youth are in relationship with God, they are “people of spirit who have encountered God;”³⁰⁴ youth are in relationship with the community, they “care for the community as a whole;”³⁰⁵ and youth are in relationship with the world, they are “passionate truth tellers who see into the heart of reality.”³⁰⁶ Training youth for worship leadership can include opportunities to practice spiritual disciplines, times of reflection and conversation in community, and interaction with the world that can develop the attributes of shamans, hosts and prophets.

Youth shamans, hosts and prophets enrich the collaborative worship planning process. The early stage of faith development and relation to the congregation does not provide youth with as thorough a knowledge of the “ancient stories and ritual pathways,”³⁰⁷ as deep an “attentiveness to context,”³⁰⁸ or as varied an experience of the “heights and depths of humanity.”³⁰⁹ Adolescents may not have the Biblical training to serve as scriptural guides or the linguistic prowess to be curators of language. These dimensions of leadership are learned over time. However, youth’s visions of God, ability to meet congregational needs, and prophetic

³⁰⁴ Yoder. 219.

³⁰⁵ Ibid. 214.

³⁰⁶ Ibid. 225.

³⁰⁷ Ibid. 219.

³⁰⁸ Ibid. 214.

³⁰⁹ Ibid. 225.

engagement with the world are unique contributions adolescents can offer to the collaborative worship planning process.

In addition, visible youth worship leaders play an extremely important *representational role*. First, youth worship leaders represent the people of God in the present. They reflect that the community of faith includes youth, children and adults at various stages of faith development.³¹⁰ Second, youth worship leaders represent the people of God of the future. When youth lead worship, it is a sign to the congregation that faith is being passed on to the next generation and that the church has a hopeful future.³¹¹

Youth worship leadership in the context of collaborative worship planning

The communal, inclusive and sensory collaborative process for planning and leading worship described in Chapter 1 lends itself to the integration of youth into the leadership of the actions, functions and purposes of worship. On the most basic level, youth can simply participate in the collaborative planning process like other members of the community of faith. However, it is helpful to consider the distinct avenues through which adolescents can become involved.

Relational contexts for collaboration

Youth can be integrated into worship planning and leadership by means of various relationships. Families, mentoring relationships, congregational systems and youth groups are four primary contexts for collaboration.

Some *families* engage in worship together at home and at church. Family worship practices at home may include praying before meals, rituals for Advent and Lent, and daily devotionals. Youth can contribute to the leadership of worship in the home alongside parents and

³¹⁰ *Worship Sourcebook*. 19.

³¹¹ Dawn, Marva J. *A Royal "Waste" of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999. 256-257.

children. Public worship and private worship are mutually reinforcing.³¹² Integrating youth into worship leadership at home can be a starting point for youth leadership in public worship. Parents involved in congregational worship planning and leadership have the opportunity to invite their adolescent children to contribute ideas and to lead alongside them on Sunday.

Intergenerational *mentoring relationships* are another important context for the integration of individual youth into worship leadership. Mentoring relationships can be a particularly valuable entry point into worship leadership for adolescents. *Preparing Sunday Dinner* suggests intentional mentoring relationships are one way to encourage and call forth new worship leadership, especially among youth:

The worship committee selects a gifted teenager to work alongside a master worship leader for a month or season. The teen attends to the overall planning session and watches how the process works. Then he participates in the weekly planning session. On the first Sunday or two, he may read scripture. By the second Sunday, he assists in inviting others who will be involved in the service and rehearses with them before the service. The next Sunday teen and mentor co-plan and co-lead the service. Each week, the mentor and the teen meet immediately after the service to evaluate the service. If the young person's interest is confirmed and continues, he is invited to lead on suitable occasions through the rest of the year and is given response and encouragement.³¹³

Mentoring relationships can result in the incorporation of youth into congregation-wide systems of worship preparation.

Congregational systems for worship planning and leadership, such as collaborative worship planning teams or worship committees, are contexts for involving youth in worship leadership. Congregational worship planning groups can strive to be representative, echoing the age composition of the congregation.³¹⁴ This model reflects an understanding of “student leaders

³¹² Liesch, Barry. *People in the Presence of God: Models and Directions for Worship*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988. 53.

³¹³ Yoder. 206.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.* 188.

in the system,” described by Dave Rahn.³¹⁵

In addition to offering leadership to worship as individuals through families, mentoring relationships and congregational systems, adolescents can be integrated into worship planning and leadership as a *youth group*. Many congregations have youth programs with catechetical, social and service dimensions. Worship leadership can be integrated into youth ministry as a form of catechism, social event or community service. In the youth group, intergenerational mentoring relationships develop between worship leaders and the entire group, and peer mentoring relationships between older and younger youth. Congregational systems can invite youth, as a group, to lead aspects of worship on a regular basis, such that youth worship leadership is no longer “special,” but assumed. The Logos model³¹⁶ and *Youth Worship Sourcebook*³¹⁷ are examples of systems that integrate youth as a group into worship leadership. A collaborative process within the youth group can contribute to the larger collaborative worship planning process of the congregation.

Qualifications for collaborative worship leadership

As members of the community of faith, all youth have gifts to share in the collaborative worship planning process. Engaging in gift discernment is necessary for the integration of youth into worship leadership:

We have seen that an essential aspect of spiritual integration into the community is in helping the faithful discover the gift God has given them in ministry. Whatever their gift—the ministry of hospitality, greeting, music, ushering, caring for property, or one of many other gifts—find it and release it.³¹⁸

It is essential not to force comprehensive involvement in every aspect of worship leadership:

Sometimes worship leading is assigned to people who are not yet ready for this ministry. In

³¹⁵ Rahn. 169.

³¹⁶ *The Logos Ministry*.

³¹⁷ Johnson. *Youth Worship Sourcebook*.

³¹⁸ Webber. *Journey*. 177-178.

a mistaken attempt to be inviting to all, congregations indiscriminately pass around the assignment. Although it is certainly important to invite broad participation in leading worship, the role of the worship leader cannot be sacrificed on the altar of inclusivity.³¹⁹

The readiness of adolescents for various aspects of worship leadership must be considered:

Responsibility and involvement must be carefully weighed with respect to an individual's readiness. ... If we focus on adolescents' spiritual and developmental and psychosocial maturity when we determine their readiness to assume their roles in the body of Christ, we will be on safe ground.³²⁰

The worshipping community can recognize that individuals of various levels of spiritual and developmental maturity are able and should be given opportunities to make significant contributions to worship. Gift discernment does not focus on naming the gifts required of worship leaders and defining who can be involved in worship leadership on the basis of possessing those specific gifts. Instead, gift discernment emphasizes identifying the gifts of each person and determining how all gifts can be employed in worship leadership.

The qualifications and attributes described in Chapter 2 point to certain specific gifts that can be employed in worship leadership by adult and youth worship leaders. No individual is expected to possess every qualification and attribute but rather, through collaboration, all qualifications and attributes are offered to the process. Individuals can be invited to identify their gifts and name the gifts of others. When the entire youth group is integrated into worship leadership, there can be various forms of potential involvement that take into account the diverse gifts of individuals and range of personal and spiritual readiness for worship ministry. Certain attributes and qualifications may be especially abundant and others less developed among youth.

Gifts are not only received and identified but developed. Qualifications and attributes of worship leadership result from training and practice: "Congregations must ensure that those who

³¹⁹ Yoder. 220.

³²⁰ Rahn. 172-173.

lead worship have been carefully trained and are able to bear the weight of the responsibility.”³²¹
Youth worship leaders must be provided with theoretical knowledge and practical experience.

Accountability

Youth worship leaders are accountable to the community of faith for their leadership of the actions, functions and purposes of worship. Developing systems of accountability is one of the greatest challenges associated with integrating youth into worship leadership. There are significantly different levels of commitment and accountability between individual youth and the community of faith. It is important to implement systems of accountability for youth in worship leadership that include individuals with different levels of commitment to the church. Commissioning and evaluation are two potential components of accountability systems.

Commissioning youth as worship leaders recognizes and affirms their worship ministry and creates a context for accountability. Individual youth may be commissioned for worship leadership. Commissioning the youth group as a whole is a sign that the group, “voluntarily subjects [its] actions and ministry to a person or group that carries authority to represent the church.”³²² It recognizes the need for the group to look beyond itself to the needs and context of the entire congregation.³²³

Evaluating the worship leadership of youth as individuals and a group is equally important. Evaluation includes strong affirmation and encouragement as well as gentle suggestions for improvement. It should be understood as a formative, developmental process. It can include self-reflection by the youth as well as feedback from the congregation. Informal and formal contexts for evaluation can be created.³²⁴ Both short-term evaluation of the worship

³²¹ Yoder. 220.

³²² *Mennonite Polity*. 128.

³²³ Yoder. 197. Yoder, Kropf and Slough recommend publicly blessing and affirming all worship leaders.

³²⁴ *Ibid.* 396.

leadership of youth on particular occasions, with particular attention to the actions of worship,³²⁵ as well as long-term evaluation of the effectiveness of youth in fulfilling the purposes of worship is necessary.³²⁶ The evaluation of individual youth engaged in worship leadership will also take place through mentoring relationships and congregational assessment systems just as it does for adult worship leaders.

Norma deWaal Malefyt points to seven benefits of evaluating worship that apply to youth worship leadership: 1) Those who serve well will receive encouragement; 2) Evaluation will balance out negative criticism so easily made; 3) Evaluation can stir creativity and motivation; 4) Evaluation provides a healthy corrective in planning; 5) Evaluation will encourage the development of thoughtful and wise practices; 6) Evaluation reminds worship planners and leaders that worship is not about them; and 7) Intentional evaluation can provide a safeguard against hyper-evaluation, the tendency to overanalyze worship leadership.³²⁷ In order for these benefits to be garnered, it is essential that evaluation does not become grading or scoring the group or comparing worship leaders. The purpose of evaluation is to, “gain better insight into what we are doing and to find ways to improve it.”³²⁸ Evaluation holds youth accountable to grow and develop as worship leaders.

Conclusion

Youth can be integrated into all three levels of worship leadership as a youth group, and as individuals through families, mentoring relationships and congregational systems. Adolescents can facilitate the actions of worship. They can attend to the mediating functions of worship. They can serve as shamans, hosts and prophets, enabling the ultimate transformative

³²⁵ Yoder.

³²⁶ Ibid. 399.

³²⁷ Malefyt, Norma deWaal and Howard Vanderwell. *Designing Worship Together: Models and Strategies for Worship Planning*. Herndon: Alban Institute, 2005. 158-160.

³²⁸ Ibid. 160.

purposes of worship. Individual youth have gifts that allow them to perform the various roles of worship leadership. The stage of adolescence also enables youth to offer unique worship leadership gifts. Careful gift discernment and training can equip youth with qualifications and attributes for worship leadership on all three levels of worship. It is possible to develop systems of accountability for youth worship leaders. As participants in a collaborative process, youth can be integrated into worship leadership in North American Mennonite congregations for the benefit of the youth worship leaders and the entire community of faith.

Outcomes of Youth Worship Leadership

Youth worship leadership is a form of catechism. Integrating youth into worship leadership is one Christian response to the developmental and cultural needs of adolescents in respect to faith formation. Youth worship leadership is also a form of ministry for the benefit of the whole worshipping community. It addresses the needs of the entire congregation as well as adolescents.

Youth Worship Leadership as Catechism

“Teaching our Christian faith certainly should include instruction in how to worship God, the Three in One,”³²⁹ proclaims Donald P. Hustad. Teaching worship before and after baptism³³⁰ helps youth learn how to participate in worship. Central tenets of the Christian faith and life can be passed on through learning and teaching worship. Learning and teaching worship leadership is also a means of teaching leadership skills.

Learning and teaching participation in worship

Congregations can teach worship so young people learn how to participate in worship:

³²⁹ Hustad, Donald P. *True Worship: Reclaiming the Wonder and Majesty*. Wheaton, Illinois: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1998. 253.

³³⁰ Jeschke. 60. Hustad. *True*. 265-268. Hustad suggests instruction in worship should be integrated into preparing for church membership as well as the continued life of the congregation through advance preparation for each service, explanation in the worship bulletin, and education incorporated into the service itself.

Simplistically, youth don't participate in worship because they don't understand it. More basically, they don't understand because they have not been taught. Even more foundationally, they have not been taught because our churches have been too busy doing other things – and perhaps because their parents and/or the community's leaders don't know what worship is either.³³¹

Robert Webber associates teaching the meaning of worship with the “hearer” period of faith development, which follows a period of seeking and precedes formal commitment.³³² Experience of worship is an essential aspect of worship education.³³³ Worship is best taught through active participation as opposed to passive observation. Active participation can include contributing to the leadership of the worship service.³³⁴ Engaging in worship rather than observing a presentation of worship is necessary in the postmodern context that youth inhabit.³³⁵

Youth can be taught about worship and worship leadership to help them avoid evaluating and leading worship on the basis of personal preference or dominant cultural models:³³⁶

The worst thing churches can do about worship for the sake of their children [and youth] is to choose music and worship forms according to *their* taste – when their tastes are not yet biblically formed.³³⁷

Instead of changing its music and worship forms to please the young people, a congregation should teach its youth why the older members value certain songs and hymns, why parts of the liturgy are meaningful, how the various things we do in worship contribute to keeping our focus on God and to nurturing us, individually and corporately, in the life of discipleship. Similarly, we should also encourage the youth to continue to bring to our worship planning group new music that does the same, so that we can teach these fresh worship tools to the older members.³³⁸

Education about worship can teach youth and adults to move beyond issues of style to consider content and the broader purposes of worship. Teaching worship leadership is one method of enabling youth to participate in worship with deeper understanding and heightened engagement.

³³¹ Dawn. *Lost Cause*. 67.

³³² Webber. *Journey*. 108.

³³³ Ibid. 108-111.

³³⁴ Snyder, Eleanor. 151.

³³⁵ Craig-Wild. 115.

³³⁶ Webber. *Journey*. 108.

³³⁷ Dawn. *Lost Cause*. 71.

³³⁸ Ibid. 73.

Learning and teaching through worship

Learning and teaching worship is an opportunity to learn and teach central tenets of the Christian faith. Robert Webber describes the role of worship in Christian education: “Worship...is an important means of education. More is taught through the actions of worship than through sophisticated church education curriculum.”³³⁹ Worship itself is an opportunity for Christian education, as is training for and practice of worship leadership. The practice of worship leadership engages diverse spiritual practices, “habits, disciplines, and patterns of life through which Christian seek communion with Christ and solidarity with others,”³⁴⁰ including prayer, confession and solidarity with the poor.³⁴¹ Learning to plan and lead worship includes studying scripture, history and theology, and caring for the pastoral needs of the congregation and the world. Yoder, Kropf and Slough describe biblical engagement, prayer, pastoral care, creative thinking and planning, dependence on God and relational growth as benefits emerging from the collaborative worship planning process for worship leaders, including youth.³⁴² In learning to plan and lead worship, youth learn how to engage contemporary life and the world in relation to scripture and theology, the central task of Christian faith and life.

Learning and teaching leadership

One part of making the transition from child to adult is learning about leadership. Who are leaders? What is leadership? Could I be a leader? Unfortunately, most adolescents answer this last question, “No, I am not a leader.”³⁴³

Josephine van Linden and Carl Fertman describe the adolescent potential for leadership and strategies for the development of leadership among youth from a secular perspective in *Youth*

³³⁹ Webber, Robert E., ed. *The Complete Library of Christian Worship: Volume 7, The Ministries of Christian Worship*. Nashville: Star Song, 1994. 373.

³⁴⁰ Yaconelli. 156.

³⁴¹ Ibid. 156-163.

³⁴² Yoder. 207.

³⁴³ van Linden, Josephine A. and Carl I. Fertman. *Youth Leadership: A Guide to Understanding Leadership Development in Adolescents*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998. 1.

*Leadership: A Guide to Understanding Leadership Development in Adolescents.*³⁴⁴ They depict two types of leadership that adolescents can develop. *Transactional leadership*, in which “leaders exchange promises of rewards and benefits to subordinates for the subordinates’ fulfillment of agreements with the leader”³⁴⁵ and *transformational leadership*:

Leaders embody ideas with which other people identify. Leadership involves helping people to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the group, organization of society; consider their long term needs to develop themselves, rather than their immediate needs; and generally become more aware of what is really important.³⁴⁶

Transactional leadership focuses on “doing” while transformational leadership emphasizes “being.”³⁴⁷

Both forms of leadership are necessary for worship leaders, who must perform the practical, transactional tasks of organizing meetings, making decisions, and instructing the congregation and also the transformational tasks of shamans, hosts and prophets who model worship, care for congregational needs and attend to the needs of the world while constantly calling attention to centrality of the triune God. The collaborative worship planning process creates an environment that encourages adolescent leadership development when it promotes adults and youth working together to reach consensus on decisions.³⁴⁸ It encourages youth to become aware of themselves as leaders,³⁴⁹ to interact with their identity as leaders,³⁵⁰ and finally to develop mastery of leadership skills and abilities to, “create and generate new interest and energy”³⁵¹ for their involvement in the church. Collaborative worship leadership, therefore, is an

³⁴⁴ van Linden.

³⁴⁵ Ibid. 8-9.

³⁴⁶ Ibid. 9.

³⁴⁷ Ibid. 8-9.

³⁴⁸ Ibid. 144.

³⁴⁹ Ibid. 65.

³⁵⁰ Ibid. 81.

³⁵¹ Ibid. 99.

opportunity for youth to begin the lifelong process of leadership development.³⁵²

Conclusion

Worship leadership can be a form of catechesis: it can teach youth how to participate in worship, how to engage the Christian life and faith, and how to be leaders in the community. Youth best learn worship leadership through experience rather than observation.³⁵³ Worship education can move beyond passive observation: youth can experience worship through engagement in the collaborative worship planning process. They can experience the truth of worship “in action first-hand.”³⁵⁴

Youth worship leadership addresses the needs of youth

The integration of youth into worship leadership through planning and leading worship collaboratively, is an opportunity for the community of faith to address the central developmental and cultural need of youth for individuation. This general need is expressed in terms of identity, belonging, and autonomy, and must be understood within the specific current cultural context that is shaped by adult abandonment, postmodernism, and consumerism. The developmental stage and cultural context of adolescence also presents challenges to the integration of youth into worship leadership.

Developmental needs

In adolescence, youth undergo the process of individuation in which they address questions of identity, belonging and autonomy. The Christian community provides partial answers and nurture for youth as they explore these questions. Integrating youth into worship is one means of affirming the identity, belonging and autonomy of youth within the community of faith and encouraging them to explore their unique and personal identities, places of belonging

³⁵² van Linden. 11.

³⁵³ Loewen. 115. Snyder, Eleanor. 150.

³⁵⁴ Loewen. 115.

and sense of autonomy.

Providing youth with the opportunity to lead worship can allow them to explore and share their emerging *identity* as people of faith and participants in the community of faith, as well as their unique gifts and personalities. Paul Basden advises worship leaders:

Be yourself. Since each of us is made in the image of God and is a unique and special reflection of his nature in the world, there is no good reason to try to imitate somebody else. ...Unfortunately, the desire to imitate is nowhere stronger than in worship leadership, where ministers often try to look and sound like someone other than themselves. My goal is merely to be myself. ... My goal is to understand and to live out what Paul claimed for himself in 1 Corinthians 15:10: 'But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.' Let God use your redeemed personality!³⁵⁵

Youth can be encouraged to lead worship as an authentic expression of their identity and experience of and relationship with God at their current age and stage of faith development. Training can enable youth to more clearly and sensitively express themselves rather to imitate adult worship leaders. As youth explore their identities, they can lead the entire congregation in reconsidering their own identities as people of faith. Identity is closely linked to belonging:

Identity forms best in community. When the young are welcomed into full participation in the faith community, when they are known and loved by many in the community, they have a sense of belonging and identity.³⁵⁶

The need of youth for a place of *belonging* can be met in worship:

To worship God is to refuse to contain ourselves: worship enjoins us to the mystery of God and gives us an identity that is entwined with others. Worship remakes us in practices like praise, sacrifice, and Eucharist that radically affirm us as valuable in God's eyes, and invite us to stretch beyond our comfort zones, reaching into the mystery of God and others.³⁵⁷

Worship can be the action of the entire community of faith, including children and youth, not only adults.³⁵⁸ Worship can be hospitable.³⁵⁹ Teaching worship is one dimension of hospitable

³⁵⁵ Basden, Paul. *The Worship Maze: Finding a Style to Fit Your Church*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999. 143.

³⁵⁶ Stonehouse. 104.

³⁵⁷ Dean. *Passion*. 114.

³⁵⁸ Snyder, Eleanor. 147.

worship:

I am convinced that, in the midst of the ambiguous, sometimes chaotic, never settled, ungrounded society that surrounds them, our young people crave roots. If we teach them the beauty and truth, the meaning and purpose of what we do in worship, they become more involved and feel more at home in the Church.³⁶⁰

Integrating youth into worship leadership is another dimension of claiming worship for the entire community. In planning and leading worship together, youth can form relationships with one another. In instruction offered by adult worship leaders, intergenerational relationships can develop, often with visible worship leaders, facilitating an increasingly personal connection to worship. The affirmation received from the community of faith can strengthen youth's sense of belonging.

“As [youth] are integrated into the body of Christ as fully functioning contributors who exercise their particular gifts, they...demonstrate *autonomy*,”³⁶¹ states Loewen. Integrating youth into worship leadership explicitly identifies and affirms their giftedness.³⁶² Worship can be a supportive and encouraging arena in which youth can contribute their gifts to the community of faith. Commissioning young people to serve as worship leaders in the church is an expression and sign of this wider calling of the people of God in the world: “A sense of value rises among young people when they realize that God has commissioned them to be agents of healing in the world.”³⁶³ Loewen calls churches to examine their youth ministry programs, asking the question: “In what ways is the youth ministry helping teens realize their value as participants in God's mission for the world?”³⁶⁴ and “What kinds of outlets are being created in which students can

³⁵⁹ Dawn. *Lost Cause*. 86.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 83.

³⁶¹ Loewen. 47.

³⁶² Jones, Stephen D. *Faith Shaping: Nurturing the Faith Journey of Youth*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1980. 76-77.

³⁶³ Loewen. 101.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 138.

bless others in the congregation?”³⁶⁵

The intensity of the adolescent search for identity, belonging and autonomy calls these central life questions to the attention of the entire congregation, inviting each person to reevaluate their sense of self, community and purpose.

Cultural context

A safe community within the North American cultural context of adult abandonment, postmodernism and consumerism can be created to enable youth to take the risk of exploring identity, belonging and autonomy through worship leadership. Integrating youth into worship leadership must respond to the North American cultural context in which youth exist which creates specific needs in youth.

In the context of *adult abandonment*, youth need to be “surrounded by adults who validate them for who they are.”³⁶⁶ Snyder expresses the importance of adults validating the spiritual experiences of children in worship, and this can be applied to youth:

Children [and youth] are nurtured in faith as they participate in the worshipping life of the faith community. Children and [youth]’s faith has validity when adults pay attention to their spiritual experiences.³⁶⁷

Worship can cease to be an adult system and instead reflect the faith and life of the whole worshipping community. Loewen describes the role of adults is supporting leadership of the younger members of the community:

The church...can be a community that surrounds its young people with affirmation of their calling. Adults can express the worth of teenagers as fellow travelers on the journey of faith, as future leaders, and as gifted contributors to the current life of the congregation.³⁶⁸

Through integration into worship leadership, youth can be welcomed as fellow travellers, future

³⁶⁵ Loewen. 140.

³⁶⁶ Ibid. 46.

³⁶⁷ Snyder, Eleanor. 111.

³⁶⁸ Loewen. 104.

leaders and gifted contributors. Their spiritual experiences can be heard, valued, and included in shaping worship that is reflective of the entire community of faith. In addition, the collaborative process of preparing to lead worship alongside adults is an opportunity for the formation of strong intergenerational relationships.

Adult youth leaders should be constantly vigilant that youth worship leadership does not develop into another adult system in which young people grudgingly struggle to survive.³⁶⁹ Instead, expanding worship leadership to incorporate adolescents can free youth from adult systems of worship and provide them with the opportunity to shape worship that reflects their spiritual experiences as members of the community of faith.

In the context of *postmodernism*, youth need to participate in worship informed by a postmodern worldview that reflects a desire for ritual and symbol, community, story, relational and particular truth, active engagement, sharing experiences, experiencing God, and using all the senses. One way to enable youth to participate in worship that reflects their predominantly postmodern worldview is to invite them into the process of planning and leading worship. The challenges of postmodernism can also be addressed in conversations with youth. In a culture in which “personal experience represents postmodernity’s one undisputed test of truth,”³⁷⁰ youth can learn that worship is more than a quest for a moving personal experience, Worship and youth ministry can challenge “both modern metanarratives of scientific power and the fragmented local narratives of postmodernism.”³⁷¹

In the context of *consumerism*, youth need to find a source of identity and fulfillment in Christ as opposed to the false salvation story provided by North American consumer culture.³⁷²

³⁶⁹ Loewen. 44.

³⁷⁰ Dean. *Passion*. 99.

³⁷¹ Loewen. 58.

³⁷² *Ibid.* 71.

Worship exposes youth to a transformative richness of verbal and visual imagery and symbol³⁷³ in every action, function, and purpose of worship:

This immersion in images is analogous to the immersion provided by advertising culture with its jingles and carefully wrought visual images. . . . One way of assessing the extent to which we have given reverent attention to these images is by assessing to what extent they have become the touchstone by which we measure other experiences.³⁷⁴

Mennonite churches are also vulnerable to in Katherine Turpin's claim that:

One of the places that many liberal Protestant traditions have faltered in their mentoring of young people is in their failure to offer youth rich images in worship to enliven their imagination.³⁷⁵

One approach to integrating alternative images into worship to counteract the pull of consumer culture is to invite youth to engage in the process of planning the imagery and symbols embodied in every level of worship.

Integrating youth into worship leadership is one method of responding to the specific needs of youth that emerge from a North American culture characterized by adult abandonment, postmodernism and consumerism.

Conclusion

The incorporation of youth into the collaborative worship planning and leading process of the community of faith addresses the general need of youth for individuation through attending to questions of identity, belonging and autonomy, and the specific needs of youth in North American culture in responding to adult abandonment, postmodernism and consumerism.

Integration into worship leadership is one important aspect of a comprehensive youth ministry:

Youth ministry is concerned with forming youth in the way of Christ. This is the way of Christian practice. Youth ministries can best facilitate growth in conformity with Christ when they focus on helping youth experience and develop practices of faith. The Christian practices are best inherited from a practicing community. If our youth ministries are not led

³⁷³ Turpin. 209.

³⁷⁴ Ibid. 211.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

by intentional spiritual communities, embedded with adults who are practicing the presence of Christ, youth will simply see faith, at best, as an intellectual endeavour. Youth must have opportunities to practice the way of Christ alongside Christian adults if Christian practices are to take root. A healthy spiritual formation program not only invites youth into practices, it also offers them opportunities to reflect and understand how practices work.³⁷⁶

Youth Worship Leadership as Ministry

Integrating youth into worship leadership does not only benefit young people, but also enriches the worship and life of the entire community of faith.

It is theologically incorrect to assume that, and even label, only a portion of Christian students in a youth group as ministers. Every follower of Jesus Christ is a minister. All parts of the body, regardless of the visibility and prominence of their gifts, are to honour each other and treat one another with humility and compassion.³⁷⁷

It is equally theologically incorrect to assume that youth are always the recipients of ministry rather than the ministers. Integrating youth into worship leadership can benefit the congregation as much as the youth themselves:

There are many times when we benefit from those we are trying to help. The influence is mutual. Rather than seeing our impact on others rush downstream in a great current—where there is little chance for reciprocal impact—it is far better to connect to other believers in the calm waters of a gentle pond. ... We each contribute to the process of helping one another become faithful disciples.³⁷⁸

This is especially true across generations. Inviting youth to contribute to the collaborative worship planning process can be as enriching for adult as for youth worship leaders. Snyder asks: “What can children [and youth] contribute to the worship service?”³⁷⁹ Loewen follows his first question, “What kinds of outlets are being created in which students can bless others in the congregation?” with a second, “How are we helping adults receive the ministry of the teens?”³⁸⁰

One way to help adults receive the worship ministry of youth is to recognize the particular

³⁷⁶ Yaconelli. 165.

³⁷⁷ Powell, Kara Eckmann. “Focusing Youth Ministry through Community.” *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry*. Ed. Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark and Dave Rahn. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001. 202.

³⁷⁸ Rahn. 176.

³⁷⁹ Snyder, Eleanor. 151.

³⁸⁰ Loewen. 140.

congregational needs that are met through the integration of youth into worship leadership.

Youth worship leadership addresses the needs of the congregation

Incorporating youth into the collaborative worship planning and leadership process as individuals and a group contributes to meeting the needs of the entire community of faith. There are six congregational needs addressed by the integration of youth into worship leadership.

1) *Youth worship leadership completes the Body of Christ.* When youth ask, “Why do I have to go to church?” one response Marva Dawn provides is:

The congregation cannot get along without you. Just as your body needs every single part—like your eyes, your nose, your mouth, your hands and feet—so the church needs every single person to make it whole. Perhaps this Sunday some persons will need you to be eyes or hands for them.³⁸¹

Each person’s gifts are required for the worship of the community to achieve its greatest potential. Every participant in the community of faith is a necessary member of the Body of Christ. This is as true in worship leadership as it is in any other area of congregational life.

2) *Youth worship leadership brings new ideas and creativity to worship.* Mercer describes the fresh contributions children can make to the community:

Children are not only shaped by practices in which they participate. They also “act back” on the community of practice, with new insights, ideas, and actions that can contribute to the transformation of those practices and, therefore, of the community.³⁸²

This is true for adolescents as well. Youth, who experience worship as something new and different and are able to critically evaluate worship for the first time, can envision possibilities for change that are invisible to adults who have participated in worship for decades. Youth can also draw on the resources of different cultural and life experiences than previous generations, integrating new forms and content into worship. Using the example of music, Dawn describes the potential of worship planning teams to teach young people the significance of the worship

³⁸¹ Dawn. *Waste*. 257.

³⁸² Mercer. 202.

music that has nurtured the community, and to “encourage the youth...to bring to our worship planning group new music that does the same, so that we can teach these fresh worship tools to the older members.”³⁸³

3) *Youth worship leadership gives adults permission to express themselves.* Snyder describes how in a particular element of worship, “the children’s exuberance gave [the adults] permission to become more active participants themselves.”³⁸⁴ Similarly the emotion, exuberance, and passion of adolescence may allow adults to express their emotion, exuberance and passion more fully in worship. The questions and doubts raised by youth can allow adults to acknowledge and ask their own questions. The insistent adolescent search for identity, belonging and autonomy frees adults to reevaluate their more mature yet continual search for self, community and purpose.

4) *Youth worship leadership engages a postmodern world.* Many churches are actively and intentionally trying to understand what it means to be Christian communities in a postmodern world. Almost every book on worship published in the past two decades includes a section on the meaning of worship in a postmodern context. Youth are an invaluable resource for congregations in creating postmodern, multisensory worship. Youth may not describe themselves or their approach to worship leadership as postmodern, yet given freedom to express their spiritual experiences they can intuitively lead congregations in engaging a postmodern world.

5) *Youth worship leadership is a source of mission.* Missional activity is more successful when the fewest possible cultural and linguistic barriers exist between the parties involved: “It seems logical to assume, then, that when we encourage young people to reach out to their friends

³⁸³ Dawn. *Lost Cause*. 74.

³⁸⁴ Snyder, Eleanor. 155.

in the name of Christ, they will encounter fewer of these natural barriers than adults.”³⁸⁵ However, if these natural barriers of language and culture exist in worship planned and led entirely by adults, one would similarly assume that it would be difficult for friends of youth, and youth themselves, to become engaged in the community of faith. Integrating youth into worship leadership can make worship a more hospitable environment for young people exploring faith from both within and outside local congregations.

6) *Youth worship leadership ensures the longevity of the church.* Churches consistently express concern that young people are not attending worship and leaving the church.³⁸⁶ If young people are not engaged by worship, the central activity of the community of faith, it is unlikely they will remain connected to the church in the long run. Integrating youth into worship leadership is one way of addressing this concern. Giving youth an understanding of worship and the ability and opportunity to make significant, authentic contributions to the worship experience of the entire community of faith is more likely to make worship and church a meaningful and valuable way for youth to spend their time and energy. Integrating youth into worship leadership not only serves the needs of adolescents but also meets certain fundamental needs of the entire community of faith

Conclusion

Psalm 145 proclaims:

One generation shall laud your works to another;
and shall declare your mighty acts.
They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness
and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.³⁸⁷

The North American Mennonite church today can proclaim alongside the psalmist that “one

³⁸⁵ Rahn. 174.

³⁸⁶ Lehn, Cornelia. *Involving Children and Youth in Congregational Worship*. Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1982. 7. Snyder, Eleanor. 168.

³⁸⁷ Psalm 145:4, 7. NRSV.

generation shall laud God's works to another," recognizing the reciprocity of this relationship. Older generations can commend the acts of God to younger generations and younger generations can proclaim the works of God to older generations as they plan and lead worship together.

Barriers to Youth Worship Leadership

To this point I have described an idealized picture of the integration of youth into worship leadership. Theologically, the integration of youth into worship leadership receives overwhelming support. The primary objections to inviting and training youth worship leaders are practical. The collaborative worship planning process is challenging, and the integration of youth into the process has the potential to intensify existing barriers and create additional obstacles. In addition to considering barriers to youth worship leadership that are described in sources addressing worship and youth, this discussion also includes responses from an informal survey of youth leaders in Mennonite Church Eastern Canada and North America.³⁸⁸ The survey asked: "What are the greatest challenges encountered when planning and leading a youth service?" and "What challenges would you expect to arise with regularly incorporating youth into worship leadership?"

The *low expectations* of youth and adults in the community of faith are the first barrier to the integration of youth into worship leadership. Quite simply, adolescents expect worship to be geared towards adults: "Often children and youth assume there will be nothing in the service for them and so they completely tune out."³⁸⁹ Adults similarly, "assume that the service is not for the children [and youth]."³⁹⁰ Congregations must overcome the initial lack of expectation for engagement in worship. Youth must expect to have something to give and receive in worship and adults must expect to give and receive from youth.

³⁸⁸ Johnson, Sarah Kathleen. *Youth Worship Leadership Survey*. June 2007.

³⁸⁹ Lehn. 16.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

Discerning appropriate contributions youth can offer the community of faith in worship is the second barrier to integration. There are no absolute age restrictions associated with any aspect of worship leadership. There are youth who can appropriately, competently and meaningfully serve as shamans, hosts and prophets, and lead the congregation in many aspects of faith and life. At the same time, there are certain aspects of worship which are less likely to be led appropriately by adolescents. These include addressing highly sensitive or personal topics, issues that may cause conflict in the congregation, or themes that reflect later stages of faith development. Yoder, Kropf and Slough provide an example:

In one congregation, a teenager was invited to lead the congregational prayers of confession during Lent. Because of the significance of the act of confession during this season and the naked vulnerability required for such intense soul-searching, the congregation needed a trusted guide for such prayers. Although the teenager could have offered effective leadership of other parts of the service, his lack of experience and discomfort with the role made it difficult for worshippers to open themselves to God's cleansing work during the prayers of confession in Lent.³⁹¹

Yoder, Kropf and Slough emphasize that this is not an argument for excluding youth from worship leadership, but rather “a plea to create a context for their development.”³⁹²

Diversity among adolescent worship leaders in terms of histories of relationship to the church, statuses in local congregations and stages of faith development makes discerning appropriate contributions increasingly complex. Integrating individuals is a matter of personal gift discernment. Planning and leading worship as a group can be more of a challenge, since not every youth is ready for every aspect of worship leadership.³⁹³ Appropriate methods for group involvement that take into account the diverse gifts, abilities and readiness of youth for worship leadership can and should be developed.

Incompatible views of worship between youth and adult worship planners and leaders can

³⁹¹ Yoder. 220.

³⁹² Ibid. 221.

³⁹³ Rahn. 172.

be a significant barrier to collaborative worship planning. Norma deWaal Malefyt states:

While the planning group must not fall into the trap of tunnel vision and must remain open to new ideas and broad-ranging discussions, the members of the planning group must own a common vision of worship.³⁹⁴

Failing to create a unified vision of worship, even if that vision is characterized by diversity, can lead to: *conditional* acceptance of youth worship leadership if it conforms to adult visions of worship; *tokenism* that grants youth their moment in worship but fails to fully integrate them into the large process of shaping the worship of the community; an attitude of *toleration*, suggesting the younger generation's view of worship must be grudgingly permitted rather than embraced and interwoven with the visions of other groups in the congregation; and the *myth of style* as what differentiates youth and adult worship leadership and the suggestion that altering style is the means of making worship hospitable to adolescents.³⁹⁵ A common vision of worship can and should be established across generational and cultural barriers when youth are integrated into worship leadership.

Cultural miscommunication is possible when youth are invited to lead worship. Yoder, Kropf and Slough point to the potential for miscommunication in worship:

[In worship,] lots of cross-cultural miscommunication occurs. What one person sees as a gesture of welcome is another's gesture of disdain. One who seeks to communicate a message of care and friendship by standing inches away from another is understood as conveying a lack of appropriate boundaries.³⁹⁶

Miscommunication also occurs across generations. Survey respondents suggest "teenage slang" and clothing may pose issues in worship leadership, pointing to cultural barriers that may communicate unintentional messages. *Cultural discontinuity* is closely related to cultural miscommunication. The gift of youth in contributing a postmodern perspective on faith and life

³⁹⁴ Malefyt. 9.

³⁹⁵ Dawn. *Lost Cause*. 71.

³⁹⁶ Yoder. 239.

in worship is one factor that may result in discontinuity between the culture of youth and the culture of the congregation. Constant dialogue and cultural sensitivity can and should characterize the collaborative worship planning process.

Existing structures of worship planning, leadership and public worship can be an obstacle to the integration of youth into worship leadership. There is always resistance to change. It is difficult to find a balance between maintaining comfortable patterns and integrating new forms and structures. Order and freedom are both necessary in worship.³⁹⁷ The gift of youth in bringing forward new forms of worship can be challenging to those who appreciate established patterns. Youth and adult worship leaders should be reminded that, the “discipline to avoid too much or too little innovation” is an important worship leadership attribute.³⁹⁸

Conflict may result from change or the possibility of change. In recent decades, many congregations have experienced conflict regarding worship style.³⁹⁹ Efforts to renew congregational worship have resulted in tension between radicals, “people most open to and desirous of change” and traditionalists, individuals “least open to change.”⁴⁰⁰ Worship planning and leadership can become politicized.⁴⁰¹ It has the potential to become competitive⁴⁰² and resort to planning worship on the basis of “political poll taking” rather than Biblical, theological and pastoral foundations.⁴⁰³ The integration of youth into worship leadership has the potential to fuel or even initiate these conflicts. Unity in worship rather than party politics should be the priority:

The common goal—to lead rich and vital worship for the glory of God and the benefit of the church—must always be in the forefront. The planning team cannot afford to waste its

³⁹⁷ Webber, Robert E. *Worship is a Verb: Eight Principles for Transforming Worship*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992. 135.

³⁹⁸ *Worship Sourcebook*. 20.

³⁹⁹ York, Terry W. *America’s Worship Wars*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003.

⁴⁰⁰ Wimber, John. “Building a Philosophy of Worship.” *The Complete Library of Christian Worship: Volume 3, The Renewal of Sunday Worship*. Ed. Robert E. Webber. Nashville: Star Song, 1993. 369-371. 370.

⁴⁰¹ Yoder. 367-388.

⁴⁰² Malefyt. 11.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid*.

time and energy on internal competition.⁴⁰⁴

Negative group dynamics which may or may not be associated with politics may also be a barrier to youth worship leadership. In the collaborative worship planning process, youth work together as a group and in community with adults. These collaborative units can experience problems due to conflicting personalities, jealousy,⁴⁰⁵ the failure of individuals to “carry their weight”⁴⁰⁶ and many other interpersonal issues. The collaborative worship planning process is an opportunity to form relationships and learn to work together; however, it also holds the potential for broken relationships and harmful group dynamics that have negative consequences for the worship of the entire community of faith. The community of worship planners should care for each other and be cared for by the congregation.

Performance centered youth worship leadership is a constant danger. Youth worship leadership can become focussed on meeting adult standards. Loewen expands:

Many teenagers are dealing with enormous pressure from coaches, teachers, and parents to excel. Often, the result is an unhealthy performance orientation in which they comply with adult demands more out of their fears than out of an innate sense of purpose.⁴⁰⁷

Youth worship leadership can easily become yet *another adult system* in which youth must struggle to survive.⁴⁰⁸ Youth worship leadership can also become *a performance* that puts youth on display for adults rather than inviting them to lead the congregation in worship. Children and youth have historically been engaged in the performance aspects of worship leadership such as Christmas pageants and solo musical presentations.⁴⁰⁹ Integrating youth into worship leadership calls congregations to stop seeing youth as worship performers and instead envision them as

⁴⁰⁴ Malefyt. 12.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid. 10.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Loewen. 32.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid. 34, 44.

⁴⁰⁹ Snyder, Eleanor. 144.

worship leaders. Youth can and should also learn to see themselves as leaders rather than performers. An element of performance always remains in worship, but it is important to recognize that the entire community of faith performs worship, the worship leaders (including youth) are considered prompters, and God is recognized as the audience.⁴¹⁰

Logistics, hard work, and high commitment of time and energy expected of youth worship leaders and adult mentors are the final barriers to the integration of youth into worship leadership. Survey respondents emphasized these issues naming, “planning ahead,” “time and energy required to mentor [youth],” “commitment/energy level” as significant barriers for adult youth leaders.⁴¹¹ They pointed to similar issues regarding youth:

Youth are generally too busy and over-programmed. This is another item on the calendar for them.

Having youth own their participation enough to make it a priority in their busy complicated schedules.⁴¹²

Finding time to plan worship is a struggle for all collaborative worship planning groups.⁴¹³ It is a matter of priorities: “Good worship takes effort—on the part of planners and participants alike”⁴¹⁴ Youth ministry is hard work⁴¹⁵ but the nurture of youth is an essential task of the entire congregation. If integrating youth into worship leadership is recognized as a theological and practical priority, barriers of logistics and commitment will fade.

Conclusion

Significant practical rather than theological barriers inhibit the integration of youth into

⁴¹⁰ Liesch, Barry. *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church*. Expanded Edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001. 123.

⁴¹¹ Johnson. *Survey*.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Malefyt. 9.

⁴¹⁴ Dawn. *Waste*. 296.

⁴¹⁵ Clark, Chap. “Assessing Honestly: Spiritual Readiness.” *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry*. Ed. Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark and Dave Rahn. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001. 377-387.

worship leadership. Communities of faith can and should work together to raise expectations of worship, discern appropriate contributions, facilitate, recognize and celebrate the diverse contributions of adolescents, create a unified vision of worship, communicate across cultural boundaries, balance consistency and change, be proactive peacemakers to address situations of potential conflict, intentionally work towards positive group dynamics, attend to worship leadership rather than performance, and work hard, making integrating youth into worship leadership a priority for congregational systems of worship planning and leadership, youth ministry programs, and the entire community of faith.

Conclusion

Youth can be integrated into collaborative congregational worship planning processes as individuals and as a group. The spiritual gifts of youth qualify them for worship leadership. It is important to discern the particular way the gifts of each youth can be employed in worship leadership. Youth can lead worship by planning and presenting the actions, functions and purposes of worship in their roles as shamans, hosts and prophets. Systems of accountability can be created through commissioning and evaluation.

Integrating youth into worship leadership is a form of catechism through which youth learn how to participate in worship, engage the Christian faith and life, and serve as leaders in the community of faith. It can meet the developmental needs of youth for identity, belonging and autonomy and respond to a cultural context characterized by adult abandonment, postmodernism and consumerism. Incorporating youth as ministers in the collaborative worship planning process can also meet congregational needs. It can complete the body of Christ, bring new ideas and creativity to worship, give adults permission to express themselves, engage a postmodern world, serve as a vehicle for mission, and ensure the longevity of the church.

There are significant barriers to integrating youth into worship leadership. The barriers are practical rather than theological and these obstacles are not insurmountable. Congregations can prioritize the theological obligation to integrate youth into worship leadership and the practical needs of youth and the entire community of faith that can be met through youth worship leadership. Through integration into worship leadership, young people can be nurtured in the community of faith and fully engaged in worship of the triune God.

Conclusion

Integrating youth into worship leadership within an Anabaptist-Mennonite theological context raises significant theological and pastoral questions about a Mennonite understanding of worship and worship leadership, and raises important developmental, cultural and theological questions about adolescence. This study of these issues concludes that, within an Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of the church and a collaborative approach to worship leadership, it is appropriate and beneficial for youth to be involved in leading congregational worship. It regards the barriers to such involvement to be practical rather than theological.

A practical resource: the *Youth Worship Sourcebook*

One way of addressing the practical barriers to youth worship leadership is to develop resources to support congregations as they prepare youth to be effective participants in collaborative worship leading. The central conclusions of this thesis are applied in the *Youth Worship Sourcebook*, a practical resource for the integration of youth into worship leadership in Mennonite congregations. The *Sourcebook* equips youth for group involvement in planning and leading various aspects of worship on a regular basis.

The *Youth Worship Sourcebook* is composed of ten units that address different aspects of worship: 1) an introduction to worship including reflection on the actions, functions and purposes of worship, the roles of worship leaders, and structuring services around themes or the Christian year; 2) opening and closing worship including discussion of language in worship; 3) music in worship; 4) prayer; 5) visual elements; 6) the place of scripture in worship; 7) preaching; 8) physical movement and multisensory worship; 9) stewardship and the offering; and 10) the Lord's Supper. Each unit includes background information on the topic for adult and youth leaders, two, three or four forty-five minute teaching modules, creative suggestions for

youth worship leadership of the unit topic and a checklist for preparing to lead the aspect of worship addressed in the unit.

The curriculum modules both teach youth about the topic of the unit and prepare youth to lead the congregation in that aspect of worship on Sunday morning. Each module consists of an opening activity, time of discussion or preparation for worship, and closing reflection and prayer. Current practices are considered and space is created for exploring new and creative possibilities. Resources for discussion and preparation for worship focus on creating structures within which youth can contribute their own reflections and ideas rather than providing specific words and actions. For example, instead of providing a call to worship for youth to present, youth are taught how to write words to open worship which reflect their own experiences of worship.

The *Sourcebook* reflects the broader patterns, themes and conclusions of this thesis. It employs a *collaborative* worship planning process through the integration of youth into the larger worship planning structures of the congregation and collaboration within the group of youth planners. Communal, inclusive and sensory activities and discussions are used to teach about worship and to prepare to lead worship. The resulting contributions to worship contribute to forming a communal, inclusive and sensory worship culture.

The *Sourcebook* addresses all *three levels of worship*, action, functions and purposes. The three levels are described explicitly and are implicit throughout the resource as youth reflect on and plan worship actions with attention to the functions they accomplish and purposes they achieve. The *Sourcebook* does not merely equip youth with the qualifications for worship leadership, such as public speaking and an understanding of the language used in worship, but encourages the development of the attributes of worship leadership through engaging activities, intentional individual and communal reflection, and the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Youth worship leadership as *catechism* is embraced in teaching youth the nature and meaning of current worship practices. At the same time, youth are encouraged to contribute their ideas and suggestions to the worship planning process calling attention to their *ministry* role and unique ability to meet the needs of the congregation. The needs of youth for identity, belonging and autonomy in the context of adult abandonment, postmodernity and consumerism are addressed through integration into worship leadership, as facilitated by this resource.

The *Youth Worship Sourcebook* addresses barriers to youth worship leadership. The *Sourcebook* teaches youth to expect to be engaged in worship. It provides appropriate ways youth can contribute to worship as a group, accounting for the diverse gifts and levels of commitment of individuals. The *Sourcebook* strives to create a unified vision for worship that contains diverse understandings. Cultural miscommunication is acknowledged and attended to in teaching the meaning and purpose of current worship language and practice and creating appropriate contexts for youth involvement. The politics of change are circumvented through allowing the gradual integration of youth into worship leadership, one aspect of worship at a time. Although radical change is possible within this model, it is equally possible to teach and prepare contributions in line with established congregational worship patterns. In an effort to develop positive group dynamics, group building activities begin most sessions. Balancing structures that channel the energies of youth with space to incorporate new worship forms and content encourages authentic youth contributions. Logistical concerns, including time and energy commitment, are addressed in providing manageable activities and clear instructions for adult and youth leaders. Short module length allows the curriculum to function within existing midweek and Sunday school programs. The *Worship Sourcebook* is expected to be used in addition to, not as a substitute for, biblical and theological Christian Education. The *Sourcebook*

may also be used in an intergenerational context. The *Youth Worship Sourcebook* expects a lot of youth and adult leaders but youth and adult leaders can also expect real results in the lives of youth and the worship of the entire community of faith.

Future directions for research

Given the centrality of worship in the life and faith of Mennonite congregations, there is very little theological reflection on worship within the Mennonite community. Since Mennonites are borrowing so frequently from worship traditions ranging from the charismatic to the high church liturgical, and incorporating worship forms from many global cultures, now is an appropriate time for more systematic theological analysis. Ecumenical relationships, the postmodern cultural context and the global character of the Mennonite church are three issues that would be especially worth exploring.

Contemporary Mennonites have also failed to engage in serious theological reflection on the developmental stage of adolescence. The need for exploration of the significance and meaning of the stage of accountability so central in the Believers Church tradition is intensified in the context of the contemporary culture of extended adolescence and adult abandonment. The relationship between participation in the community of faith, church membership, and baptism could receive particular attention. The place of adolescents with diverse relationships to the church at the Lord's Supper could also be explored.

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