THE INFLUENCE OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE, SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT,
AND FRIENDSHIP IN THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION AT
ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SAN FRANCISCO

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Dedication

To Rick Fabian and Donald Schell.
Who, with Ellen Schell founded the Church of St. Gregory of Nyssa.
God grant them many years!

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To acknowledge any individual or group of individuals for supporting me in the course of this project is necessarily to omit someone; apologies to those who have helped, and whom I forget to mention. That being said, I could not have accomplished this thesis without the support of my advisor, Ruth Meyers. For her support, her pushing me always deeper into the material, and her belief in my ability – thank you. The other members of my committee were similarly supportive, maintaining a high standard for me even when I was not quite sure I was able to reach it. To Paula Nesbitt and Susanna Singer – thank you. Three parishioners of St. Gregory's engaged both their experience of the congregation and their professional abilities to aid me in crafting the research questions and protocols for this study. To Lynn Dolce, Kelsey Menehan, and Judith Tucker – thank you. Without the professional support of my colleagues, Sanford Dole, Sara Miles, Sylvia Miller-Mutia, and Sherri Wood, this study could not have been accomplished. For their filling in the gaps while I worked feverishly to complete this thesis – thank you. The congregation of St. Gregory of Nyssa – heart of my heart, companions on the journey, co-ministers of the Good News of Christ – to them I owe, not only a debt of gratitude, but also the satisfaction in working to create a congregation of unique beauty and steadfast joy. To each one – thank you. Among the members of St. Gregory's, I owe particular gratitude to the research participants in this study. The candor and pleasure they communicated in their research interviews allowed me to do my work. To each one – thank you. Finally, thank you to my husband, Grant Martin. Without him, I would be less of a priest, less of a scholar, and less of a man. You press me to pursue truth, despite the cost. All my love.

Maundy Thursday, 2014

The Influence of Aesthetic Experience, Social Engagement, and Friendship
in The Process of Transformation at
St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, San Francisco

Paul D. Fromberg

Abstract

This study demonstrates the way that transformation in congregational life takes place and states the influences in the process, at St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, San Francisco. Two factors, aesthetic experience and social engagement, were initially proposed as influencing transformation. A third factor, friendship, emerged from the research data as an additional influence in transformation. At the conclusion of the study, recommendations are offered to congregations that seek to influence transformation in their members' lives. The methodologies used in the development of this study include grounded theory, phenomenology and ethnography. This study includes a qualitative data analysis of fourteen hours of research interviews with members of St. Gregory's.

The definition of transformation is influenced by the theory of transformational learning developed by Jack Mezirow. The work of other researchers gives examples of transformation and is included in the study. Theologians and other scholars, including Hans Urs von Balthasar, John de Gruchy, Elaine Scarry, Max Weber, Gordon Lathrop and Alexander Schmemann are referenced in this study, and their analysis is used to explicate the influences on transformation listed above.

St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church is a congregation that values both aesthetic experience, the community's life in art, and social engagement, the community's life in action, as part of its shared experience in ministry. St. Gregory's organizes its community life on the basis of God's friendship with all people. Friendship

with God comes with the expectation that, in it, people's lives will be transformed by divine love. This study urges the church to believe in the power of God to transform the lives of congregational members. Congregations that utilize the findings in this study will be more able to foster communities whose members can work to create more vibrant, generative and evangelistic communities.

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Introduction

The first time that I stepped into the Church of St. Gregory of Nyssa, San Francisco, I was on the verge of losing my vocation. I had worked for a large urban cathedral for more than ten years, first as a layperson and then as a priest. I had learned the art of priest-craft with keen attention to the right way of performing my work in the church. I had succeeded in my areas of responsibility and achieved a measure of professional standing among my colleagues. Despite all of this, I found the work dispiriting. What I discovered at St. Gregory's was something that I had only vaguely imagined: a congregation that cared more about doing its work *well* than doing it the *right* way. As my affiliation with St. Gregory's continued over the years, ultimately resulting in a call to be rector in 2008, I learned that doing the work of the church *well* was infinitely more rewarding than doing it *right*. In this, I experienced transformation. I found that what we were doing at St. Gregory's had the potential to transform people's understanding of themselves as participants and leaders in the church. I found that when people have real work to do in the church it changes lives, and this change is generative; more people find their lives changed by participating in the congregation. I found that my work did not have to be boring, and I began to suspect that participating in the life of a congregation had the power to change people's lives. Perhaps it was this desire to change that brought people to St. Gregory's.

St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church is a congregation that values both aesthetic experience, the community's life in art, and social engagement, the community's life in action, as part of its shared experience in ministry. It is a community

that welcomes all people to come and freely receive the gifts that God is bestowing in the midst of its common life, and to express those gifts in the congregation and the world around it. St. Gregory's relies on the work of each person for the sake of its shared identity as the church. It seeks to remove ministry from the domain of a select, professional class; it is a community of amateurs. Joining this desire to de-professionalize ministry with its high value on both aesthetic experience and social engagement results in a congregation of creative, engaged, empowered and motivated people. St. Gregory's is a community where people can experiment and test out ideas about their lives. A person does not have to be accomplished in order to have a creative stake in the community. St. Gregory's believes that people grow and change on the basis of doing the work that the community needs to fulfill its purpose. Examples of this dynamic can be found in the congregation's shared life and the personal experience of its members.

This study will examine the question of transformation in congregational life and the variables that strengthen transformation in the lives of St. Gregory's members. Aesthetic experience and social engagement were initially proposed as exercising influence in the process of transformation. Another variable, friendship, emerged from the research data as a variable that influences transformation. I will explore these variables and the ways that they operate as separate phenomena and the ways they interact.

The first question that must be addressed is the definition of transformation. Polling data suggests that people attend church for two primary reasons, spiritual growth and belief in God.[1] It is reasonable to assume that this indicates an interest in change.

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[1] Frank Newport, "Just Why Do Americans Attend Church?" *Gallup* (April 6, 2007): accessed December 3, 2013, http://www.gallup.com/poll/27124/Just-Why-Americans-Attend-Church.aspx.

Such an interest does not mean that the process of transformation is easy. Change is difficult for many congregants. Change involves giving up what is known for what is unknown, admitting one's limited ability to control life, and personal examination that discloses one's self to another. Nevertheless people continue to come to church, and hear the church's message of *metanoia*: reorientation, change, conversion of life, and transformation. I will look to the theory of transformational learning developed by Jack Mezirow to come to a definition of transformation. Mezirow's theory was developed in the context of adult learning. He found that the way adults learn begins with a crisis, or changed situation in life. From this experience comes personal reflection on data received as a result of the new reality. The process reaches its greatest capacity as one makes new meanings from previously held assumptions. His theory will be examined in greater depth, in chapter two. In addition, chapter two will analyze the work of six researchers who have studied the meaning of transformation in congregational life.

The primary variables in this study, aesthetic experience, social engagement, and friendship must also be defined. Among twentieth-century theologians who have focused their study in aesthetics the first who must be considered is Hans Urs von Balthasar. The depth with which Balthasar examines aesthetics has no comparison among modern writers. Balthasar states that beauty is active in the transformation of human life. He writes, "Before the beautiful – no, not really before but within the beautiful – the whole person quivers. He not only 'finds' the beautiful moving; rather, he experiences himself

as being moved and possessed by it."[2] I will use Balthasar and his commentators as one source in defining theological aesthetics and their exemplification in congregational life.

Another theologian who deals with the intersection of aesthetics, transformation and social engagement is John de Gruchy. Writing within a South African context, de Gruchy contends that social injustice causes ugliness. De Gruchy supports the idea that beauty and justice are dependent on each other. He writes,

> Art's main contribution to social justice may well be its iconoclastic function. It is equally true that only an understanding of beauty that has been chastened by exposure to the gross inhumanities and hypocrisies of our century and others can be considered as a potential source of transformation.[3]

I will use de Gruchy's analysis as a source to examine aesthetics and its influence in social engagement in congregational life.

Elaine Scarry is the Walter M. Cabot Professor of Aesthetics and the General Theory of Value at Harvard University. Her 1999 work *On Beauty and Being Just* explores the meaning of beauty as it relates to justice. She writes, "Beauty assists us in our attention to justice."[4] Her work is a defense of beauty as politically and socially meaningful. Where society diminishes beauty, Scarry claims, justice itself is undermined. I will use Scarry's work in my analysis of aesthetics and social engagement.

I will include the work of two liturgists, Gordon Lathrop and Alexander Schmemann, in this study in order to show that the liturgy is a location of aesthetic experience, social engagement, and friendship in congregational life. Both of these

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[2] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, *Vol. 1: Seeing the Form*, ed. Joseph Fessio, S.J. and John Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (New York: Ignatius Press, 2009), loc. 247, Google Books.
[3] John W. de Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 99.
[4] Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 86.

scholars prove useful in the study of St. Gregory's. The liturgy developed in the congregation is a hybrid of Eastern and Western Christian traditions. Lathrop speaks from the Western Christian tradition, and Schmemann from the Eastern Christian tradition. Each addresses aspects of the particular liturgy developed at St. Gregory's.

I will touch on the sociological insight of Max Weber as it relates to the points of agreement and disagreement between religion and art. Weber clearly describes the relationship between art and religion, and the way that the relationship between the two social phenomena have evolved in human history.

My theological methodology for the project emphasizes praxis. I believe that the community comes to understand God through its actions. Reflection on praxis is the beginning of theological insight. The everyday occurrence of beauty and justice are categories that reveal the action of God in the world. St. Gregory's members report these experiences to the community as a normal part of its common life; the community hears such reports as a way of listening for the voice of God in the midst of members' lives.

This study will offer recommendations to congregations on ways to influence transformation, and what are the influence of aesthetic experience, social engagement, and friendship in this process. The field research for this thesis is a participant action study. I developed the interview protocol and research questions with the assistance of three co-researchers who are members of the parish. I conducted seventeen separate interviews with members of St. Gregory's, asking each participant an identical set of questions. The length of each interviewed ranged from thirty to ninety minutes. Grounded theory is this study's primary methodology for analyzing this data, but it leans into the research methodologies of phenomenology and ethnography. Although the primary data

source is from the participant interviews, the study also gathers data from small groups in the parish, direct observation of members, and observation at other parish events. I have generated concepts and categories from the data using an open coding process. I used these concepts and categories to offer recommendations to congregations that want to empower transformation in the lives of their members. Finally, I utilized cultural artifacts from the community and the ways that they represent symbols of transformation in participants' experiences.

This study demonstrates the ways that transformation in congregational life takes place and the influence of aesthetic experience, social engagement, and friendship on transformation. Congregations that utilize these insights will learn how their members can work to create more vibrant, generative and evangelistic communities.

Chapter 1

The Situation

Human virtue and knowledge will always, under all circumstances, fall short of God, but in love, in desire, humanity has that about it which answers to, corresponds with, the divine Infinity.

R.A. Norris [5]

Richard Fabian and Donald Schell founded St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in 1978. Their hope was to create an intentionally experimental congregation that would press the liturgical limits of the Episcopal Church's new Book of Common Prayer. The founders began to imagine St. Gregory's as a place where the liturgy would form the community. They described a congregation that was primarily a place uninhibited by received ideas about how a congregation of the Episcopal Church should operate. Instead, they wanted to start a community of Christ's Church firmly rooted in the gift of God's grace to people of all faiths – or no faith at all. They wanted to start a community where this extravagant gift of love was experienced week by week in the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood. So it is from the altar that the community discovers its identity. Each one is none other than God's friend, as are all human beings. People are made friends of God by the loving service of Christ. Friendship with God comes freely; it comes as an expression of the eternal love that is God the Holy Trinity, and it comes with an expectation that human lives will be transformed in God's love. Thirty years after its founding, the congregation called me to be the second rector of the church. Many

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[5] Richard Norris, "The Soul Takes Flight: Gregory of Nyssa and the Song of Songs," *Anglican Theological Review* 80, (1998): 531, accessed April 5, 2014, http://0-search.ebscohost.com. grace.gtu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rlh&AN=1361816&site=ehost-live.

changes took place between the founding of the parish and my call to be the parish leader. However, the initial hope of creating an intentional community that was formed and transformed by the liturgy of the church was undiminished. The congregation's work in making the liturgy demonstrates this.

I am never the first person to arrive at St. Gregory's on a Sunday morning; someone always gets there ahead of me. "Good morning Paul!" Sally greets me with an affectionate embrace when I walk into the building. "I just have one question for you…" Unlike my experience in other congregations I have served, St. Gregory's does not expect that the rector will do everything. There is much work to be done before the morning liturgy begins at St. Gregory's: music books to be set out, chalices and plates to set on the altar, the gospel book to be marked at the day's readings, oil lamps to fill and light, charcoal discs to light for the thuribles, guests and visitors to welcome. Sally asks, "Are you preaching on the first reading or the Gospel today?" She has been volunteering as a lay leader in the early liturgy for two years. After a year and a half she decided she was ready to make a commitment to membership in the parish. St. Gregory's volunteer cadre of liturgical leaders accomplishes the majority of the work preparing the liturgy. For the first of the two Sunday morning liturgies, there are two liturgical leaders: one who is responsible for setting up the room and the other who is responsible for leading the congregation through the worship service. These volunteers work at least an hour before the 8:30 liturgy and complete their tasks some 30 minutes after the service's conclusion. A separate team of liturgical leaders takes on the work for the 10:45 service, beginning their preparations about 30 minutes before the service begins. This second team is composed of one person for the set-up work and three others for leadership during the

liturgy. These volunteers come from every demographic in the congregation: young adults, children, retired people, clergy, laypeople, men and women. Sometimes one or another of St. Gregory's staff members recruits the liturgical leaders, but most of them ask to be involved in liturgical leadership. Sally, a quiet, middle-aged woman who lives some distance from St. Gregory's, asked to be included in the liturgical leaders' team. There are always surprises to be found when people step into this role: sometimes the most introverted member makes a fine liturgical leader while a genuine extrovert has trouble directing his or her energy to the work of leadership. Despite my first impression of Sally as someone who might prefer to observe more than lead the liturgy, she has become quite accomplished in leading the people in prayer. Everyone is welcome to test out leadership at St. Gregory's; no one is excluded.

The space of St. Gregory's church building was designed for the community's liturgy, based on Louis Bouyer's analysis of Syrian Christian synagogues from the fourth to the sixth centuries.[6] The building is divided into two areas, one for the Liturgy of the Word of God and the other for the Liturgy of the Holy Communion. The arrangement of each room is based on both a functional and a theological understanding of the liturgy that the community makes together. One walks through the great wooden doors of the church building into the area set aside for the Holy Communion, called the rotunda. At the entrance are two stands holding icons, a single candle burning between them. Nearby is the welcome table. Just beyond the entrance is the altar table. It sits alone in the center of the rotunda, an octagonal space some sixty feet across and three stories tall. Along the top two-thirds of the walls is painted a heroic series of figures, each connected to the

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[6] Richard Fabian, "Worship at St. Gregory's" (Unpublished manuscript, San Francisco, August 6, 2001), accessed May 8, 2014, http://www.saintgregorys.org/Resources_pdfs/Worship_at_St._Gregorys.pdf.

other in a circle dance being led by the magnificent icon of Christ. Unlike some depictions, this icon of Christ is dark-skinned with flowing dreadlocks. The figure is standing; one knee is raised in dance, the right hand holding a cross. With the free hand Christ beckons the other figures to follow him in his dance. Among the dancing saints, there are familiar subjects from iconology: Paul and Barnabas, Mary Magdalene and Theosebia. There are also less traditional subjects as well: Malcolm X and Cesar Chavez, Ella Fitzgerald and Li Tim Oi. All of the saints have a hand on the shoulder of the one next to them; all of them have one knee raised in dance. On the side of the rotunda opposite Christ, the sky is dark and spangled with stars. Surrounding Christ the sky is gold and red as at the sunrise. Clerestory windows around the rotunda illuminate the whole.

Across from the front entrance, outside a set of tall glass doors, there is a rock sculpture over which water continually flows; this is the baptismal font. The orientation of the altar table and the font is intended to demonstrate the community's theological appreciation of the two dominical sacraments. First, all are welcome to receive the bread and wine, Christ's Body and Blood, from the altar. Later, those who have not been baptized are encouraged to receive the water, anointing and laying on of hands of Holy Baptism. Richard Fabian writes that this arrangement of our building reflects a biblical understanding of the relationship between Eucharist and Baptism,

> Some modern designers place the baptismal font at the entrance for this purpose, indicating that baptism serves as a gateway to the Eucharist. But Biblical critics argue Jesus abandoned baptismal washing, and instead chose table fellowship as his prophetic sign for incorporation into the Kingdom.[7]

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[7] Fabian, "Worship," 28.

The choice to place the altar table before the font makes this point visually. People are often surprised by this arrangement of the space; sometimes they are scandalized by it. St. Gregory's takes seriously the Gospel imperative to welcome all people to receive the gifts of God from the altar.

On the base of the altar, facing the main entrance, is carved and gilded a verse from the fifteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel, "ΟΥΤΟΣ ΑΜΑΡΤΩΛΟΥΣ ΠΡΟΣΔΕΞΕΤΑΙ ΚΑΙ ΣΥΝΕΣΘΙΕΙ ΑΥΤΟΙΣ" [this one welcomes sinners and dines with them].[8] Jesus' opponents spoke these words as an insult and challenge to his honor. However, Jesus continued his scandalous practice, dining with the worthy and unworthy, the unprepared and the pious; this is the core meaning of St. Gregory's practice of eucharistic welcome. Just as Jesus welcomed all people to share his table, the community extends the same invitation to those who come to worship. On the opposite side of the altar, facing the doors to the font, is similarly carved words from the seventh-century bishop and theologian Isaac of Nineveh, "Did not our Lord share his table with tax collectors and harlots? So then, do not distinguish between worthy and unworthy, all must be equal in your eyes to love and serve."[9] These words indicate St. Gregory's baptismal theology. In Baptism God prepares each one to continue the work of Jesus, serving others as Christ serves. Those who are baptized take on the new humanity of Jesus Christ.

On Sunday morning people are busily preparing for the service. Sally carries music books to place on the fifty chairs needed for this liturgy. Sylvia, St. Gregory's Associate Rector, is arranging the several spaces around the church for children. There

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[8] Luke 15:2, NRSV.
[9] Fabian, "Worship," 6.

are four children's spaces, each with small chairs, cushions, books, Playdough and finger labyrinths. Sylvia explains, "We made the Playdough last week and scented it with rose oil for the season of Advent." The worker's conversation is subdued and focused. Wes appears from the vestry wearing a white alb and colorfully tie-dyed chasuble, a modified *bubu* from West Africa. Wes will serve as the liturgical leader for the service. His job is to make announcements, recruit volunteers, bid the prayers and have general oversight of the service. "I asked the visiting seminarian to read the Gospel this morning," Wes tells me. Sanford is similarly dressed. Sanford Dole is St. Gregory's music director and will serve as the cantor for the liturgy. The cantor chants the psalms, leads the hymns and directs all of the musical parts of the service. Sanford says, "Don't forget that we're using the new music that I wrote for Communion, do you remember how it goes?" I do not remember, so Sanford shows me my part of the music and sings it along with me. "Don't worry," he adds, "if you can't remember it I'll just sing it along with you during the service." There is no organ or piano; all of the music is sung without accompaniment except for the occasional use of a drum and other rhythm instruments. Those with solo singing parts in the liturgy support each other when we cannot quite find the correct notes to sing. In the kitchen, some are making coffee and setting out food on platters and in bowls. Melinda quickly steps out of the kitchen, "I don't see any cream for coffee hour, so I asked Howard to run over to the store and pick some up." All of the work required for the liturgy and the coffee hour is shared with the greatest number of people possible. Following the liturgy, these refreshments are placed on the altar so that the congregation may continue their eucharistic fellowship during coffee hour.

More people begin to arrive for the early service: parents with young children, single men and women, older people and middle-aged people. Everyone dresses casually. One person greets visitors and welcomes them to the service. Members talk with each other freely and make a special effort to greet those who are attending for the first time. A visiting priest from Canada has just arrived to spend a week of her sabbatical in residence with the community; this will be her first opportunity to worship here and she has many questions. Sara Miles, St. Gregory's director of ministry, talks to her about the relationship between the liturgy and the Food Pantry that Sara started. "We give the food away in this space," Sara indicates the room around the altar, "just like we will give the bread and wine this morning." St. Gregory's does not have a parish hall or other large meeting space, which means that the Food Pantry, adult education, one-on-one conversations and socializing happen in the sanctuary. For those who are seeking silence the side chapel is available. The busyness in the sanctuary is particularly high before the later morning service. Not only do people greet each other, the choir is rehearsing for the days prelude and anthems. The atmosphere in the sanctuary is seldom quiet or somber; it is first of all a gathering place for people who see each other weekly. In addition to regular parishioners, on most Sundays there are a number of visitors; nametags identify them. Members of the church put on round metal name badges; those who are visiting write their names on adhesive nametags, red colored for the first time visitors and black for returning visitors. Sally greets a couple with two young children. The parents are looking up at the huge icon of the dancing saints. Sally gives them a booklet that describes each of the 90 figures depicted. She points up to one of the figures, "There's St. Francis, next to the wolf." There are other icons to see, placed around the building on

pillars and stands. Although a few are antiques, members of the congregation paint most of the icons. St. Gregory's is a community of people who take pleasure in creating art that can be shared and used by the entire congregation. Everyone is welcome to take part in making worship materials.

The other of the two rooms that make up the sanctuary is the seating area. Rows of padded chairs face each other across a central platform, or *bema,* about thirty feet in length. At one end is the lectern, flanked by columns. On one column, there is a bowl for burning incense and on the other a *Nasrani* menorah or oil lamp from the Mar Thoma Church of Kerala in India. In front of the lectern, there is a nineteenth century menorah, from Europe. At the other end of the platform is the presider's chair. It is a large *howdah* or elephant saddle from India. On either side of the presider's chair are seats for the liturgical leader and cantor. By the cantor's chair, a group of Japanese temple bells rests on the floor. Wes lights the candles and the oil lamps as people take their seats, then adds incense to the burning coals, adding smoke and sweet fragrance to the room. Ritual objects from many different cultures around the world inform St. Gregory's aesthetic. This use both indicates the universal quality of God's saving love and is a reminder that the Gospel is not the church's alone, but belongs to the whole world. Multi-sensory experiences, such as incense, art, bells and human touch, are used throughout the liturgy. This use expresses the community's appreciation of God's action in the Incarnation and God's expression in the creation.

As the presider of the liturgy, I am similarly dressed to the liturgical leaders and the cantor. The only difference in my vesture is the addition of a long strip of cloth, the stole or *pallium* draped across my shoulders, one end hanging at the front and one at the

back. All the leaders for the liturgy wear chasubles over their albs. The leaders are vested in this way for two reasons. First, it indicates to visitors those who can help them to navigate the service and the culture of St. Gregory's. Instead of assuming that everyone who is present knows how the service works, the assumption is that there is at least one person present who has no idea what is going to be happening. Congregation members are disciplined to speak to the first-time visitor before we speak to anyone else. The second reason is to communicate that leadership is shared in the service. Although the ordained have a particular authority in the liturgy, it is always dependent on the authority of the other leaders and the rest of the assembly. Shared leadership is one of the chief goals in the liturgy. If there is some piece of work that an ordained person can share with a layperson, then it is shared. The roles of the liturgical leaders and the presider are functional rather than hierarchically ordered. We deliberately seek to obscure the question of status while being very clear about the roles that each person plays in the liturgy. This practice dates from the earliest days of the congregation. Fabian writes,

> All ministers, lay or ordained, do their work among the laypeople rather than in a reserved chancel space. We elevate the preacher and readers for the congregation's convenience in hearing and seeing what they do. Otherwise all stand, sit and move together.[10]

As the rector of the church, this has been a tremendously liberating thing for me and has required me to understand the congregation and myself in a new way. I was formed as a priest believing that I had privileges and responsibilities in the liturgy that nobody else could touch. Almost none of them were my canonical responsibilities; most were only the turf that I was taught to carefully guard. The community has found that the core value of liturgical leadership – among the ordained and the non-ordained – is giving work away.

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[10] Fabian, "Worship," 4.

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So a visitor who comes to the liturgy will see many people active in the service. Members light the lamps and candles. Members take turns proclaiming the scriptures. Members assist in serving communion. Members speak their own intercessions during the prayers. Members make coffee and serve it. Members clean up when it is time to go home. Members do this week after week. Because each person can call out his or her own prayers, proclaim the scriptures, share experience, light the lamps, serve communion, and take on a dozen other jobs, the community recalls where its corporate identity and relationships are rooted: in the worship and praise of God shared freely. A premium is placed on giving work away; letting people do things not because they have to, but because they freely may. People feel as if the work of the church is their own, because it is. What I have discovered in sharing my authority with the members of the community is that my own work as a priest is enriched. I am free to give my work away in ways that amplify the work of God in our midst. As a result, the congregation is filled with people of all ages and stages of life that are competent as leaders.

Sanford begins the early service by gently ringing the Japanese temple bells by the chair. He calls the congregation's attention to a half-sheet insert in the music book used at all the liturgies. "Everything that you'll need for the liturgy is in your music book; the opening greeting is printed at the top of the insert," he tells the congregation. There is no description of the service, no bulletin, no printed readings for the day. The congregation's responses are all sung; the congregation never speaks lines in unison in the service. When it is time to sing, the liturgical leader announces the page number where the music is printed in the book. The first line of hymns, chants and canticles are typically sung in unison with subsequent lines being sung in harmony. Sanford

announces this and encourages people to sing, "Whatever vocal part fits best with your voice." At St. Gregory's the entire congregation is the choir. As stated earlier, there is no accompaniment; all of the singing is a cappella. At the later service, there is a choir that sings together three times in the course of the service. When they are not singing together, choir members sit throughout the congregation. There is always a trained singer sitting nearby to support those who may feel less competent to sing. This practice supports St. Gregory's belief that everyone who comes to the liturgy is competent to take part in making the liturgy happen. Both first-time visitors and longtime members share the responsibility and pleasure of singing. Many report the ease with which they can sing and the beauty of their own voices singing in harmony. Recent studies have shown that when music and prayer are joined a real effect on human consciousness is achieved.[11] The adage "The one who sings prays twice" seems to be objectively the case. In the liturgy at St. Gregory's people learn how to be a community while making music. The sense of community that is created while singing is fostered by the need to remain attentive to the other voices, the common purpose of many voices creating a single work of art, the physical and mental exertion required in singing, and the transcendent sensation of creative labor. One of the visitors this morning has a particularly lovely tenor voice; following the service I overhear Sanford speaking to him about joining the volunteer choir.

In the course of both the early and later services, the members of the assembly are given authority and responsibility for the liturgy. There are extended periods of silence. A

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[11] Ansuman Biswas, "The Music of What Happens: Mind, Meditation, and Music as Movement," in *Music and Consciousness: Philosophical, Psychological, and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. David Clarke and Erik F. Clarke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 108.

two-minute silence after each reading and the sermon is initiated by ringing the deeply resonate temple bells. Silences conclude with the sharp, high-pitched ring of *tingsha* bells. These luxurious periods of silence are provided in the liturgy so that the congregation may appropriate what has just been spoken on their own terms. The desire is for people to rest deeply in the readings of scripture and the proclamation of the Gospel. Following the silence after the sermon the preacher invites the congregation to share aloud their own experience of God's action in their lives. This "sermon sharing" is initiated by the preacher's invitation, "We continue the sermon by sharing our own experiences, so if something that you've heard today reminds you of your own story I invite you to stand and share. Listen to each other and listen to the silence because God is speaking in both." People raise their hands, and the preacher calls on them individually to stand and speak. The preacher carefully directs people to share from their experiences rather than from their opinions. Instead of offering a critique or correction of the sermon, people are encouraged to share their stories. One of the assumptions made in the liturgy is that God wants to be known and is ready to be disclosed in the stories that everyone has to offer; this is another deliberate sharing of authority between the preacher and the assembly. In order to elicit experiences from the congregation the preacher must include some lived narrative from his or her own experience in the sermon. If the preacher does not include personal experience, it results in superficial conversation, in the sermon sharing. The liturgical leader begins the prayers, but individual members of the assembly say their own intercessions aloud.

At the conclusion of the liturgy of the Word of God, the whole assembly moves into the rotunda for the Holy Communion. Rather than a mass of individuals moving, the

assembly goes to the table in a processional step while singing. Wes announces, "We'll go up to altar together in step singing from your insert *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*…the step is very simple. Beginning on your right foot, we go right-left-right-back. Place your hand on the shoulder of the person in front of you and the cantor will tell us when to step off." The whole assembly moves as one. The right hand is placed on the right shoulder of the person in line ahead. Darla appears with a drum and keeps a steady beat so that the assembly may move together. The people are close together in a way that is affectionate without being overly intimate. The lines of people progress closer and closer to the altar table, then wrap around it in spiraling lines. When the hymn is completed, and everyone has gathered closely around the altar table the presider bids the peace, "Christ has come and is making peace right now, turn to those near you and share it. The Peace of the Lord be always with you." This physical closeness and communal action are intended to signify what is accomplished in the Eucharistic Prayer: as one Body we give thanks to God for our salvation and dedicate ourselves to Christ's service in the world. Everyone stands closely around the altar table as the presider chants the prayer. Along with the presider, some members of the assembly hold their hands in the *orans* position during the Eucharistic Prayer. Others in the assembly look upward to the figures of dancing saints depicted on the walls. There are children sitting on the floor at their parent's feet, or standing closely by the altar watching the action of the Eucharistic Prayer. Following the Great Thanksgiving the gifts of bread and wine are shared among the assembly. The presider and other liturgical leaders distribute the bread while the chalice is passed from person to person. Children and adults help with the administration of the chalice. Everyone shares communion with everyone else. Fabian comments on this

practice, "Thus every Christian receives Christ's body and blood from another Christian, and so from the Church; and the whole company shares Jesus' prophetic ministry, welcoming sinners to the table and feeding them."[12]

The liturgy concludes with congregational dance. While the final hymn is sung, which we call the carol, meaning a sung dance, we dance to a simple Greek-style folk dance, going around and around the altar table. Once again the members of the assembly are close to each other. Sanford says, "Place your right hand on the shoulder of the person next to you and form several lines. The step is very simple: step to the right, put your left foot behind, step to the right put your left foot in front, step to the right, raise your right knee and put it down, raise your left knee and put it down. Then repeat the whole thing over and over. And I'll give you the pitch for the first line of *Simple Gifts*." Darla moves closely around the altar table, along with the cantor; she beats out the rhythm of the dance. Once everyone is moving in step, the whole assembly sings and dances together around the table. No one receives an explicit exemption from the dance. People are never warned to participate only if they feel comfortable. The assumption is that telling someone to do something only if they feel comfortable implies that what they are asked will be uncomfortable. Those who wish to stand back and watch the dance are free to do so; chairs are always available for the infirm. The expressions on people's faces during the dance range from bemusement to concentration to bliss. At the conclusion, there is always laughter and sometimes applause from visitors. The experience of congregational dance puts everyone on the same level of vulnerability. The dismissal, the high point of energy in the liturgy, concludes the service. Melinda and Karl bring food and drink out

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[12] Fabian, "Worship," 15.

for everyone to enjoy. People remain in the rotunda or find places for quiet conversation in the seating area, for up to an hour following the liturgy.

St. Gregory's is a congregation that works together to make the liturgy. Insight is gained in the ways that the liturgy forms the people of God by paying attention to what happens when the community gathers in prayer. In the liturgy, experience always precedes opinion; prayer always comes before standardization. When the community worships together, it learns how to worship together. For example, St. Gregory's did not begin as a congregation that offered Communion to everyone irrespective of baptism. It was in the practice of giving communion to the congregation that the practice of unbounded communion began. The liturgy is understood, and sometimes adapted, in the act of worship. People sometimes like change and sometimes they do not like it. Sometimes a change is difficult, sometimes it is easy, but the issue at hand is not merely about personal preference. St. Gregory's values change not for the sake of change, or novelty, but for the conversion of life. Change happens when the liturgy embraces flexibility and welcomes newness. The experience of liturgy means coming together with others in need of *metanoia* – repentance – both old friends and strangers, children and adults, turning toward God. Repentance is based not in the sense of guilt, but in a desire to be remade.

None of the volunteers who assist in the morning liturgy had to understand everything about their duties before they began to serve. All that they needed was a desire to serve and a willingness to grow through the experience of service. St. Gregory's welcomes the prepared as well as the unprepared to encounter the living God in the midst of the lively people. There are no membership requirements or training minimums for

those who want to serve in the liturgy. St. Gregory's expects that the act of worship will make people powerful and wise and expand their vision of God, the world and the self. An assumption that is held at St. Gregory's is that one's experience in the church will result in transformation. But what precisely is transformation? Moreover, what are the influences that facilitate transformation?

The purpose of this study is to explore these two questions as they relate to St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church. The distinct nature of St. Gregory's makes it a valuable focus of study. Is it possible that transformation is directly influenced by the way the community makes church together? An overview of the research of seven different researchers will lead to a clearer understanding of the meaning of transformation at St. Gregory's.

Chapter 2

Transformation in Social Groups

There is a growing body of literature that addresses the phenomenon of transformation in social groups, including religious congregations. The work of six theorists is examined in this chapter. Each one investigates the ways in which transformation occurs, and the factors that influence the process of transformation. Additional data regarding transformation in congregational life are taken from Gallup polling data. Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory is used by two of the theorists in their work. His contributions to the field are significant in this study. We begin by an examination of the transformation of faith.

The Journey of Faith

Brian Ward's 2012 study of the psychological phenomenon of faith and its transformation examines this process in terms of journey and metamorphosis.[13] Ward writes that faith is, "proposed as encompassing the human experience."[14] Faith is the state of being in which one's life moves forward, a fundamental aspect of one's identity; it is not a phenomenon relegated to formal religious practice. The loss of faith touches the existential experience of being human; it is a destabilizing experience, requiring a new approach to living. Ward uses Paul Ricoeur's movement from a first naïveté to a second naïveté to describe the loss and regaining of faith.[15] Moving from a state of innocence

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[13] Brian L. Ward, "On the Loss and Transformation of Personal Faith: An Empirical-Phenomenological Analysis" (Ph.D diss., The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, 2012), accessed February 5, 2014, Proquest.

[14] Ward, 9.

[15] Ward, 2.

means that the consciousness once embraced cannot be regained; only a new experience and appropriation of faith will suffice to give meaning to life. It is at this point that Ward begins his description of the process of transformation. Of his research participants he writes, "The process of transformation, then, consisted of being very cognizant of the loss of past innocence while attempting to reconcile a faith within the existential given of suffering."[16] Ward understands transformation in life as a process that is destabilizing while at the same time liberating. The new appropriation of faith is as costly as it is valuable, requiring a new consciousness. The process of growing from naïve faith to mature faith is essential for transformation in life. Ward writes of his research participants,

> In transforming to a more seeking and exploring faith, one underwent both exhilaration and anxiety. That is, the transformation of faith surfaced as an encounter with existential freedom, both empowered and frightened by the gravity of authoring one's own engagements with existence. As the participants grasped the power of shaping their own meaning, they also grasped the accountability in following one's own path.[17]

Ward's research participants discovered the power of transformation in their lives by actively making meaning out of the experience of loss and freedom. He notes that this process is not automatic; loss of faith does not necessarily result in reclaiming faith. Making meaning, one step in the process of reclaiming faith, depends on conscious, personal reflection. This process requires stepping into the unknown, risking uncertainty where one had previously experienced certitude. It is in this unknown, unexplored psychic place that a new appropriation of faith leads to the process of transformation. He

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[16] Ward, 43.
[17] Ward, 174.

writes, "to be in faith is to be in constant change and existential motion."[18] Religious congregations exist in order to provide resources to their members on which to reflect and work toward this appropriation of faith. If congregations are gatherings of those seeking to grow in faith, and if Ward's contention holds true that being in faith is itself a process of transformation, then congregations have the potential to be places where transformation may be an expected event and a normal experience.

Why Do People Go to Church?

Recent data indicates that people go to church because it is the place where they are able to reflect on their experiences of faith. According to a 2007 Gallup poll, the primary reasons that Americans attend church are for religious and spiritual reasons.[19] Based on 562 adults who attend church at least monthly, 23% report doing so for spiritual growth and guidance and 20% in order to remain grounded and be inspired. Of those polled 15% report attending church because it is their faith, 15% attend in order to worship God, and 12% attend because they believe in God or in religion. As the data analysis of the poll states, this is not a great surprise. There are, however, surprises in these seemingly obvious findings. First, these reasons are about growth in consciousness and self-conception. Second, these reasons are imaginative; they have to do with personal self-image projected into the future. Third, these reasons occur within the context of community; they need the presence of others in order to be realized. These factors introduce a complexity and subtlety that warrants further analysis. It is reasonable to assume that there are additional factors that influence both religious and spiritual reasons

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[18] Ward, 52.
[19] Newport, "Just Why Do Americans Attend Church?"

for church attendance. These factors could affect people's experience of themselves as church attendees in ways that deepen their belief and increase their spiritual growth. If Brian Ward is correct in his analysis of the relationship between faith and transformation, then a plurality of those who attend church on a regular basis are in a process of transformation. What these individuals require is a process of reflection on their own experiences.

Personal reflection may be accomplished either in solitude or with others. Those who attend church have ample opportunity for both, depending on the context of their congregations. Additional polling data suggests that those who attend church regularly do so because of positive emotional interactions with others. The *2012 Gallup-Healthways Well Being Index* finds that churchgoers experience a positive emotional experience in relationship with their fellow parishioners.[20] Chaeyoon Lim writes that interaction with others heightens this experience, "across most religions, religious attendance is highest on Sunday, the day when regular churchgoers are most likely to socialize with their fellow congregants."[21] Citing Daniel Kahneman, Lim writes,

> "It is only a slight exaggeration to say that happiness is the experience of spending time with people you love and who love you." In fact, additional research based on one of the most comprehensive surveys of religion in America, the Faith Matters Survey suggests that how many close friends churchgoers have in their congregations explains higher life satisfaction among regular churchgoers. Moreover, the research found that friendship in church is more strongly correlated with life satisfaction than friendships in other contexts such as the workplace or a book club.[22]

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[20] Chaeyoon Lim, "In U.S., Churchgoers Boast Better Mood, Especially On Sundays," *Gallup* (March 22, 2012), accessed February 8, 2014, http://www.gallup.com/poll/153374/Churchgoers-Boast-Better-Mood-Especially-Sundays.aspx.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2011), quoted in Chaeyoon Lim, "In U.S., Churchgoers Boast Better Mood, Especially On Sundays," accessed

Congregations are uniquely able to provide their members with the kinds of relationships that provide the context for reflection on faith and transformation in life. As stated in Ward's research, this can be a destabilizing experience for many; they may find it difficult to accomplish alone. Reflection on one's life in the company of others provides the positive emotional context in which to experience transformation. It is also likely that the positive emotional experience of relationships in the congregation will draw people back to the congregation, a type of positive feedback loop. This ongoing relational system provides a safe, encouraging place for reflection on faith and transformation in life.

Art Facilitates Change

There are additional factors that influence the process of personal transformation in congregational life. Olga Lipina studies the way congregations use the arts in the process of transformation, particularly in terms of leadership development.[23] Her findings show that parishioners who take an active part in arts programs within their congregations not only experience transformation, but also discover their ability to take on leadership roles within the congregation. Lipina writes,

> For the congregants at Old West [the congregation in which she based her research], involvement in the arts program opens numerous new opportunities motivating them to grow spiritually. This transformative process leads participants of the arts program to the discovery of their leadership potentials.[24]

February 8, 2014, http://www.gallup.com/poll/153374/Churchgoers-Boast-Better-Mood-Especially-Sundays.aspx.

[23] Olga Lipina, "The Role of Arts in the Process of Leadership Formation and Ecclesial Transformation" (D.Min diss., Boston University School of Theology, 2010), accessed February 5, 2014, Proquest.

[24] Lipina, 95.

The arts have an historic place in congregational life of many denominations. Lipina finds that it is not simply the presence of art that influences transformation, but also the act of creating art. There are many ways in which parishioners may be involved in the life of a congregation; committees need staffing, Sunday school classes need teachers and meals must be prepared for those who are sick. Lipina describes a process that is not simply the experience of involvement in congregational service, but is specifically about participating in the creation of art. She attributes the unique power of the arts in the process of transformation to the ways that parishioners embody the Christian faith through their artistic endeavors.[25] Making art requires individuals to exercise multiple skills at one time; physical energy, intellectual ability, emotional commitment, and spiritual reflection are all needed to create art. The combination of discernment, commitment and hard work that artistic creation requires was sufficient to begin a process of transformation. She writes, "This process of redemptive transformation allows participants to experience self-awareness, personal empowerment, and improved ability for communication. This positive change cultivates participants' leadership qualities and expands participants' vision about their own potentials."[26] When people take an active role in making art as a part of their commitment to congregational service they are changed.

Individual transformation also influences systemic transformation. Lipina found that through making art, the experiences of her research participants influenced systemic transformation throughout the congregation. Her research affirms the Gallup polling data that indicate an increased sense of wellbeing and positive emotional relationships among

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[25] Lipina, 68.
[26] Lipina, 132.

those who attend church. She writes that creating art with a group resulted in "self-awareness, personal empowerment, and improved ability for communication."[27] Citing J. Nathan Corbitt and Vivian Nix-Early, Lipina defines transformation as an "intentional process of bringing about change in the world."[28] The effort of creating art, and the relational network of making art, gives energy to the process of transformation within the congregation. This energy has the power to extend beyond the congregation to the community of which it is a part. Lipina states that, "The process, which begins with the personal changes of the arts program's participants, leads to the transformation of the entire Old West community, and spreads the positive change even beyond the walls of the Old West Church." This kind of transformation requires those engaged in making art in the congregation to commit to an ongoing relationship with each other. Lipina describes the quality of this relationship as one in which, "The atmosphere of love, the presence of the Holy Spirit, the common values, and shared vision are implicitly present."[29] Transformation does not occur in a single moment, but is always a piece of a longer-term experience of sharing artistic creation with others in a context of loving support, sustained by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Finding Transformation in Service

Another factor that influences transformation is the experience of community service on behalf of a congregation. B.A. Hewitt addresses the relationship between

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[27] Ibid.

[28] J. Nathan Corbitt and Vivian Nix-Early, *Taking It to the Streets: Using the Arts to Transform Your Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 52, quoted in Olga Lipina, "The Role of Arts in the Process of Leadership Formation and Ecclesial Transformation" (D.Min diss., Boston University School of Theology, 2010), 139, accessed February 5, 2014, Proquest.

[29] Lipina, 143.

congregational service and transformation, drawing on insights from the service-learning movement of the past two decades.[30] Her study concerns the perspective transformation of persons who participate in service work sponsored by their congregations. She writes, "Research has shown service-learning to be an effective pedagogy in educational settings. This study confirms that the principles of service-learning transfer to congregational settings."[31] The principles that Hewitt names center on the actual service work done by congregations, the interactions that participants have with those their congregation serves, and a process of group reflection on the experience of service. She finds that both the interaction with the individuals that are served, as well as a reflective process on the experience, greatly increases the process of transformation.

She identifies one problem of transformation related to service-learning experiences; often the changes that take place make only a short-term impression on participants. Hewitt finds that one way to enhance the experience of transformation is with ongoing group reflection on community service. Without adequate reflection on experience, she finds that there is little sustained change in her research participants. Her research finds that with a commitment to reflection, "About half of the participants reported some sort of attitude change, resulting from their service experience, and again these reports reflected a range in the depth of that change."[32] Hewitt found that the deeper and more consistent the process of reflection the greater the experience of transformation for participants. Participants identified the content of their transformation

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[30] B.A. Hewitt, "Transforming Service: Applying Principles of Service-Learning to Congregational Settings of Service" (Ed.D diss., Peabody College for Teachers of Vanderbilt University, 2007), accessed February 8, 2014, Proquest.
[31] Hewitt, 1.
[32] Hewitt, 107.

as "a change in attitude that caused them to be more accepting and more inclusive of other people around them, in their communities back home."[33]

Another factor that influenced transformation was the degree to which participants interacted with those they served. Hewitt found that those who had a greater degree of interaction experienced greater depth and quality of transformation. She writes,

> Participants who reported perspective transformation begin realizing not only the reciprocal nature of the experience but also the mutuality of the experience. They begin seeing themselves and the community members as being equal partners, where the delineation between the two begins to blur.[34]

In cases where there was interaction between research participants and community members there was a growing sense of mutuality and a deepening of relationship. These interactions provided surprising insights for both groups. Hewitt writes that her research participants,

> Become more aware of the plight of others and of the complexities of the issues affecting their lives. This can be a difficult position, because participants often become aware of their own complicit participation in the systems that negatively impact the lives of the persons they are serving.[35]

Transformation in this instance includes an uncomfortable experience that creates a crisis for participants. Those who experienced transformation by serving the community, who also interacted with community members and participated in a process of group reflection, found it difficult to return to their previous ways of being. Hewitt concludes that congregations are able to increase the effectiveness of transformation in the lives of parishioners by recognizing that the combination of service and learning is a benefit to both participants and the community.

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[33] Ibid.
[34] Hewitt, 129.
[35] Ibid.

Transformative Learning Theory

The transformative learning theory of Jack Mezirow is a critical component of this study. Mezirow states that adult learning is most deeply effective when it includes a shift in self-understanding as well as acquiring new knowledge and skills. In 1978 Mezirow first used the term "transformation" in his research on women who had returned to college after an extended absence. His research examined the experience of 83 women in twelve different college programs.[36] Mezirow sought to understand what factors aided the learning of these scholars as they reentered higher education. His results showed that a key factor in a positive learning experience was the transformation of their perspective on themselves and the learning process. Mezirow listed ten steps in the learning process that led to perspective transformation in his subjects, as well as lasting changes in their lives:

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition of one's discontent and the process of transformation
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective [37]

The most significant factor in adult learning, according to Mezirow, is the process of critical self-reflection, leading to a new self-understanding, motivation and behavior.

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[36] An Andrew Kitchenham, "The Evolution of John Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory," *Journal of Transformative Education 6* (April 2008): 105.

[37] Jack Mezirow, "Transformative Learning Theory," in *Transformative Learning in Practice*, ed. Jack Mezirow and Edward W. Taylor (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 19.

The work of earlier theorists influences the development of Mezirow's learning theory. These include Thomas Kuhn's paradigm, Paulo Freire's conscientization, and Juergen Habermas' domains of learning.[38] Kuhn states that paradigms, or commonly shared sets of assumptions, provide a context within which to make meaning. Freire states that the way to free learners to gain greater knowledge is by developing a new consciousness or critical awareness with the power to transform the world. Habermas proposes that adults learn in the process of communicating with one another toward a common understanding of reality. It is primarily Habermas' work that influences Mezirow's critical theory of adult learning.

Habermas proposes three overarching areas of learning: the technical, the practical and the emancipatory.[39] He states that technical learning is simply absorbing facts about the area of inquiry; practical learning is the ability to master the particular social norms of the area of inquiry; emancipatory learning is an internal process of appropriating information and coming to a new self-knowledge. Habermas' findings led Mezirow to conclude that adult learning could only have lasting power if it resulted in perspective transformation. Mezirow adapts Habermas' theory and proposes three types of learning: instrumental, dialogic and self-reflective. According to this paradigm, people learn by mastering the content of the material being studied, seeing how to apply the material to actual situations, and the meaning of the material in relation to their own self-understanding.

As Mezirow's research subjects transitioned through the ten phases of learning they experienced learning in a way that not only made them functionally competent in

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[38] Kitchenham, 105.
[39] Kitchenham, 109.

their area of study, it transformed their fundamental perspective on themselves and the world. Mezirow continued to refine his theory. More than twenty years after his initial research he wrote,

> A defining condition of being human is our urgent need to understand and order the meaning of our experience, to integrate it with what we know to avoid the threat of chaos. If we are unable to understand, we often turn to tradition, thoughtlessly seize explanations by authority figures, or resort to various psychological mechanisms, such as projection and rationalization, to create imaginary meanings.[40]

The human need to create meaning is critical to adult learning and transformation. The creation of meaning takes place through a process of self-reflection that leads to new perspectives on one's own experience. Mezirow states that self-reflection must include three distinct types: content reflection, process reflection and premise reflection. Andrew Kitchenham defines these types of reflection as,

> Examining previous actions (content reflection or learning within meaning schemes) or where the actions and their related factors originated (process reflection or learning new meaning schemes), but when they consider a more global view, the reflection is much deeper, more complex, and involves transforming a series of meaning schemes (premise reflection or learning through meaning transformation).[41]

As one's perspective on life is reoriented by self-reflection new meanings must be made, and new schemes devised in order to live fully and with integrity. Self-reflection must be coupled with critical discourse, where one tests out his or her new schemes in relation to the experience of others.[42]

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[40] Jack Mezirow, "Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory," in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. by Jack Mezirow and Associates, 3-33 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 3.
[41] Kitchenham, 114.
[42] Kitchenham, 113.

Mezirow's theory is not only about the inner experience of reflection, but also includes a social exercise in dialogue.[43] Transformation relies on both internal reflection and dialogue with others. Dialogue with others must allow for mutual, supportive and empathetic communication. Further, this dialogue must seek to validate the experience of those engaged in conversation. This is not a purely intellectual conversation, but one that seeks to acknowledge the learners' emotions, perspectives, social locations and sensitivities. Transformation must be accompanied with genuine concern for the wellbeing of the partner in dialogue. Edward Foster notes, "It is through building trusting relationships that learners develop the confidence to deal with learning on an affective level, where transformation at times can be perceived as threatening and an emotionally charged experience."[44]

In summary, transformative learning is a process of viewing previous understandings and interpretations of reality as inadequate to address current needs. This experience results is a disorienting crisis that pushes the learner to look for new ways of making meaning. Older understandings must be interpreted in new ways so that new insights can guide future actions and behaviors. Mezirow writes, "Transformative learning may be defined as learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change."[45] Transformation continues by sharing self-reflection in dialogue with others. Sharing new assumptions and ideas with others invites a critical discourse that further clarifies learning. Finally, the new learning is practiced in one's lived experience.

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[43] Edward W. Taylor, "Fostering Transformative Learning," in *Transformative Learning in Practice*, ed. by Jack Mezirow and Edward W. Taylor (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 9.
[44] Taylor, 13.
[45] Mezirow, "Transformative Learning Theory," 22.

Mezirow writes, "Transformative learning may be understood as the epistemology of how adults learn to reason for themselves – advance and assess reasons for making a judgment – rather than act on the assimilated beliefs, values, feelings, and judgments of others."[46]

<center>Transformation in Pastoral Ministry</center>

Curtis Young examines transformative learning as it relates to pastoral ministry.[47] Young writes that his research "is a report and analysis of qualitative research involving semi-structured interviews with nine ministers who described case studies in which they had observed deep change among their congregants."[48] The work that these ministers did was not as straightforward as they had first imagined. They admitted that their attempts at creating transformative experiences in the lives of parishioners had limited success. The success these pastors experienced in their attempts at transformative learning was contingent on factors beyond the pastors' control, a source of frustration for them. Young writes, "The pastors in this research expressed a strong desire to foster change among church members as well as frustration in not seeing more widespread growth within their congregations."[49] The pastors experienced tension when they viewed the transformation of their parishioners as only partially dependent on the their actions. This tension created a crisis for the pastors, and Young argues that it is this tension that caused the pastors in

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[46] Mezirow, "Transformative Learning Theory," 23.

[47] Curtis J. Young, "Deep Change: How the Transformational Learning Theories of Mezirow and Loder Apply to Pastoral Ministry" (D.Min. Thesis, Covenant Theological Seminary, 2011), Proquest.

[48] Curtis J. Young, "Transformational Learning in Ministry", *Christian Education Journal* 10 (Fall 2013): 322-38, accessed February 6, 2014, http://0-go.galegroup.com.grace.gtu. edu/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA345694385&v=2.1&u=gradtul&it=r&p=PPRP&sw=w&asid=ee87b6 19d3fe3233d760dbf2a4dedf18.

[49] Young, "Deep Change," 185.

his research group to experience their own transformation. He writes, "Reaching the point of convictional knowing that transformation is God's work, not theirs, involves deep learning for pastors. It humbles them and transforms their sense of identity."[50] Transformation for these pastors was a result of an admission of their own relative ability to create change in the lives of parishioners.

The contributions of these pastors to their parishioners was not insignificant. Young writes, "Teachers cannot cause shifts in perspective to occur among learners, but they can foster them by approaching their teaching task as one of 'reframing reality' for the learner."[51] As teachers, the pastors' work was to direct their parishioners in a "Godward" direction and trust the power of the Holy Spirit to work for their transformation.[52] The pastors' own sense of transformation came when they were able to admit that change in the lives of their parishioners was not simply a cognitive process, but relied on the action of God. It was in an appreciation of their relative ability to create transformation that the pastors were able to recognize what their function was in transformational learning: those who point toward God and trust that God is at work in their parishioner's lives. Young advocates for a transformational learning that leans strongly into the life of faith, to the degree that the work of the Spirit is the work of transformational learning. He writes, "The profound change that Christian teachers seek to foster in learners is the result of transformational learning. This is the process that the Holy Spirit uses in people's lives. This is how the Holy Spirit causes people to learn."[53]

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[50] Young, "Deep Change," 188.
[51] Young, "Transformational Learning in Ministry," 331.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Young, "Transformational Learning in Ministry," 337.

God is at work in the lives of people transforming their self-understanding and their behavior, and pastors have a part to play in this process.

Transformation in Adult Religious Education

In a recent study, Leona M. English examines the implications of transformative learning theory in her research on the adult religious education of women.[54] Her claim is that transformation occurs in the lives of women not only through intellectual appropriation of material, but also through emotional and physical experience, relationship networks, and mutual concern for social change – areas she contends are ignored by transformational learning theory and religious education. She writes,

> While many religious groups still tend to stress the improvement of the mind (for instance, think of a typical school of theology) the mindset of transformative learning literature is open to the role of emotion for women in learning. It is open, too, to the body in learning, to the role of creativity and the arts, to acknowledging that we bring all of ourselves to our learning, and that any bifurcation is anathema to learning.[55]

English contends that both students and teachers share in the process of transformation in learning, "The process of being transformed demands nothing less than awareness of the fundamental premises of life and living. This is what many of us aim for in our work as religious educators: fundamental change in the learners and in ourselves as educators."[56] The process of transformation is generative; it creates new insights in both students and teachers. Transformation is a communal event where the lives of all involved may be influenced and which operates on many levels of women's experience. Religious

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[54] Leona M. English "Transformative Learning Theory: Implications for the Adult Religious Education of Women", *Journal of Religious Education* 60, no. 1 (2012): 41-47.
[55] English, 45.
[56] English, 41.

education, English affirms, must pay attention to women's experience if it hopes to work for the sake of personal transformation.

Relevance of Theorists to St. Gregory of Nyssa

In the founding document St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church Richard Fabian writes of the existential quality of the congregation's vocation,

> In Jesus God himself came to serve us. He came because he is love and will suffer even death to rescue those he loves from ruin. He came because love cannot send another to do its work: love comes itself…Like Jesus, we are all made to love. As we follow his example we fulfill our nature and realize God's loving plan for the world.[57]

Individual members take on this vocation as the work of the church. Fabian writes, "Instead of entrusting its pastoral program to professionals, St. Gregory's Mission will help all members of our congregation to fulfill their own need to love in the context of their own lives."[58] The researchers cited above present findings that are highly relevant to the question of transformation at St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church. Like the research participants in Brian Ward's study, members of St. Gregory's take an active part in their own appropriation of faith. This is an early practice of the congregation. The founding document of the congregation states that, "Laypeople will learn to criticize thoughtfully and informedly, so that they may speak with honest conviction about Christ and his good news for the world."[59] Most members of St. Gregory's realize this practice in their lives. There is a palpable sense that the community is moving in a

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[57] Richard Fabian, "Plan for the Mission of St. Gregory of Nyssa" (Unpublished manuscript, San Francisco, December 1977), accessed May 8, 2014, http://allsaintscompany.org/original-december-1977-plan-st-gregory-nyssa-church, 5.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Fabian, "The Plan," 7.

direction toward health and maturity. Examples of this phenomenon will be examined in chapter five.

As found in the Gallup poll data, St. Gregory's members practice their faith in the context of relationships with other members and visitors. The founding document states that, "Laypeople as well as clergy will deliver sermons on the scriptures, and will share their experience of prayer and Christian life with the congregation."[60] Every Sunday the congregation puts this ideal into practice as members share the work of preaching, sharing their own experiences publicly with the assembly. Another example of practicing faith in members' relationships is seen in the way that the church's work is shared in relationship with other members. Further examples of this phenomenon will be examined in chapter five.

Olga Lipina's study linking creative work and transformative experience is resonant with many members of St. Gregory's. The founding document imagines a congregation that "will especially serve musical people, offering them a leading role in its corporate life, and developing the potential of music for Christian liturgy and mission."[61] In addition to musical people, St. Gregory's draws people who have an interest in the visual and performing arts. An example of this is found in the regular icon painter's group that meets in the church. Many of those who participate have no previous artistic experience; they have found that their desire to paint was sufficient for learning the art of painting. Lipina's findings linking artistic participation and leadership development have also been demonstrated at St. Gregory's as those who came to learn how to paint icons

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[60] Ibid.
[61] Fabian, "The Plan," 2.

now serve as conveners and instructors to new painters. Further examples of this phenomenon will be examined in chapter five.

B.A. Hewitt's study of transformation and service-learning in congregations resonates with the experience of those who practice community service at St. Gregory's. Service to the community is something that all members are expected to take on as a part of their commitment to the members of the parish. The founding document states that, "our common participation in works of service will ensure that pastoral responsibility has an active influence upon theology for laypeople and clergy alike."[62] This process is based in the practice of publicly sharing experience of service in the liturgy and at other gatherings of the congregation. The Food Pantry at St. Gregory's is the best known example of service in the community, although other works of service take place throughout the year. Further examples of this phenomenon will be examined in chapter five.

Conclusion

The six theorists, as well as the Gallup polling data, examined in this chapter each find that transformation is a phenomenon which takes place in social groups, including congregations. Their findings support this study's primary concern: transformation is a phenomenon that can reasonably be predicted in the context of St. Gregory's Church. The research data examined in chapter five of this study will demonstrate the validity of this position.

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[62] Fabian, "The Plan," 7.

Chapter 3

Theology, Aesthetics, and Ethics

The question of transformation in congregational life is analyzed, in this study, theologically as well as educationally and sociologically. Without a theological analysis, looking at the ways in which the "word-about-God" [63] of a congregation effects transformation in the lives of its members, we are left with a diminished conversation. Theology is an attempt to write the narrative of human attachment to God and of God's longing for creation. As followers of Jesus Christ, the church is claimed by a theology that makes God known through the teachings, actions and life of Christ. Jesus Christ demonstrates the essential nature of God in all that he says and does. Of primary concern in this theological study are the cross and resurrection of Christ and the effect that these have on all of creation and history. What Christ accomplishes on the cross and in trampling down death in the resurrection shows the nature of God as God has always been: one whose love has no boundaries and whose mercy is absolute. In this reality the church, the Body of Christ for the world, is formed, nurtured, empowered and given its mission. It is also the context in which each member of the church has the possibility of transformation. What is specifically theological about personal transformation? How is theology enacted in the life of the congregation for the sake of transformation? In order to address these questions, this chapter will review the work of Gordon Lathrop, Alexander Schmemann, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, Max Weber, John de Gruchy, and Elaine Scarry.

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[63] Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), loc. 81, Kindle.

The work of these six are divided into three disciplines: liturgical theology, theological aesthetics and the aesthetics of ethics.

Theology, in this analysis, assumes the presence and revelation of God in human experience. The everyday occurrence of beauty, the gathering of the assembly in the liturgy and the individual and corporate striving for justice and ethical living are categories that reveal the action of God in the world. These events are brought to St. Gregory's by members of the congregation as a normal part of its common life; members of the community share experiences with each other as a way of listening more closely for the voice of God in the midst of life. St Gregory's is a community that hears the "word-about-God" through both individual and corporate actions. This appreciation comes from St. Gregory of Nyssa who taught that God's actions are what make God known, not just the idea of God. Gregory writes in his sixth sermon *On the Beatitudes,* "God becomes visible only in his operations, and only when He is contemplated in the things that are external to Him."[64] Just as people know God through the actions that God takes on in creation, so St. Gregory's members come to know God in taking up God's work in the world. We begin with liturgical theology.

What Is Liturgical Theology?

Gordon Lathrop writes about the transformative potential of liturgy in individual and corporate life in the congregation. He acknowledges that the liturgy is "primary theology;" the meaning of the liturgy is found within the liturgy itself.[65] It is in the action of the liturgy that the assembly experiences the "word-about-God" as a multi-sensory

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[64] Paulos Mar Gregorios, *Cosmic Man: the Divine Presence: The Theology of St. Gregory of Nyssa [Ca. 330 to Ca. 395 A.D.]* (New York: Paragon House, 1998), 70.
[65] Lathrop, loc. 108 Kindle.

performance of fundamental actions. He describes these as praise and intercession, scripture and meal, teaching and water bath, and festal proclamation at the springtime Passover and the winter solstice.[66] The articulation of Christian faith that is expressed in the assembly is the work of secondary liturgical theology. Lathrop notes that secondary liturgical theology "is not merely descriptive: it always has something of a critical, reforming edge. When that edge is turned toward specific problems of our time, these reflections may be called, as they are here, pastoral liturgical theology."[67] Liturgical theology is one way for individuals to analyze, critique and take action against injustice that occurs in the world. The liturgy is capable of preparing people to take on the urgent work of renewing the world for the sake of God's justice. As B.A. Hewitt has shown, reflection on this experience has the power to transform individual lives and congregational systems. Lathrop writes that the community which gathers regularly for worship experiences an immersion in sacred story and action that has a transformative effect on its members. He writes, "A community immersed in Bible and rite has powerful tools for seeing the world anew."[68] When the assembly gathers in liturgy its members are empowered to go out and do the work of Christ in the world, work that begins by looking at the world theologically.

Alexander Schmemann writes that theology is a task that must be included in the study of the liturgy. This is a part of Schmemann's larger project of joining theology, liturgy and piety.[69] One task of liturgical theology is to unify the shared experience of

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[66] Lathrop, loc. 512-517 Kindle.
[67] Lathrop, loc. 144 Kindle.
[68] Lathrop, loc. 108 Kindle.
[69] David Fagerberg, "The Cost of Understanding Schmemann in the West," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 53, (2009), 179-207.

congregational members. The lack of harmony between theology, liturgy and piety results in an appropriation of the liturgy that is individualized and inward looking at the cost of its evangelical and ethical potential. If the liturgy is only mysterious and beautiful, it deforms worshippers and renders them as mere consumers of the rites without any attendant requirement to make something out of the experience of the liturgy. Schmemann writes, "To understand liturgy from inside, to discover and experience that 'epiphany' of God, world and life which the liturgy contains and communicates, to relate this vision and this power to our own existence, to all our problems: such is the purpose of liturgical theology."[70] Transformation is found in the liturgy when it is something more than a series of disconnected actions, each more beautiful than the last. The liturgy must be planned, executed and evaluated with an appreciation that it has real power to change the lives of worshippers as they continue in their growth as the disciples of Jesus Christ. Such is the importance of liturgical theology to the task of transformation that without a real attempt at theological reflection on the liturgy one must ask if bad liturgy is worth the effort, and if it, in fact, has more power to deform worshippers than it has to build them up.

<center>What Do We Think We're Doing?</center>

St. Gregory's founder, Richard Fabian, is fond of sharing his experience upon visiting a typical congregation's Sunday morning liturgy and finding himself asking the question, "What on earth do these people think they're doing?"[71] The question that Fabian asks is a somewhat sideways approach to the question of liturgical theology and

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[70] Alexander Schmemann, *Of Water and the Spirit* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1974), loc. 12, Google Books.
[71] Richard Fabian, emailed to author, San Francisco, CA, February 25, 2014.

transformation, but one that raises significant issues. What do worshippers believe they are doing when they gather in the liturgical assembly? What do worship leaders, clergy, liturgists and musicians understand their responsibilities are as they prepare and conduct the liturgy? Lathrop asks similar, critical questions of the liturgy,

> Is the Sunday meeting – the liturgy, the mass, the worship service – simply the survival of a collection of quaint customs from a more secure and simple time? Or do its symbolic interactions propose to us a realistic pattern for interpreting our world, for containing our actual experiences, and for enabling action and hope?[72]

If the former instance is the case, the liturgy is more of a museum piece than it is a potentially transformative experience. If it is the latter, the liturgy can free the worshipping assembly to make meaning of their own experiences, and can move them toward action in the world.

The liturgy influences worshippers along this axis of meaning making and action in the world; both are needed for the proper formation of worshippers. If the liturgy only provides an opportunity for personal reflection and meaning making, then it is prone to devolve into pietism. Schmemann describes this situation where the liturgy "deprived piety of its living content and term of reference."[73] If the liturgy only pays attention to taking action in the world, then it becomes a religiously tinged social work. A parishioner recently said, "We came to St. Gregory's because you actually talk about God. The church we went to before spent all of their time talking about drone strikes in Pakistan."[74] When the deep desire for an experience of community with others, bound in God's Spirit, is joined with a longing to see the world transformed by the loving power of God, then

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[72] Lathrop, loc. 57 Kindle.
[73] Schmemann, *Of Water and the Spirit,* loc. 12 Google Books.
[74] Cassie Ambutter, personal communication with the author, San Francisco, CA, January 12, 2014.

the liturgy finds its truest purpose. In this appreciation of the liturgy, neither piety nor social action is sacrificed. Instead, a new optic is opened through which to see the world as God sees it. Lathrop writes of the assembly in the second century liturgy of Justin, "This thanksgiving, which is none other than the faith that God made and redeemed the world, yields a revolutionary new view of all that is."[75] With eyes opened to see the world as God sees it, the worshipper is remade in grace. Transformation in the liturgy is realized in this promise.

What Is the Liturgy For?

Transformation is one of the goals of the liturgy. The liturgy touches on many different parts of human experience in order to achieve transformation. In theological terms, some of these points of contact between human experience and the divine are sacraments, ways in which everyday reality is enhanced, defined and changed into eternal reality. In this way, the liturgy is like a bright light that shines on human experiences and shows how they are charged with divine energy, or how human experiences stand in need of divine transformation. Schmemann writes that what human persons need transformation from is "the deviation of man's love and his alienation from God. That man prefers something – the world, himself – to God, this is the only real sin, and in it all sins become natural, inevitable. This sin destroys the true life of man."[76] Schmemann writes that the way of transformation is by a lively participation in the sacraments of the church.[77] The sacraments are the sacred signs of God's grace revealed in Jesus Christ.

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[75] Lathrop, loc. 688 Kindle.
[76] Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), loc. 1128 Kindle.
[77] Schmemann, *For the Life of the World,* loc. 58 Kindle.

The chief work of God in Christ is in reconciling all things to Godself through the cross. It is this work that the sacraments chiefly show to the worshipper. The liturgy becomes the place in which the worshipper receives the good news of salvation through meal, bath, touch and speech. God's grace transforms these common human actions into moments in which transformation can take place.

Everything that one brings to the liturgy is in need of transformation by sacramental grace. Schmemann writes,

> In a way, of course, the whole life of the Church can be termed sacramental, for it is always the manifestation in the time of the 'new time.' Yet in a more precise way the Church calls sacraments those decisive acts of its life in which this transforming grace is confirmed as being given, in which the Church through a liturgical act identifies itself with and becomes the very form of that Gift.[78]

The whole exercise of the Christian life is not to "patch up" a broken and distorted appreciation of the self, the world and the other; it is to be remade, to be raised from the dead, to be unbound and placed in the midst of the living. The sacraments have the ability to open in the worshipper a new appreciation of the gift of God's grace and the power of God's healing. For such dramatic transformation to take place the church must approach the liturgy and the sacraments as alive and contemporary to the experience of those who come to worship. Ancient, esoteric rituals are not sufficient to bring transformation. Neither is it adequate to perform the liturgy in a static manner. Lathrop writes, "In liturgy, as in Christian theology, to say an old thing in the old way in a new situation is inevitably to distort its meaning. Authentic continuity requires responsible change."[79] If the liturgy

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[78] Schmemann, *For the Life of the World,* loc. 1167 Kindle.
[79] Lathrop, loc. 108 Kindle.

is structured in such a way that it keeps worshippers from bringing their full, lived experience to the assembly then it is just so much play-acting.

In no sense does this mean that the sacraments are subject to changing, consumerist points of view. Lathrop reminds us, "When we gather to do ritual, we bear modern life within ourselves. We also are the ones who set out the ancient symbols."[80] The ancient symbols, the essential points of contact between God and human experience – the meal, the bath, the touch, the speech – are universal experiences of being human. Sacraments are not as Schmemann says, "a 'passage' into 'supernature,' but into the Kingdom of God, the world to come, into the very reality of this world and its life as redeemed and restored by Christ."[81] The sacraments serve to manifest the love of God, the truth of Christ, to all parts of human experience. What is transformed are not the sacraments, but the stuff of human life. Worshippers bring their joys, sorrows, holiness and brokenness to the liturgy, and by the presence of the sacraments they are made new. Sacramental grace may not take away the pain or the sorrow of life, but it will always transform them and make them new.

The liturgy can transform time. Every Sunday is not merely the first day of the week; the liturgy shows that it is also, always the Day of Resurrection. Regardless of the season of the church year, every Sunday is the Easter Feast. Sunday is also the day in which worshippers are transformed in time because it is the customary day that the church gathers in assembly. Schmemann writes that every Sunday, "through the Eucharistic ascension, the Day of the Lord was revealed and manifested in all its glory and transforming power as the end of this world, as the beginning of the world to

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[80] Lathrop, loc. 3046 Kindle.
[81] Schmemann, *For the Life of the World,* loc. 1495 Kindle.

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come."[82] Worshippers in the liturgy are not only those who work in offices or tech companies. On Sunday, each person in the assembly is recognized as a member of the Royal Priesthood, a guest at the Messianic Banquet, a Prophet of the Most High. Those called to preside at the Sacraments of the New Covenant are dressed in such a way to show this revealed identity. Over the white baptismal garment, the *tunica alba*, the presider wears the brightly colored vestments stolen from the royal court of Rome, the chasuble or dalmatic and the stole. At St. Gregory's even those who are not ordained to the ministry are so vested, showing the amplitude of the common priestly identity. Just as the first disciples stood looking upward at Jesus' ascension, worshippers gather in the liturgy on Sunday and look up to recognize, "all days, all time were transformed into times of remembrance and expectation, remembrance of this ascension…and expectation of his coming."[83] The people gather in the liturgy and look not only to the past and the present, but also to the future, and Christ's promise to abide with his people forever. We claim the future as God's domain when we join the acclamation, "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again."[84]

The liturgy has the power to transform history. The liturgy places a question mark over the assumption that history is either an inevitable ascent by human will, or devolution into chaos, or an exercise of power over weakness. Every assumption of history is placed under judgment by the liturgy. Schmemann speaks of liturgy – *leitourgia* – as both the common work of a group that is greater than could have been done by a mere collection of individuals, and as the work of a few on behalf of the

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[82] Schmemann, *For the Life of the World,* loc. 710 Kindle.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing, 2002), 363.

many.[85] However, in another sense liturgy is the calling of the whole church to "act in this world after the fashion of Christ, to bear testimony to him and His kingdom."[86] The liturgy is not simply what takes place in the customary meeting place of the assembly on a Sunday morning. It is the entire exercise of working with God for the transformation of creation; to take up the "ministry of reconciliation."[87] This is the liturgy set loose in history, incrementally changing the course of human affairs by the grace of God.

This transformation of history by the liturgy is also seen in the use of sacred story in worship. When the dominant text of culture becomes one of oppression and exploitation, such as those texts that have sought to control queer people, women and people of color – among others, the liturgy serves as a location for telling the dangerous stories of salvation. Lathrop notes that, "by reading biblical texts as if they were ours, we, who careen through the world seemingly without history, are given a story, an origin, an orientation in the world, something to remember."[88] By hearing the stories of redemption in the Hebrew Scriptures, the wonders and signs of the Kingdom wrought by Jesus in the Gospels, the non-compliance of the early church in the narrative of empire in the Epistles, worshippers receive a counter-narrative to make history on eschatological and liberatory terms. The repetition of sacred story as part of the liturgy reinforces a new narrative in the imagination of worshippers. As these stories are heard season after season, year after year, they may become a part of the hearer's personal narrative and text for theological reflection. Thus, history is not only what is experienced in everyday life, but is something the liturgy reveals as what Schmemann calls "a vision of life, and what comes from that

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[85] Schmemann, *For the Life of the World,* loc. 288 Kindle.
[86] Schmemann, *For the Life of the World,* loc. 293 Kindle.
[87] 2 Cor. 5:18, NRSV.
[88] Lathrop, loc. 237 Kindle.

vision is the light, the transparency, the referral of everything to the 'other,' the eschatological character of life itself and all that is in it."[89]

As people live in the liturgy, it gives them a new story by which to live, new light with which to see reality and a new agenda to take up in the world. Lathrop reflects on the history of the early church and its liturgy, including the full meal that was a part of the eucharistic celebration, and reminds us, "This thanksgiving, which is none other than the faith that God made and redeemed the world, yields a revolutionary new view of all that is. The community gives away food. The community challenges the injustice of the emperor."[90] The liturgy gives the church permission to undermine every dominant system of oppression in every time and place. However, this is not a violent act or one that seeks simply to oppress the oppressor; the liturgy wants to work for the reconciliation of all things. Schmemann writes,

> Pascha. Holy Week. Essentially, bright days such as are needed. And truly that is all that is needed. I am convinced that if people would really hear Holy Week, Pascha, the Resurrection, Pentecost, the Dormition, there would be no need for theology. All of theology is there. All that is needed for one's spirit, heart, mind and soul. How could people spend centuries discussing justification and redemption? It is all in these services. Not only is it revealed, it simply flows in one's heart and mind.[91]

The liturgy can transform as it works its way into the soul of the worshipper. The liturgy so considered has the power to effect change in the individual, the church and society. In this way the liturgy may be understood as beautiful: it has the power to create, to open new vistas and to relate people in new ways. What can theology say to beauty?

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[89] Alexander Schmemann, and Juliana Schmemann, *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemann 1973-1983* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 24.
[90] Lathrop, loc. 689 Kindle.
[91] Schmemann, *Journals*, 13.

What Are Theological Aesthetics?

No writer in the past century has had a more lasting effect on the discipline of theological aesthetics than Hans Urs von Balthasar. There are points at which Balthasar's theology is dissonant with the experience of St. Gregory of Nyssa, particularly in his conservatism. However, his writings are theologically profound, his scope is vast, and he is deeply sympathetic with the thought of Gregory of Nyssa. Above all, he has a deep, loving understanding of beauty and the necessity for beauty in human experience. In the introduction to his seven-volume theological aesthetics, he writes,

> Beauty is the word that shall be our first. Beauty is the last thing which the thinking intellect dares to approach, since only it dances as an uncontained splendor around the double constellation of the true and the good and their inseparable relation to one another. Beauty is the disinterested one, without which the ancient world refused to understand itself, a word which both imperceptibly and yet unmistakably has bid farewell to our new world, a world of interests, leaving it to its own avarice and sadness.[92]

These are sentiments that make sense in the context of St. Gregory's. The congregation has a deep appreciation for the place of beauty in its life in the liturgy. However, an appreciation of beauty is much less than a theological aesthetics. Is there more to St. Gregory's than a superficial appreciation of beauty? Does St. Gregory's have an articulable understanding of theological aesthetics? Is there a sense in which theological aesthetics assists in transformation?

Balthasar insists that one is only able to know beauty through God's revelation. One cannot know the true nature or meaning of beauty by beginning with creation or

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[92] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: a Theological Aesthetics, Vol. 1: Seeing the Form*, ed. Joseph Fessio, S.J. and John Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (New York: Ignatius Press, 2009), loc. 12, Google Books.

human creativity.[93] Balthasar has a high view of the human ability to perceive transcendental value. He uses the word "transcendental" to refer to principles that are universal, transcending particular categories, which give meaning to human experience.[94] He says that these transcendentals are accessible and comprehensible to human beings on the basis of their physical senses. Thus, human beings can know the most essential, universal principles that give meaning to reality. In the words of Aidan Nichols, Balthasar is an "epistemological optimist – he holds that our powers of knowing are reliable."[95] Further, Balthasar believes that human persons have the ability to access what is real and to participate in being itself; in technical terms he is also an ontological realist.[96] The transcendentals that Balthasar holds to be real are four: unity, truth, goodness and beauty.[97] Balthasar understands unity, the outlier in this set of universal principles, as the holistic quality of reality, the sense that reality is coherent. Truth, goodness and beauty are all bound in the idea of unity. Human persons are able to understand unity, truth, goodness and beauty because we exist "in relation to a world of things which by their presence make themselves known to us."[98] Human sense and imagination have the ability to know beauty because beauty presents itself to human consciousness as inviting, desirable and valuable. This position coheres with Balthasar's understanding of reality as a gift from God. It is not that one constructs reality but that God gives everything that comprises reality. All that human beings have to do is to receive the gift that God gives. Balthasar writes that the "first prerequisite for

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[93] De Gruchy, 104.
[94] Aidan Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs Von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness and Truth* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2011), 1.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Nichols, 3.
[98] Nichols, 5.

understanding is to accept what is given just as it offers itself."[99] The first step in Balthasar's theological aesthetic is to receive the beautiful, along with the other transcendentals, as a gift from God.

Balthasar means to expand his understanding of theological aesthetics beyond what can be perceived of beauty within the created world. Although the created, human senses are able to perceive beauty, the location of beauty includes the uncreated. The fundamental definition of beauty is found in the revelation of God's grace.[100] Beauty is the glory of God, not only an explanation of God's glory.[101] In whatever way God reveals Godself in creation, there is beauty. Balthasar writes,

> But if beauty is conceived of transcendentally, then its definition must be derived from God himself. Furthermore, what we know to be most proper to God – his self-revelation in history and in the Incarnation – must now become for us the very apex and archetype of beauty in the world, whether men see it or not.[102]

Beauty is not dependent on the human gaze; it exists whether or not it is perceived.

Theological aesthetics says that beauty is one of the ways in which human beings come to a clearer understanding of God in the world. Theology is possible for human beings on the basis of God's desire to be known. Theological aesthetics considers the ways in which human senses perceive the word-about-God, how human senses are able to remember and reflect on beauty and the way that beauty opens us to an awareness of God's presence.[103] Theological aesthetics is concerned with the meeting place of human

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[99] Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord,* loc. 145 Google Books.
[100] Nichols, 13.
[101] De Gruchy, 114.
[102] Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord,* loc. 27 Google Books.
[103] Nichols, 14.

and divine desire, or as Aidan Nichols says it, "the beautiful is…the meeting-place of finite form with infinite light."[104] In that meeting place there will always be beauty.

Not every experience of beauty should be thought of as equivalent to recognizing the presence of God.[105] The human perception of beauty is marred by sin. Humans can view something through the deformed perception of sin and see the truly ugly as beautiful. God reveals Godself to human beings freely in human experience, but the shape of the sacred story points to God's revelation within a particular range of human experience: walking in the garden in the cool of the day, rescuing an enslaved people from captivity, dying on a Roman cross. God is seen most consistently in the merciful, the humble, the poor and the forsaken. The glory of God is always contained within the context of those the world calls "losers." Nichols writes, "The events of salvation history – where God is active, presenting himself for contemplation – show the divine to have its own style of manifestation, and we must learn to register its impress."[106] It is in the joining together of the beautiful and the particular manifestation of the divine that human perception can be transformed by aesthetic experience.

Theological Aesthetics vs. Aesthetic Theology

Which comes first, the theology or the aesthetic experience? The question is critical in Balthasar's development of his theology. He begins by admitting that there is a connection between one's own inner sense of inspiration and being indwelt by the Spirit of God. The human spirit and the Holy Spirit cannot be differentiated on the level of sense experience. So when one perceives a beautiful form and has some experience of

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[104] Nichols, 18.
[105] Nichols, 19.
[106] Ibid.

elevation as a result, the question arises as to the source of that inspiration; is it from the experience of God's revelation or a sense perception of a beautiful form?

The perception of inspiration as given to humans by God's Spirit is a matter of faith. So too it is a matter of faith to say that God is manifest in the form of beauty, even when that form is necessarily something less than God. If a beautiful work of art has the power to inspire the viewer, what is the origin of that inspiration? The artist who creates the form may or may not have a sense of participation in the revelation of God. Balthasar holds that the artist participates in the revelation of God in as far as he or she is open to the divine action, allowing God to be known in the form of creation. He writes, "Such creative form, then, is God's work, and the work of man only in so far as he makes himself available to the divine action without opposition, acceptingly, allowing God to act, concurring in his work."[107]

Balthasar writes that the work of the artist in making beauty is analogous to the act of God in creation. He admits that this analogy is problematic, but states, "the element of danger must not be here allowed to prejudice our theoretical reflections in advance. Even a dangerous road remains a road."[108] The danger for Balthasar is in confusing the created with the uncreated. Clarity is gained by seeing the principle of creation as itself an aesthetic value. The relationship between God as Creator and the artist as creator is based in the principle of making something out of absence. Therefore, the making of beauty is always informed by the principle of creation. In this sense, a work of art can be a part of the revelation of God.

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[107] Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord,* loc. 17 Google Books.
[108] Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord,* loc. 18 Google Books.

The one who views the work created by the artist is free to interpret it according to his or her own inner sense of beauty. Balthasar writes, "all those who have been once affected inwardly by the worldly beauty of either nature, or of a person's life, or of art, will surely not insist that they have no genuine idea of what beauty is."[109] Beauty is comprehensible without explanation or exegesis. God can only be comprehended by faith. In this tension, the critical difference between theological aesthetics and aesthetic theology is revealed. Balthasar writes,

> Man's habit of calling beautiful only what strikes *him* as such appears insurmountable, at least on earth. And therefore, at least practically speaking, it seems both advisable and necessary to steer clear of the theological application of aesthetic concepts. A theology that makes use of such concepts will sooner or later cease to be a 'theological aesthetics' – this is, the attempt to do aesthetics at the level and with the methods of theology – and deteriorate into an 'aesthetic theology' by betraying and selling out theological substance to the current viewpoints of an inner-worldly theory of beauty.[110]

Aesthetic theology starts with a beautiful form and seeks to create a theology from it without beginning with the revelation of God. It is, therefore, prone to lead the seeker of beauty to a dead end. If there is nothing beyond the beautiful form, then there is no way to move more deeply into the mystery of God. The beautiful form is all that there is. Balthasar insists that theological aesthetics can only be developed by first attending to God's self-revelation, what he calls *the theory of vision*, and then moving to human experience of elevation which comes from the experience of the beautiful, what he calls *the theory of rapture.*[111] Balthasar insists that beauty must always be joined with the true and the good. Nichols writes, "Beauty's separation from the other transcendentals, and

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[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord,* loc. 43 Google Books.

the consequent rise of what Balthasar terms the 'aestheticisation; of the beautiful, is at least partly responsible…for the inability of people to pray and contemplate."[112]

Art and Religion

Max Weber contributes to the understanding of beauty and aesthetics in his analysis of the relationship between art and religion in his magisterial work *The Sociology of Religion*.[113] Weber's work seeks to define the influence of religion on social change throughout history. Specifically, as Reinhard Bendix notes, "his three main themes were to examine the effect of religious ideas on economic activities, to analyze the relation between social stratification and religious ideas, and to ascertain and explain the distinguishing characteristics of Western civilization."[114] In addition to considering the influence of religion on art, Weber examines economics, politics, sexuality, and intellectual development in his social theory. Weber's theory claims an evolutionary relationship between these social categories and religion. In the earliest phase of development "religion and art are intimately related."[115] Instead of categorizing them in opposition, society understands religion and art to be a single reality; this phase equates the aesthetic with magical ritual. In subsequent phases of social development the unity of art and religion is broken apart by other, religious, considerations. Weber claims that the opposition of religion to art comes specifically from "ethical religion."[116] Ethical religion is a congregational gathering "in which an ethical prophecy imposed a unified meaning

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[112] Nichols, 12.

[113] Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

[114] Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 258.

[115] Weber, 242.

[116] Ibid.

on the world and demanded from the believer self-discipline in all realms of life."[117] Ethical religions are unable to regard as a source of salvation anything that comes from the "ethical irrationalities of the world."[118] As a sensuous reality in the world, art is automatically suspect by ethical religions.

Religion is suspicious of that which claims independent existence apart from God. Weber writes, "The more art becomes an autonomous sphere, which happens as a result of lay education, the more art tends to acquire its own set of constitutive values, which are quite different from those obtaining in the religious and ethical domain."[119] Art becomes rationalized, standing apart from religion as a separate phenomenon. Eventually, religion begins to suspect that art is a competing form of salvation, a threat to religion that must be combatted at every turn. Weber writes, "Religion violently rejects as sinful the type of salvation within the world which art *qua* art claims to provide."[120] The opposition to art from religion is pronounced by the guardians of ethical religion; according to Weber, "The more the god proclaimed by the prophets was conceived as transcendental and sacred, the more insoluble and irreconcilable became this opposition between religion and art."[121] The great difficulty for religion is that art is objective and can be understood from a multitude of different perspectives. When approaching a work of art each person is competent to make aesthetic judgments about it. From the gaze one casts upon the work of art, each person can make meaning on his or her own terms.

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[117] Guenther Roth and Wolfgang Schluchter, *Max Weber's Vision of History: Ethics and Methods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 151, accessed April 8, 2014, http://books.google.com/books?id=92jdaFUlEBoC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.
[118] Weber, 243.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Weber, 244.

Robert Bellah notes that at this phase, "The aesthetic sphere is a danger to the religion of brotherliness once form becomes an object of cultivation independent of content, for formal elaboration without ethical content can only seem self-indulgent and unbrotherly to salvation religion."[122] Art becomes the enemy of religion and must be excised from religious devotion. Historical examples of this phenomenon are legion.

Remarkably, given the depth of religion's rejection of art, Weber claims that religion has a way in which to appreciate art. Despite the hostility of religion to art, Weber contends that religion can welcome the arts on the basis of their being used for religious purposes. He writes,

> Subjectively too, there is an easy way back to art from every orgiastic or ritualistic religion of emotionalism, as well as from every religion of love the culminates in a transcendence of individuality – despite the heterogeneity of the ultimate meanings involved. Orgiastic religion leads most readily to song and music; ritualistic religion inclines toward the pictorial arts; religions enjoining love favor the development of poetry and music.[123]

In as far as art serves the purposes of religion, there is a place in religion for art. The acceptance of art by religion is contingent on separating art from its earliest religious understanding as magic. The presence of art in religion depends on its being used for the worship of God, not the coercion of God. Weber claims that if this is not the case, "religious behavior is not worship of the god but rather coercion of the god, and invocation is not prayer but rather the exercise of magical formulae."[124] Art in religion must serve the purpose of directing the devotee to worship God, not a tool for

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[122] Robert Bellah, "Max Weber and World-Denying Love: A Look at the Historical Sociology of Religion," *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67 (June 1999): 277-304, accessed March 9, 2014, http://www.robertbellah.com/articles_3.htm.
[123] Weber, 244-245.
[124] Weber, 25.

manipulating God. In this sense, religion is perfectly glad to accept art as a useful part of society, and, as Weber claims, "religion is continually brought to recognize the undeniable "divinity" of artistic achievement."[125] Despite the historical fact that religion has attempted to purge itself of art, aesthetic objects continue to reappear in religion. Religion's reappropriating of art signifies the power of beauty in the process of transformation.

<div align="center">Transformation and Beauty</div>

Beauty has the ability to stir within the human person and cause his or her transformation. The power of beauty is not only to draw a response from the human person, but also, according to Balthasar, to change that one into beauty. Beauty then becomes the animating principle in the life of one so moved. Balthasar writes,

> Before the beautiful – no, not really *before* but *within* the beautiful – the whole person quivers. He not only 'finds' the beautiful moving; rather, he experiences himself as being moved and possessed by it. The more complete this experience is, the less does a person seek and enjoy only the delight that comes through the senses or even through any act of his own; the less also does he reflect on his own acts and states. Such a person has been taken up wholesale into the reality of the beautiful and is now fully subordinate to it, determined by it, animated by it.[126]

Balthasar's claim that beauty is woven together with truth, goodness, and unity and that these four have transformative power in human life, is central to his theology. It is the revelation of God and the human experience of that revelation as beautiful which causes transformation. Balthasar says that this process is dynamic: "the object with which we are concerned is man's participation in God which, from God's perspective, is actualized as

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[125] Weber, 244.
[126] Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, loc. 80 Google Books.

'revelation'…and which, from man's perspective, is actualized as 'faith.'"[127] God comes to humanity with the generous offer of salvation, and the human person comes to God with faith. This transformation changes the one who comes to God into beauty, the same beauty that God is revealed to be. Gregory of Nyssa writes of this dynamic in his treatise *On Virginity*,

> Indeed, the person who removes himself from all hatred and fleshly odor and rises above all low and earthbound things, having ascended higher than the whole earth in his aforementioned flight, will find the only thing that is worth longing for, and, having come close to beauty, will become beautiful himself.[128]

The result of human reaching out to God is to become as God is in God's beauty. A new consciousness is created, not only of the self, but also of the world. The one who is turned into beauty begins to see the world as a proper location of beauty, and that one takes on a new responsibility: working for the sake of what is not already beautiful in the world. Beauty moves the beholder to act for the sake of beauty in the world.

The Aesthetics of Ethics

John De Gruchy and Elaine Scarry each make the case that situations of injustice produce ugliness, and the state of justice is itself beautiful. Scarry's book, *On Beauty and Being Just* is the text of the 1998 Tanner Lectures at Yale.[129] In it she states that the experience of beauty can create a longing for beauty, and the desire to experience even more beauty. The generative quality of this dynamic is not only in relation to the

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[127] Ibid.

[128] Gregory of Nyssa, "On Virginity," in *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader*, ed. Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), loc. 479 Kindle.

[129] Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

beautiful object, but is also expansive; the experience of a beautiful object evokes a desire to tell others about it. Scarry claims that the energy in this desire to share beauty with others moves people toward a new appreciation of truth.[130] In turn, this dynamic moves the one who has experienced beauty towards a passion for justice. When one sees beauty it creates a heightened attention to balance, symmetry and fairness, conditions that are offended by injustice in the world. The offense of injustice, as well as the experience of beauty, moves one to seek justice. Thus, an appreciation of beauty leads to an appreciation of justice.

The existence of "beauty" is problematic for many in Scarry's study. She uses their arguments against beauty as part of her case in favor of beauty. Scarry summarizes the critics' arguments against her position on two fronts. The first objection is that speaking of aesthetics in the midst of situations of injustice is a distraction. The second objection is related to the Lacanian theory of "gaze" in which looking at anything objectifies it. She articulates these critical claims,

> There are two separate political arguments. One is the claim that beautiful things distract us from injustice, and therefore sabotage our ability to dedicate our energies to increasing the overall well-being of the world. The other is that when we look at a beautiful object, whether a person or a flower, we actually damage the object by turning it into a mere object that we feel superior to.[131]

After laying out the critique, she moves on to her defense. In the first case, the generative quality of beauty does the opposite of what her critics claim. Instead of a distraction from injustice, beauty has the ability to sensitize us to injustice and gives a reason to work for

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[130] Scarry, *On Beauty*, 52.
[131] Elaine Scarry, "Does Beauty Really Equal Truth," Salon.com, November 9, 1999, accessed February 25, 2014, http://www.salon.com/1999/11/09/scarry/.

the sake of justice.[132] Second, she claims that the danger of objectification of the other is moot when it comes to the two instances of beauty that she includes: the divine and the inanimate. Neither of these takes offense; the divine because it is beyond human violence, and the inanimate because it lacks consciousness. Scarry claims that it makes no sense to say that gazing upon beauty does violence if the object is not susceptible to violence.[133]

At the heart of Scarry's argument is the point that beauty assists people in paying attention to justice. She asks what it is that a person is seeking when he or she seeks beauty. The answer is harmony, balance, symmetry and ultimately fairness, all based in the relationship between the beautiful other and its beholder. Scarry describes this relationship in three ways. First the beholder of beauty is stirred, by the appearance of beauty, to bring some new beauty into being. Second, the beholder of beauty becomes beautiful as part of his or her inner experience. Finally, beauty and the beholder each affirm the aliveness of the other.[134] This description of the relationship between beauty and the one beholding beauty depends on an earlier claim of Scarry that beauty is in itself capable of restoring life to the viewer. The relationship is crucial for Scarry's argument about beauty and justice because she claims that beauty places a requirement on the viewer to recognize the "aliveness" of the world and to take steps to protect it.[135] She writes, "Beauty is, then, a compact, or contract between the beautiful being…and the perceiver. As the beautiful being confers on the perceiver the gift of life, so the perceiver confers on the beautiful being the gift of life."[136] Along with Balthasar, Scarry says that

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[132] Scarry, *On Beauty*, 62.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Scarry, *On Beauty*, 88-89.
[135] Scarry, *On Beauty*, 90.
[136] Ibid.

the relationship between the beautiful and the beholder is a mutual coming toward the other.

<center>Fairness, Justice, and Beauty</center>

The relationship between beauty and justice hinges on the word "fairness" as it is used to describe both a beautiful object and the situation of justice. Scarry claims that the root of each of these ideas is from the same source and expresses the aesthetic sense of the beautiful.[137] Fairness as a quality of justice and fairness as a quality of beauty are identical concepts. Scarry writes, "Although the two attributes of beauty can each be described in isolation from the other, they together constitute a two-part cognitive event that affirms the equality of aliveness."[138] Fairness is about symmetry in relationship, a principle that applies equally to beauty and justice. Both beauty and justice "give rise to the notion of distribution, to a lifesaving reciprocity, to fairness not just in the sense of loveliness of aspect but in the sense of 'a symmetry of everyone's relation to one another.'"[139] This idea is well reflected in a definition of social justice by Lee Anne Bell,

> We believe that social justice is both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. We envision a society in which individuals are both self-determined (able to develop their full capacities) and interdependent (capable of interacting democratically with others). Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others, their society, and the broader world in which we live.[140]

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[137] Scarry, *On Beauty*, 91.
[138] Scarry, *On Beauty*, 92.
[139] Scarry, *On Beauty*, 95.
[140] Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2007), loc. 525, Kindle.

The world in which justice is valued is a place where mutuality, support and interdependence are actively encouraged. It is a world that is, in both meanings of the word, "fair." In this world where both beauty and ugliness, justice and injustice exist side by side there is a "pressure toward social equality. It comes from the object's symmetry, from the corrective pressure it exerts against lateral disregard, and from its own generous availability to sensory perception."[141] All one need do in order to appreciate the fairness of the world is to step away from the center and look around.

Scarry quotes Simone Weil who says that this process requires us "to give up our imaginary position as the center…A transformation then takes place at the very roots of our sensibility, in our immediate reception of sense impressions and psychological impressions."[142] When beauty approaches a person he or she undergoes a disorientation and begins to view the world from a new vantage point. The experience is analogous to Mezirow's concept of the disorienting dilemma examined in chapter two. In Scarry's theory, it is not a dilemma, but the approach of beauty that opens one to newness. Newness invites transformation in the life of the one who beholds beauty. Then the seemingly unbroken surface of reality becomes torn open as new ideas about fairness come into consciousness. Beauty destabilizes and creates opportunities to view reality in a new way. Scarry says, "We willingly cede our ground to the thing that stands before us."[143] In stepping away from the center of perception, one can see that fairness for the sake of others is a priority in a life of balance and equity. Fairness applies equally to the areas of justice and beauty. Scarry writes, "People seem to wish there to be beauty even

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[141] Scarry, *On Beauty*, 110.
[142] Simone Weil, "Love of the Order of the World," in *Waiting for God* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1979), 159, quoted in Scarry, *On Beauty*, 111.
[143] Scarry, *On Beauty*, 112.

when their own self-interest is not served by it."[144] It is enough to know that there is beauty in the world, even if one does not have personal access to it. Beauty can to render one selfless. The newness that comes with the approach of beauty can engage the world on new terms and with new perspectives.

Transformation and Social Engagement

Juliet Millican defines social engagement as the ability to work constructively within and between social groups to create more resilient and sustainable communities. She warns that retreat into social disengagement,

> Has the potential to generate increased conflict and escalating violence. The inability to see the world from the vantage point of others is a key factor behind both local and civil conflict. It can also lead to less violent but equally harmful problems of alienation, marginalization and exclusion. We develop our identity by defining ourselves in relation to like and unlike groups but this can quickly lead to assumptions and stereotyping as people struggle to make sense of who they are.[145]

The retreat into social isolation serves to increase suspicion of those outside of one's own social network. Suspicion leads to prejudice. Prejudice leads to violence. Social engagement is a starting point for dismantling violence that exists on both micro and macro levels of society. Millican writes, "Understanding how identity categories are created and how labels can be used to situate people as insiders or outsiders is important in creating more resilient and sustainable communities."[146] The consciousness of one's own ability to act out of prejudice is, in Mezirow's terms, a disorienting dilemma. Without focused reflection and new insight on the disorientation of knowing one's own

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[144] Scarry, *On Beauty*, 123.

[145] Juliet Millican, "Social Engagement," University of Brighton, accessed February 27, 2014, http://arts.brighton.ac.uk /__data/assets/ pdf_file/0019/6274/ Social-Engagement-2.pdf.

[146] Ibid.

prejudice, it might be easy to continue the retreat into social disengagement. One path to new insight is through aesthetic experience. Beauty can transform a person from a place of social disengagement to social engagement.

John De Gruchy addresses the question of aesthetics as it relates to art and social engagement within his own context as a South African theologian. De Gruchy has served as professor of Christian studies at the University of Cape Town. He was active in the anti-apartheid struggles of the last century and the work of reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa. In the course of his work De Gruchy became convinced "apartheid was not only unjust but also ugly."[147] He means this in both a symbolic and literal sense. He writes, "To deprive people willfully of beauty and intentionally create such ugliness is from a Christian perspective nothing less than sin in its most cynical form."[148] This insight of De Gruchy was the genesis for his work synthesizing the themes of good and holy taste, the power of sacred images, the alien beauty of the cross, aesthetic existence, culture and transformation into a theory of theological and ethical aesthetics.[149] De Gruchy holds that beauty must be partnered with truth and justice if it is to have any integrity. Without beauty, truth and justice are each diminished, and the experience of them is attenuated in human life. There is something about beauty that works to free people from the weight of ugliness and attune them to the realities of truth and justice. De Gruchy says, "Anyone familiar with the ugly realities of apartheid will immediately recognize…the remarkable attempts by those affected to transcend their situation through township art, home decoration and the music, dance and colorful

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[147] De Gruchy, 1.
[148] De Gruchy, 88.
[149] De Gruchy, 213.

vestments of African-initiated churches."[150] Even though the ugliness of apartheid was a

daily reality for many South Africans, they were able to make meaning and lay claim to

justice by creating their own works of art.

De Gruchy approaches the question of aesthetics primarily through the visual arts

and architecture. His is a more pastoral theological aesthetics than Balthasar's, whose

aesthetics are located solely in the revelation of God. De Gruchy's theological approach

is not without hazards. He admits as much: "What, after all, is art, how does it relate to

aesthetics, and in what if any sense does it have moral significance?"[151] Visual art exists

in a social contract between the artist, the viewer, the critic and society at large. As stated

above, the opinion of many who work for social justice is that art is, at best, peripheral to

the struggle of justice. De Gruchy describes this opinion among some of those engaged in

the apartheid struggle, "We were concerned about truth and goodness rather than beauty,"

but he adds, "This does not mean that there was no interest in the arts."[152] This tension is

similar to the one noted by Scarry in her work: "This liability to error, contestation and

plurality – for which 'beauty' over the centuries has so often been belittled – has

sometimes been cited as evidence of its falsehood and distance from 'truth'."[153] De

Gruchy cites Theodor Adorno regarding the difficulty of "art" as a category, "Everything

about art has become problematic: its inner life, its relation to society, even its right to

exist."[154] De Gruchy contends that the difficulties with the categories of beauty and art

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[150] De Gruchy, 88.
[151] De Gruchy, 2.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Scarry, 52-53.
[154] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 1, quoted in De Gruchy, 2.

and their influence in making justice are worth the difficulties as they contain great potential in leading to social transformation.

While he admits that he is not an expert in the field of theological aesthetics, de Gruchy offers insights that are helpful in understanding the relationship between ethics, justice, art, taste, transformation and the church. He writes, "Aesthetics is about the way in which we see, hear and feel things through sense perception primarily through the arts, and the way in which we evaluate and appreciate what we experience."[155] He places human experience at the center of the question of aesthetics. What human beings are able to perceive is a "text" from which a theological aesthetics is built. Human reflection and critique are the locations in which to build a theology. All of this is related to the physical experience of beauty in which people are able to reflect theologically. De Gruchy cites Carol Harrison about the incarnational potential of beauty, "Unlike truth and goodness, beauty attracts us precisely because, of the three transcendentals, it 'is the most embodied, the most incarnate, the one which is virtually inseparable from matter – from the created, temporal, mutable realm.'"[156] The content of the texts for theological reflection are the works of art themselves. De Gruchy does not distinguish between "fine art" and "popular art" in the development of his theological aesthetics. He is, however, concerned to avoid "aestheticism" which he describes as a retreat from social engagement and doing the work of justice.[157] Aestheticism is unreflective admiration of beautiful objects. De Gruchy contends that art must serve some socially positive function in the struggle for justice. Otherwise, art is valued solely on the basis of its appearance and "is idolatrous

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[155] De Gruchy, 6.
[156] Carol Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Though of St. Augustine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 271, quoted in De Gruchy, 85.
[157] De Gruchy, 3.

because it makes aesthetic value an absolute."[158] De Gruchy's starting point in visual art means that he must deal with other challenging social categories as they relate to art. One of these that bears examination is the issue of good taste and bad taste as they relate to beauty.

<center>The Strange Necessity for Beauty</center>

The place of art in the church is an unquestioned necessity for de Gruchy. Not only does it give shape to the spiritual and religious longing of the viewer, it can raise theological concerns that spur the devout to a more profound witness to Christ in the world. He writes, "Whatever else is said about the power of beauty, it has the ability to enhance life, to improve its quality. There is, we might say, a strange necessity for beauty."[159] But the presence of visual art in the church has been a challenge for many throughout Christian history. Not only have some objected to visual images on the basis of the Second Commandment – "You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth,"[160] – some object to the aesthetic judgments that are called upon when introducing art into the church. Aesthetic judgments differ from Weber's positioning of religion in opposition to art. The general way of referring to these aesthetic judgments is in terms of "taste."

Art and taste provoke potentially conflictive conversations about social status, class and economics. For some people the very idea of "wasting" resources on art means that there is no space for attending to social needs such as poverty. The extravagant and, arguably, aesthetic action by Mary of Bethany in anointing the feet of Jesus with

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[158] De Gruchy, 83.
[159] De Gruchy, 77.
[160] Exodus 20:4, NRSV.

expensive ointment brings the social criticism of Judas Iscariot, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?"[161] In congregational life, the same conflict is often present; should the congregation reduce the flower budget for the sake of its homeless ministry? Even more pointedly, in the context of congregational life, should the altar guild spend money on "fine art" vestments, or will the "popular art" vestments made by a parishioner suffice? Which represents good taste and which represents bad taste? In congregational life issues of economics, social justice and questions of social class all contribute to aesthetic judgment, bad taste or good taste.

Pierre Bourdieu suggests a theory of culture where questions of taste are necessarily related to social capital, assets other than material goods, which define social class.[162] From the Bourdieuian perspective "good taste" is a symbolic marker of class, and as such is a part of the social struggle for domination. Those who make art engage in a struggle for the power to define taste as "a strategy of maintaining or modifying their social position."[163] For Bourdieu "bad taste" is what high-status people have left behind in their pursuit for social status that is then taken up by lower classes. In contrast, De Gruchy talks about bad taste theologically in terms of the human disposition toward sin. He writes, "The problem with the human social condition is not bad taste but original sin."[164] The solution to "bad taste" is the same as the solution to sin: the redemptive love of God seen in the cross of Jesus Christ. De Gruchy's is a provocative position, but it is central to the argument that he makes about aesthetics and justice: there is a relationship

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[161] John 12:5, NRSV.
[162] Bradford Verter, "Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu against Bourdieu," *Sociological Theory,* Vol. 21, No. 2 (Jun., 2003), 152, http://0-www.jstor.org.grace.gtu.edu /stable/3108623 (accessed March 1, 2014).
[163] Ibid.
[164] De Gruchy, 74.

between human sin and bad taste. De Gruchy addresses this from his South African context in the apartheid struggle.

He begins with the assumption that art is fundamental to religion.[165] De Gruchy explains this in terms of the human need to appropriate truth in terms of the physical senses. Human beings make meaning in terms of symbols, and art is one way of physicalizing symbols. Art contributes to one's ability to make religious meaning by making the unseen visible, by objectifying the personal and capturing the imagination with color, line, mass and all the other qualities of visual art. Throughout Christian history, there has been a wide range of art objects from which one might make meaning. Everything from the sublime beauty of an Andrei Rublev icon to a plastic statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe can serve as a piece of "religious art." These two examples may serve to typify the extremes between "fine art" and religious "kitsch."

The term *kitsch* originates in the nineteenth century in Germany. The suggested etymology of the word is the German for "smear" or "playing with mud."[166] Kitsch is messy, something that may be superficially pleasing, but with no lasting value. Except as a foil to consciously critical art, kitsch has little or no relationship to social critique. De Gruchy claims that art objects which are adequate to form the religious imagination of the devout must be able to speak to social justice in some way. Religious kitsch may be superficially comforting, but it has no lasting power to inform religious imagination and has no real aesthetic value. De Gruchy claims that there is a difference between good and bad taste, and good and bad art. He does not argue for the superiority of elitist art, or

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[165] De Gruchy, 76.

[166] Karsten Harries, *The Meaning of Modern Art*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 74, in Robert C. Solomon, "On Kitsch and Sentimentality", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (Winter, 1991), 4, http://www.jstor.org/stable/431644 (accessed March 1, 2014).

make a distinction between "fine art" and "popular art." The distinction that he draws for religious art is, "between good art of all kinds and kitsch, that is art which is mediocre and banal."[167] De Gruchy states that kitsch may be comforting to some, but, "this does not alter the fact that kitsch obfuscates reality, ignoring the ugly as the necessary counterpoint to the beautiful and becoming a dangerous 'poisonous substance', the 'epitome of all that is spurious in our times.'"[168] The definition of kitsch may well be in the eye of the beholder, but the value of art in spiritual and ethical formation relies on something more. People need good art in order to make meaning. The way of Christ is comforting, but it is also bent to the hard wood of the cross. Comfort cannot be the full content of Christianity; striving for justice is at the heart of the Christian life.

Art at the Heart of Transformation

De Gruchy believes that art and beauty have the power to transform human life, both individually and corporately. This conviction comes in part from his experience in apartheid South Africa. He describes the city of Cape Town as a place of both natural and cultural beauty. The beauty of the city stands in contrast to what he calls "another, ugly reality, much of it the creation of colonial and apartheid legislation and oppression, an architecture that reinforces alienation from social others and the environment."[169] This alternate, ugly reality is created by the sins of racism, greed, oppression and alienation, and is dominated by architecture and city planning that intended to separate black, colored and white South Africans. In this environment, intentionally designed to deprive

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[167] De Gruchy, 76.
[168] Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol. 1: Perception and Judgements, 1939-1944*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 12, quoted in De Gruchy, 76.
[169] De Gruchy, 171.

people of beauty, as well as their honor and dignity, a culture was transformed in the anti-apartheid struggle. One part of this struggle included the use of art as a subversive tool to oppression. Perhaps, as Nadine Gordimer states, "Art is the heart of liberation."[170]

De Gruchy claims that the effect of theological aesthetics is not to contain the church within its own safely constructed enclosure, but to empower its members to a thorough "participation in God's mission to transform the world."[171] From this position, it is clear that art is not an optional tool in the church's participation in God's mission, but is a vital part of the formation for Christians to take up their part in that mission. Art gives the church an alternative vision of reality from the one that is offered by exploitative, destructive cultural forces. The work of the church is to use art to reflect upon the calling of God as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."[172] The identity of the church's members is revealed in light and shadows; art is a tool to clarify what it means to be a member of God's household. If justice is to be achieved as a result of God's presence in the world it will be through the words and actions of those who follow God's way of self-giving love, individuals working together in the Spirit of Christ. De Gruchy writes,

> Art in itself cannot change society. That is a far too optimistic view of its capacity. But good art, whatever its form, helps us both individually and corporately to perceive reality in a new way, and by so doing, it opens up possibilities of transformation.[173]

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[170] Nadine Gordimer, *Culture in Another South Africa*, ed. Willem Campschreur and Joost Divendal (New York: Interlink Publishing Group, 1989), introduction, quoted in De Gruchy, 204.
[171] De Gruchy, 129.
[172] 1 Peter 2:9, NRSV.
[173] De Gruchy, 253.

As individuals are moved by their experience of beauty greater capacities are provided to see the world as God sees it, and in that vision to work for the sake of God's purpose.

Theory of Transformation

One of the hymns sung at St. Gregory's is a paraphrase of Gregory of Nyssa's writings: "God creates life; life beholds beauty; beauty begets love; love is the life of God."[174] The original words of Gregory are, "For the life of the Supreme Being is love, seeing that the Beautiful is necessarily lovable to those who recognize it, and the Deity does recognize it, and so this recognition becomes love, that which He recognizes being essentially beautiful."[175] Gregory's teaching concerns the resurrection of the body and the meaning of desire, love, faith and beauty in eternal life. Above all human experiences, there is love that lasts into eternity because it is the essence and nature of God. When all else passes away, love remains the eternally vivacious aspect of what it means to be human. According to Gregory, with love there is also beauty. There is beauty because whatever God recognizes is essentially beautiful. Beauty draws forth love from the beholder in a dynamic that is the substance of eternal life. In this mortal life, there is also beauty and love, imperfectly shared among human beings. Nevertheless it is the same beauty and love that are completed in God's eternal life, shared freely with all humankind. The presence of beauty, along with love, is a guarantee of eternal life, therefore, these are realities of eternal meaning. The hope of transformation promised in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is what Christians hope for in the last day; love and beauty are each a pledge of that hope.

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[174] Scott King, "God Creates Life", *Music for Liturgy* (San Francisco: All Saints Company, 2000), 77.

[175] Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Soul and the Resurrection" New Advent, Church Fathers, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2915.htm, (accessed March 3, 2014).

The theorists reviewed in this chapter inform the research design of this study by defining the relationship between God and human persons as one in which God desires to make a new creation, transforming people into the divine image, showing more of Godself in the world. Therefore, human persons are competent both to know God as revealed in beauty, truth, goodness and unity, and to bear witness to God's revelation in their lives as they create beauty, work for justice, and live together in community with one another and God. Both Lathrop and Schmemann show that transformation is at the heart of the liturgy, creating people as God's own. Participation in the liturgy gives the worshipper a narrative that has the power to transform time and history by recalling God's loving action in both. The liturgy prepares people to take up the work of transforming unjust and ugly social conditions that they face in daily life. The liturgy directs the people of God toward a future of eschatological hope of the transformation of all things into the beauty that is eternally in God's perception. Balthasar claims that this beauty exists as the glory of God, not only as an explanation of God. Beauty is objectively real as part of God's revelation. Weber offers a critique of the relationship between religion and art that is resolved by religion's acceptance of art as a tool for giving glory to God. As human beings reach out to beauty they discover that God is reaching toward them. This encounter of ultimate truth and beauty is the point at which Scarry claims life is restored to the viewer. Beauty leads people to seek justice; therefore beauty can spur people to social engagement in situations of injustice. De Gruchy urges the church to recognize that art, an expression of the beauty of God, can be used as an aid to people's participation in the mission of God. In so doing, people gain a greater capacity to see the world as God sees it and to work for the sake of God's purposes in the world.

Chapter 4
Research Design and Methodology

Rationale for the Study

The preceding chapters have examined the question of transformation as a phenomenon in congregational life from both sociological and theological perspectives, as well as an overview of theological, liturgical, aesthetical, and ethical issues related to transformation. The literature clearly shows that different methods and modalities influence transformation. Two influences that bear examination fall into the categories of aesthetic experience and social engagement. As stated earlier, aesthetic experience includes worship, music, art and poetry. Social engagement includes direct action in the community outside the congregation, public advocacy for societal and political change and working to make justice a reality in disenfranchised persons' lives. St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church has a long experience of these phenomena. The congregation has a history of working for growth and transformation in its shared life. Therefore, it is an ideal setting within which to learn more about the phenomenon of transformation and the factors that influence transformation. The question that will guide the remainder of this study is this: what are the influences of aesthetic experience and social engagement in the process of transformation of life at St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church?

Participant Action Research

The field research for this thesis is a participant action study. Gary Anderson and Kathryn Herr suggest that instead of concise explanations of propositional knowledge, action research leads to a deeper understanding of research questions as well as to

additional, more sophisticated questions.[176] The goal of action research is a deeper understanding of social conditions and the ways that individuals function in these situations. Additional goals include: generation of new knowledge, achievement of action-oriented outcomes, the education of both researcher and participants and findings that are relevant to the local situation of the study.[177] These goals are achieved as the researcher and those assisting in the study, called participants instead of subjects, enjoy a mutual sharing of authority in the research process. As the main researcher, I participated in a series of interviews with parishioners of St. Gregory's to gather the research data needed for the study. I enlisted a group of three co-researchers to assist me in the development of the interview questions and protocols. The study was deeply embedded in the culture of St. Gregory's. The research was done *with* members of the community, not *to* them.[178] The research participants, to a greater or lesser degree, were each very interested in the potential influence that research findings could have in the congregation.

Participant action research is a very suitable orientation for research at St. Gregory's. Since the congregation's founding in 1978 members have taken responsibility for the formation of the community. The founding document of St. Gregory's states that the membership of the church will,

> Appoint its own executive groups with authority to carry out policies approved by the membership. Every executive will work with the support of other members, who will provide help when asked for it. Clergy will help lay members to define their tasks, and lay members will support the clergy as they carry out clergy tasks. In this way authority and responsibility will be joined, not divided: members with responsibilities

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[176] Gary L. Anderson, and Kathryn Herr, *The Action Research Dissertation: A Guide for Students and Faculty* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2005), loc. 86, Kindle.
[177] Anderson and Herr, loc. 54, Kindle.
[178] Anderson and Herr, loc. 3, Kindle.

will have authority to do their work; and those who have authority over any matter will be responsible for its execution.[179]

This founding ideal has, with some modification, been successfully put into practice over the years. The people of St. Gregory's appreciate that they are stakeholders and are accustomed to having real authority regarding the course of the congregation's life. The collaborative quality of action research respects the authority and wisdom of the community and uses these in coming to insight. This study puts the researcher and the participants in a relationship that seeks new insight from shared experience.

The three co-researchers that I recruited from the parish each have a background in social science; one is a practicing child psychologist and the other two are licensed marriage, family and child therapists. The three are also very actively involved in the life of the congregation, a beneficial part of the project; as Anderson and Herr note, "Action research is best done in collaboration with others who have a stake in the problem under investigation."[180] The co-researchers and I met on two different occasions as a group and had occasional conversation one-on-one in the course of the project. During the first meeting, I explained the project in depth to the co-researchers. The group then worked together on the interview questions and discussed the way to recruit interviewees. The group pressed me to define the word transformation as it applies in the study. In the second meeting, I presented the draft interview questions and the group worked with me to refine and select the questions that would be used for the participant interviews.

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[179] Fabian, "The Plan," 6.
[180] Anderson and Herr, loc. 4, Kindle.

Qualitative Research

The methodology of this thesis is in qualitative research. In distinction to quantitative research, qualitative research seeks to come to new and deeper insight of social relationships, phenomena, institutions and actions within their own setting and according to the ways that people make meaning of them.[181] Earl Babbie notes that qualitative research produces data that are "not easily reduced to numbers."[182] Qualitative research begins with the assumption that what is being studied must be investigated as deeply as the researcher is able. Anselm Strauss writes, "One of our deepest convictions is that social phenomena are complex phenomena."[183] Such complexity warrants deep analysis. Qualitative research methodology looks closely at human interaction and relationship in order to come to deeper insight. John Swinton and Harriet Mowat note that there are three types of knowledge that can be gained through qualitative research: knowledge of the other, knowledge of phenomena and reflexive knowing.[184] Knowledge of the other refers to a deep understanding of the research participants. The depth and complexity of the analysis seek to discover not just the surface of people's experience, but what lies behind and beneath the reports of their experience. Knowledge of phenomena looks at particular events that take place in a particular social setting as an area of research interest. Analysis in this regard is local and based in what is happening in the social setting, not what the researcher believes should be happening. Reflexive

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[181] John Swinton and Harriett Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM, 2005), loc. 635, Kindle.
[182] Earl R. Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2013), loc. 295, Kindle.
[183] Anselm L. Strauss, *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 6. Google Books, http://books.google.com/books/about/Qualitative _Analysis_for_Social_Scientis.html?id=y16ww5ZsJ0AC, (assessed March 5, 2014).
[184] Swinton and Mowat, loc. 706, Kindle.

knowing refers to the researcher's own process of making meaning out of the world and articulating that insight into a statement of findings. Throughout a qualitative research study, the researcher must continually reflect on the data as they are shared by participants and seek to make meaning from them without moving too quickly to conclusions based on the data.

Qualitative research is an appropriate methodology for this study; it seeks to understand on the basis of the experiences of the people of St. Gregory's. Further, it takes individual's narratives as legitimate data for coming to new insight. This resonates with another section of the founding document of St. Gregory's that describes the community's coming to insight and action by sharing their experiences publicly. The founding document states, "Laypeople as well as clergy will deliver sermons on the scriptures, and will share their experience of prayer and Christian life with the congregation."[185] This phenomenon is seen every Sunday, in the assembly, as people stand to share their own experiences as part of the sermon, a period that sometimes exceeding that of the sermon itself. Swinton and Mowat note, "Stories are not simply meaningless personal anecdotes; they are important sources of knowledge."[186] Qualitative research makes meaning out of what participants bring to the research process, just as the liturgy at St. Gregory's does out of people's experiences.

<center>Emic/Etic Perspectives</center>

One of the dangers inherent in this study is maintaining researcher objectivity. The project is an "emic" study; I am a member of the research field. While attempting cultural neutrality, I admit that both the community of St. Gregory's and the data

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[185] Fabian, "The Plan," 6.
[186] Swinton and Mowat, loc. 808, Kindle.

provided by the research participants is personally meaningful to me. I have a stake in proving that the work of St. Gregory's Church leads to transformation in the lives of its members. One of the disciplines of this study is attending to an "etic" perspective on the research. I have practiced this discipline since first visiting St. Gregory's in 1997 as a liturgist examining "alternative worship communities" in the Episcopal Church. Since my first introduction to St. Gregory's, before I was a member of the community, I have sought to understand its practices, principles, and values. Nevertheless, there is a tension between my etic interest in the congregation, and my emic participation in it. My goal is to recognize this tension, not as counteractive to the research, but supportive of a complete understanding of St. Gregory's.

Grounded Theory

A central question of congregational life is whether or not people experience transformation as a result of their participation in the church, and if they do, the variables that affect that process. The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate how transformation takes place at St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church. One of the challenges to the methodology of this study is the relatively small number of research participants. As a rule, grounded theory involves a great deal of data in order to provide validity. This study has a relatively small body of data with which to work. Nevertheless, grounded theory is a suitable methodology for this study; it will extend the scope of the study in a way that a phenomenological study could not. I will use a mixed methodology, including phenomenology, in order to allow greater flexibility with the research data. I will

conceptualize the life of St. Gregory's community, examining the relationships between research findings and show the ways that these findings lead to transformation.

Grounded theory was developed from the collaboration of sociologists Anselm Strauss and Barney Glasser.[187] Grounded theory seeks to conceptualize why certain events occur in particular social settings. It is a process of developing theory that is grounded in observed social data, such as field studies or research interviews, and not deciding on a theory before beginning the research process. The data that comes from the research process is deeply analyzed by the researcher using a standard four-stage methodology.[188] First, discrete data, such as excerpts of research interviews, are categorized and compared. At this stage the researcher is trying to find concepts that occur in the case being studied, and compare them. Next, the researcher notes compelling relationships among the concepts that are identified. The researcher then begins to narrow the field of inquiry by eliminating some concepts that prove irrelevant to the research question. Finally, the researcher writes his or her findings and proposes a theory that explains the observed case being studied. Grounded theory uses complex data and clarifies it so that it can be used to explain the ways in which social situations function.

It is important to emphasize that, in grounded theory, the researcher does not formulate a hypothesis in advance of data analysis. If a researcher does so, it will result in a theory that is ungrounded from the data and is potentially meaningless. In order for this methodology to be successfully achieved the researcher must be directed by three principles.[189] First, the process of data collection and interpretation are guided by successively evolving interpretations made during the research. Second, the developing

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[187] Babbie, loc. 307, Kindle.
[188] Babbie, loc. 392-393, Kindle.
[189] Strauss, 10.

theory must be conceptually dense, having many internal links between its several parts. Third, the researcher must make a detailed, intensive, microscopic examination of the data in order to find what is most deeply revealed by the data. From this analysis, the researcher can develop a grounded theory.

The development of a grounded theory relies on organizing research data into manageable units for analysis. The process for organizing the data in qualitative research is coding, classifying or categorizing discrete units of data.[190] Codes are extracted from the research data. Coding not only organizes data, but also allows the researcher to discover patterns among the data that enable the development of the theory. The categories of coding are called open coding, axial coding and selective coding.[191] In the first stage, open coding, the data must be broken down into units that can be analyzed. The next stage, axial coding, identifies core concepts and further analyzes them in relationship to one another. Building upon these two stages, in the next stage, selective coding, the researcher seeks to identify the core concepts in the research study. The coding process also includes the technique of memoing, writing notes about insights as they arise from the coding. Strauss and Corbin identify three kinds of memoing: code notes, theoretical notes and operational notes.[192] Code notes identify the meaning of the code and what they mean in the analysis. Theoretical notes look at the deeper relationships among concepts and propositions. Operational notes are concerned with methodological issues. The purpose of coding and memoing is to reduce the research data

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[190] Babbie, loc. 396, Kindle.
[191] Babbie, loc. 397-398, Kindle.
[192] Anselm L. Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, 1998), quoted in Babbie, loc. 400, Kindle.

down to information that can be used to develop a theory. Without this process, the huge amount of research data would prove too unwieldy to allow analysis.

This thesis takes as its research data fourteen hours of interviews with seventeen members of St. Gregory of Nyssa. The interviews ranged in length from thirty to ninety minutes. Each interview was transcribed by a paid research assistant, a seminary student. The transcriptions were analyzed, using the coding categories listed above. The process of coding was achieved using a web-based app called "Dedoose".[193] The coded data was then used to develop the concepts and categories that describe the process of transformation at St. Gregory of Nyssa.

Research Design

As I have stated above, the intention of this thesis is to demonstrate the process of transformation in congregational life, and the variables that influence this process. My initial plan was to look only at the variables of aesthetic experience and social engagement. However, I developed a research design that would allow the inclusion of other variables. A third influence, friendship, did emerge from the data. The study was designed acknowledging the possibility that the phenomenon of transformation does not happen in congregational life. Although the primary data are one-on-one interviews with members of the congregation, additional data were examined. These include observation of St. Gregory's Sunday morning adult forum, the pastoral care listserv, and people's interaction during coffee hour, as well as cultural objects in the congregation.

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[193] Dedoose Version 4.5, web application for managing, analyzing, and presenting qualitative and mixed method research data (2013), (Los Angeles, CA: SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC, 2013), (www.dedoose.com).

I conducted research interviews with seventeen St. Gregory's members during the fall of 2013. These research participants were selected on the basis of quota sampling of the members of St. Gregory's who were over the age of eighteen years, a total of 212 people. Quota sampling divides a larger population into meaningful subsets; I determined that a quota sampling would provide a sample group with the same distribution characteristics that exist in the congregation. A purposive sampling method was used in selecting research participants. Purposive sampling assumes that the subset studied represents the whole population. I accounted for an imbalance between men and women in the congregation. Of those invited to participate, 46% were male and 54% were female; this represents the gender balance in the congregation. There are currently no transgender or intersex members of St. Gregory's. I further separated the group into four sampling units based on age and tenure at the church relative to my own age and tenure: group one represents members older than I who have been members of the church longer than I have; group two represents members older than I who have been members of the church less time than I have; group three represents members younger than I who have been members of the church longer than I have; group four represents members who are younger than I who have been members of the church less time than I have. The breakdown of the 212 potential participants in the research study can be graphically represented:

One Older Tenured 76 (35.85%)	**Two** Older Junior 37 (17.45%)
Three Younger Tenured 30 (14.15%)	**Four** Younger Junior 68 (32.8%)

This further reduction of the sample was made because of my status as the second rector of a congregation that is arguably among the most distinct in the Episcopal Church; it was also an attempt at overcoming potential bias in the study. I determined that tenured members of the congregation would relate to me differently than would newer members and that older members would relate to me differently than younger ones. These differences are related to issues of my authority as rector versus that of the founding rectors, my being the only rector of the congregation that newer members have known, and the tension between innovations that have taken place since my becoming the rector versus maintaining practices in the congregation initiated by the founding rectors. Another factor with the potential to bias the study was my role as each participant's pastor. I attempted to ameliorate this issue by encouraging participants to share their concerns about the study with me. I assured the research participants that their identities would remain confidential in the written results of the study. I also told them that their participation was a piece of the larger effort of making St. Gregory's a more vibrant community. Because of St. Gregory's long-standing tradition of members publicly

sharing experiences in the course of the liturgy, I deemed that there were negligible psychological and social risks in the study.

Of the 212 eligible members of the church, I determined to invite 30 participants, 14.5% of the total, on a proportional basis from the additional reduction of the sample. Participants were selected randomly within each subset using an Excel spreadsheet. Eleven participants were selected from category one, five from category two, four from category three and ten from category four. Although I did a racial and ethnic analysis of the congregation,[194] I did not plan on taking this factor into account in the quota sample. Of the thirty people invited to participate in the study, eighteen accepted. One participant dropped out of the study before being interviewed. Of those who were interviewed, seven (41%) were "older tenured" members, three (18%) were "older junior" members, one (5%) was a "younger tenured" member, and six (35%) were "younger junior" members. There were nine female and eight male research participants.

The interviews were conducted at times and locations of the participants' choosing. The majority of the interviews took place in a classroom at the church. Three of the interviews took place during the parish retreat at the Bishop's Ranch in Healdsburg, California. Three interviews took place in participants' homes. One interview took place in the participant's place of business. After reading each of the participants a standard description of the interview process, I asked each to sign two copies of an interview consent form, including a request to digitally record the interview. Each interviewee retained one copy of the consent form and the other was kept under lock and key in my office. Each interview was digitally recorded using a Tascam digital recorder. The

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[194] Of the 212 members considered as research participants 90.09% are white, 6.13% are Asian American, 1.42% are Latino/a, 1.42% are mixed-race, 0.47% are African American and 0.47% are South Asian.

recordings were digitally stored in separate Google Docs files, and then the recording was erased from the storage chip in the Tascam recorder. Each participant was assigned a randomized code number. These numbers were generated using an Excel spreadsheet. Participant names were included in the field notes that I made during interviews, but were excised from the transcripts and replaced with pseudonyms. Pseudonyms were also used for the written analysis of the data.

I developed ten research questions with the assistance of the three members of my co-researcher team. These questions were asked of each research participant in the order listed below:

1. Tell me how you came to be a part of the worshipping community at St. Gregory's.
2. How is your life different because you are a part of St. Gregory's?
3. What are the three most important things that make St. Gregory's "your" church?
4. Tell me how your experiences at St. Gregory's are the same or different from those you have in other communities.
5. Has there been a time when you behaved differently as a result of your experience at St. Gregory's?
    a. Tell me about the incident.
6. Think of your senses. When you walk into St. Gregory's building, what do you see, hear, smell, taste and/or feel?
7. What is your experience of beauty at St. Gregory's?
    a. What is the most beautiful aspect of St. Gregory's?
8. Tell me about your experience of helping to create beauty at St. Gregory's.
    a. Has that experience affected you in some way?
9. Tell me the ways that St. Gregory's action in the community makes a difference.
10. Tell me about the sense of your capacity to change the world to be a better place.
    a. How do you believe St. Gregory's has helped you do this?

Occasionally the research participants asked for clarification on some of the questions. At the end of the interview, I asked the participants if they had further experiences that they wished to share.

Conclusion

The design and methodology of this study provide findings that are essential in describing the process of transformation. The content of the findings and a summary of the findings are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Research Findings

The central topic of this study is transformation in congregational life. In chapter two, the meaning and process of transformation are examined, including the perspective of Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory. His theory states that transformation is a process that begins by one's viewing previous understandings and interpretations of reality as inadequate to address current needs. This experience results in a disorienting crisis that pushes the learner to look for new ways of making meaning. Older understandings are reinterpreted, allowing new insights to emerge, which guide future behaviors. The process of transformation continues by sharing self-reflection in dialogue with others. Sharing new assumptions and ideas with others invites a critical discourse that further clarifies meaning. Finally, the new learning is practiced in one's lived experience. The research participants in this study have experienced transformation as a result of their participation at St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church. Each one of them recognizes that their transformation was shaped and guided by practices and events that are a regular part of St. Gregory's life as a community.

This study finds that personal transformation is a phenomenon that takes place as a result of peoples' participation in the life of St. Gregory's Church. The research data of this study establish three main areas that influence the process of transformation. Each main area is further divided into themes that help to amplify the ways in which transformation take place. The data are presented in three of this chapter's sections:

1. The Effect of Beauty on Transformation

The presence and experience of beauty at St. Gregory of Nyssa are important in the process of transformation in the lives of community members. Beauty is recognized through aesthetic experience, the concept of harmony, the practice of liturgy, the process of making music together, the process of making art together, and in the idea of "personalism."

2. The Effect of Social Engagement on Transformation

The distinct practice of social engagement at St. Gregory's contributes to the process of transformation in the lives of community members. The distinctive nature of St. Gregory's social engagement is first analyzed and then demonstrated by the choice of social engagement, the work of the Food Pantry at St. Gregory's, the influence of social engagement on those who do not participate in it, the influence of liturgy on social engagement, and the role of strangers in the process of social engagement.

3. The Effect of Friendship on Transformation

Transformation is realized at St. Gregory's as a result of friendship and life in the community. This phenomenon is examined as it relates to the founding of the congregation in 1978, the choice of friendship by members of the community, the influence of friendship on events within the parish, the effect of friendship outside of the parish, the durability of friendship, and the place of hospitality in nurturing friendship.

In the final section, I will describe the influences on transformation in congregational life. As noted in chapter four, one of the dangers inherent in this study is maintaining researcher objectivity. I have made every effort to avoid identifying so completely with the research participants and the findings in the data that I lose my objectivity. I recognize both my etic interest in the congregation, and my emic participation in it. The tension inherent in my role as both a researcher and the congregational leader provides a creative opportunity for me to fully understand the culture of the congregation. The following sections present the research data from this study and the findings from the data that will be used in describing the process of transformation at St. Gregory of Nyssa.

Part One: The Effect of Beauty on Transformation

Aesthetic Experience

Mostly it is the feeling that this is a place where beauty of all kinds is welcome and out front and not hidden and celebrated.

Linette P.

This study finds that aesthetic experience influences the process of transformation in congregational life. Based on Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological aesthetic, this study contends that aesthetic experience is a gift *from* God and experience *of* God. Building on Balthasar's work, John de Gruchy states that beauty *is* the glory of God, not only an *explanation* of God's glory.[195] When God is revealed in creation, there is beauty. Whenever and wherever God is present, there is the promise of transformation; it is God's nature to make a new creation. In this sense, aesthetic experience, the revelation of God's glory, influences transformation in people's lives; this is reflected in the experience of the research participants in this study.

Brianne came to St. Gregory's from another Episcopal church but had been raised in a conservative Evangelical congregation, one that de-emphasized aesthetic experience for the sake of a legalistic, rational approach to God. She says that St. Gregory's role in her transformation has been opening her to receive new experiences, "St. Gregory's has made me more open minded. More tolerant. Not that I like the word 'tolerant' but, honestly, it's made me more tolerant." Before coming to St. Gregory's, Brianne had already experienced the Episcopal Church's prioritizing of beauty in the liturgy, utilizing all of the senses, but she did not fully appreciate the power aesthetic experience had in influencing her life, until participating at St. Gregory's. She says,

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[195] De Gruchy, 114.

I had studied art. I had bought into Episcopalian theory of using all your senses and emotions and, you know, Eucharist and being with people is more important than agreeing with every word of the sermon, or having every word of the sermon change your life and make you want to confess. But Saint Gregory's made that more real, and it was around all the time.

Brianne's experience of beauty at St. Gregory's is, as she says, "more real" and "around all the time." If God's presence is revealed in beauty, then the value of beauty in the church is in its revealing God to those who come to the church. St. Gregory's enjoys the presence of beauty in both the liturgy and the material culture of its building and seeks to express beauty in ways that are authentic to itself as a community. The presence of beauty, in the life of the church, has the power to transform human experience as it reveals God's presence in the community.

A Community of Artists

Artists have been drawn to St. Gregory's since its founding, owing to the pleasure that the community takes in both making art and sharing it with others. Many members of St. Gregory's are artists, working both as amateurs and professionals in a variety of media. The presence and participation of artists in the congregation influences the role of aesthetics, beauty, and art as a part of the community's life.

Linette is one of the members of St. Gregory's raised in the Episcopal Church. She has a serious avocation as an artist. She came to the congregation after moving to the Bay Area from the East Coast. In her former parish, she was engaged in creating liturgical art for the church's use. Her efforts were not without risk. She states, "For several years when I first started doing liturgical arts they got me in trouble. Big trouble." Generously offered for the church's use, Linette's work was not always warmly embraced. She says that some members of her former parish did not consider her works

as "Anglican" enough, describing one as "that awful tie-dyed banner." Reflecting on her experience of making art for the church Linette says, "Artists often say, 'Art doesn't matter! Nobody cares!' but they haven't done anything for churches. People in churches have intense feelings about what is right and what is wrong for their church."

Linette's experience reflects the perennial tension between art and religion identified by Max Weber. He writes that historically, as a society evolves from magical thinking to rational discourse, the critique of art by religion changes, "The rejection of responsibility for ethical judgment and the fear of appearing bound by tradition…shift judgments whose intention was originally ethical into an aesthetic key. An example is the shift from the judgment 'reprehensible' to the judgment 'in poor taste.'"[196] The response to Linette's work in her previous congregation was not based in moral conviction but in terms of taste and opinion. Linette describes her experience of transformation at St. Gregory's as one that involves her work as an artist, "I never would have done all this stuff if it hadn't been for Saint Gregory's." Her experience at St. Gregory's has given Linette a new perspective on herself and her abilities, a factor that Jack Mezirow identifies as critical in personal transformation.[197] The artists who come to St. Gregory's, sharing their work with the whole community, find it to be a place that nurtures their creative efforts. Unlike some other congregations, artists find St. Gregory's a place that offers a generous welcome to those whose spirituality is nurtured by creating art. The presence of artists influences the life of the entire community. Rather than being an optional part of the community's experience, there is an expectation of beauty among

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[196] Weber, 243.
[197] Mezirow, *Learning as Transformation*, 290.

members. Research participants report that the presence of works of art enhances their experience of the holy and nourishes their spiritual lives.

Feeding the Hunger for Beauty

The presence of beauty and art at St. Gregory's serve the needs of those who come seeking transformation in their lives. De Gruchy's theological aesthetics states that art is an essential part of religious practice and formation.[198] He contends that human beings use art as a means of coming to a deeper knowledge of God. De Gruchy's position is proven in the experience of the research participants. Eileen came to St. Gregory's from the Roman Catholic Church where she was a member of a religious community. Although she remembers her former parish as a place that she cared for and which honored her vocation, she was unable to be fully nurtured in that denomination. She contrasts her experience in the Roman Catholic Church with what she has found at St. Gregory's. Eileen says that when she came to St. Gregory's, "I think I was sensory-starved. In many ways I had a hard time getting how much I needed good music and good art, you know, for my spirit." Eileen's sense of impoverished aesthetics in her former church is a step in Mezirow's theory of transformation: the recognition of discontent as a part of the process of transformation.[199] As she became aware of her dissatisfaction with the role of beauty in her former denomination, she chose to affiliate with a congregation that places a premium on the experience of beauty in the life of the church.

Sebastian came to St. Gregory's in its early years, before the congregation relocated to the Potrero Hill district of San Francisco. Like Eileen, he was raised in the Roman Catholic Church. Sebastian had a similar experience to Eileen's of discontent in

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[198] De Gruchy, 76.

[199] Mezirow, *Transformation Learning in Practice*, 19.

his former denomination; it was a church that provided limited aesthetic nurture. He says that in that denomination, "the liturgy was just appalling." Both Eileen and Sebastian find that the experience of beauty at St. Gregory's is a transformative influence in their lives. Eileen specifically names being "sensory-starved" as one of the deficits that she had experienced. She did not realize that her need for "good art and good music" was at the core of her spiritual desire to be whole. Impoverished aesthetics starve the soul; beauty serves people as they make meaning in their lives.

Hunger for beauty draws people to St. Gregory's. After moving into the neighborhood of Potrero Hill, Ted came to St. Gregory's after reading a review of the congregation online at Yelp. Raised in a mainline denomination, attending services sporadically at best, his experience of beauty in congregational life was limited. The beauty of St. Gregory's building and art spoke very clearly to Ted of sacred space. He says that when he comes into the building it is the art that captures his attention, "It's very sensual compared to most other places that I've been to because of all of the artwork and the dancing saints…it certainly has an effect to help realize that you are in God's house." In particular, the large icon of Dancing Saints in the rotunda is impressive to him and gives him pause to "think about the different people up there." He finds that the sense of beauty in the space prepares him for worship, "You're here to worship, to try to calm down, to listen and participate, to give and receive in the service. I think the whole atmosphere does contribute to that." Ted finds that the presence of beauty facilitates his encounter with God.

Similarly, Madeline finds that the beauty of St. Gregory's feeds her in ways that she had not considered before. Madeline came to St. Gregory's after the birth of her first

child. She has an interest in architecture and an appreciation of beauty; as she states, "we have a creative family." Her initial interest in the church was to provide her child with a religious upbringing. She soon found the "whole aesthetic component, which is something I value and I never really thought about much before…I've come to really appreciate in the context of just feeling inspired." She says that St. Gregory's has been an influence in her transformation, "I can only say in a positive sense where I feel more open to new experience and I want to be kinder and more thoughtful about how I go about doing things. More reflective." Madeline's experience is another step in Mezirow's theory of transformation: an exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions.[200] As she becomes more involved in the life of the parish, Madeline is opened to new ways of participating in the community and is aware of new areas of her life that are affected by the presence of beauty.

People come to St. Gregory's and recognize the community's revelatory understanding of beauty, and that beauty is a regular part of the congregation's life. However, not every member is equally impressed by the aesthetic. For some, the presence of beauty is less significant than the efficient or thrifty operation of the parish; for these members beauty is of relative value. Some of the research participants struggled to identify beauty as a part of their experience. Nevertheless there continues to be a general concern for the aesthetic within the congregation. The following five sections will examine different aspects of aesthetic experience at St. Gregory's: harmony, liturgy, music, making art, and the beauty of persons. By examining each of these areas, a more complete analysis of aesthetic experience in the lives of the research participants will be demonstrated, which will add to an understanding of transformation.

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[200] Ibid.

Harmony

The harmony that comes as we bring so many different things together. The harmony that somehow manages to come when we have such brightly colored vestments. The harmony that comes when we have a little bit of Byzantine, a little bit of Shaker, a little bit of Taizé, a little bit of stuff that our own people have written. The fact that we sing harmony…the harmony of colors, the harmony of music, the harmony of traditions coming together.

Sebastian L.

As noted in chapter one, St. Gregory's is a congregation that does not use musical instruments in the liturgy; the congregation sings in four-part harmony. For many of the research participants, the physical experience of singing in harmony has become a metaphor for the harmony of the liturgy and of the relationships that are shared within the congregation. The research participants report that harmony influences their own transformation in life. In chapter three of this study, we noted that one of the insights of liturgical theology is the necessity of harmony between the liturgy, theology and Christian life. Alexander Schmemann writes that the purpose of liturgical theology "is to overcome the fateful divorce between theology, liturgy and piety—a divorce which, as we have already tried to show elsewhere, has had disastrous consequences for theology as well as for liturgy and piety."[201] In order for its transformative potential to be realized, the liturgy must be a harmonious part of human experience. This study contends that the transformative power of the liturgy is enhanced when it is something more than a series of disconnected actions, each more beautiful than the last; the liturgy must be harmonious. Elaine Scarry notes that harmony is a quality of beauty. She writes that beauty in society

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[201] Schmemann, *Of Water and the* Spirit, loc. 12, Kindle.

includes "fairness not just in the sense of loveliness of aspect but in the sense of 'a symmetry of everyone's relation to one another.'"[202]

Harmony as Organizing Principle

The harmonious relationship among the several areas of St. Gregory's shared life has an influence in the transformation of people's lives. Madeline says of singing at St. Gregory's, "It's just a very beautiful thing especially when everyone starts singing the different octave and harmonies…I really appreciate that." Harmony in the congregation's singing is an aesthetic experience, as well as an organizing principle in the community. Carly identifies the relationship between the harmony of singing and a sense of harmony in the congregation's aesthetics. She came to St. Gregory's following the birth of her first child. Although raised by irreligious parents, Carly became interested in church while in college, attending Quaker and Unitarian-Universalist congregations. After she became a member of St. Gregory's she joined the choir and became more deeply involved in the congregation. Carly says of St. Gregory's, "It's a very sensory experience; just all the art and the sounds and the fabrics and the resonance of the place, the beauty of the place. But it's also, there's a richness to it. There's a harmony in that."

Cliff's father was a pastor in a Protestant denomination. He was raised in a conventional Protestant church. Art and music were early avocations for members of his family. Before coming to St. Gregory's, Cliff spent time in different denominations. St. Gregory's has been a place for him to explore art and beauty as it relates to his spirituality and his work as a photographer. Cliff names a concern for a harmonious relationship between the art of the church and what it communicates about God. He states, "So many churches are square boxes and say nothing about God. And if you make any

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[202] Scarry, *On Beauty*, 95.

kind of equation between God and beauty, you've got a problem." For Cliff, there is a necessary relationship between the beauty of God and the beauty of the place where the church gathers to worship God. This sense of harmony is transformational.

Mona has been a member of St. Gregory's since the congregation moved to the Potrero Hill district of San Francisco in the early 1990's. She had not been affiliated with a church since her childhood. Soon after coming to St. Gregory's she found herself with leadership responsibilities in the parish. She describes St. Gregory's influence in her life in terms of her leadership abilities, "This community gave me another place for me to be a leader and figure out, in being a leader in a setting that was spiritual, better approaches to people." Mona reflects on the relationship between the physical beauty of the church and the category of harmony. She says, "On occasion, I try to look at our church as a stranger would see it. Does that look right? Does it look balanced? Is there something uneven there? Is it jarring?" The harmony of building's arrangement catches Mona's attention because she believes it will positively impress a first-time visitor. As a leader in the congregation, she has a concern that the space is harmonious, creating an atmosphere that is hospitable and welcoming to those who come to the church for the first time. Harmony, a quality that is most obvious in the congregation's singing, has easily become a way for members to analyze other areas of St. Gregory's common life.

Harmonious Relationships

Harmony not only concerns the physical culture of St. Gregory's; research participants find that it is significant in terms of personal relationships. As noted above, this reflects the position of Elaine Scarry; there must be a balance in human relationships. Ethan came to St. Gregory's shortly after meeting his husband, a longtime member of the

congregation. He was raised as a frequent attendee in a Protestant denomination. He says

that being grounded in community is a transformative experience in his life. Ethan is one

of the research participants for whom harmony is an important category for

understanding the relationships of members and their participation in the liturgy. During

this study several members of the congregation died, two of whom had served as greeters

at the Sunday liturgy. Reflecting on their death, and missing their presence, Ethan states,

"Everyone needs to be there to be sure that we're harmonized…I think the harmony is

just the people being there doing what they're supposed to be doing." Ethan appreciates

harmony in the congregation as everyone participates in creating its common life. He

experienced the deaths of influential members of the community as what Mezirow's

theory of transformation defines as a "triggering event" or "disorienting dilemma."[203]

This event began the process of transformation in Ethan's life; he had to manage his

awareness that the harmony of the community was valuable because it was interrupted by

death.

<div align="center">Fitting Everything Together</div>

This study finds that the harmonious intersection of art, music, liturgy and

friendship creates something that is greater than the sum of the parts for the community.

Any single aspect of beauty at St. Gregory's may be, in itself, aesthetically pleasing, but

the interaction of each piece provides opportunities for transformation in the lives of

research participants. Laura says of her experience of transformation at St. Gregory's,

"What I've learned is not to judge myself, to be more gentle with myself in creating

beauty." Laura came to St. Gregory's in 1996 after reading about the congregation's new

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[203] Sarah Gravett and Nadine Petersen, "Promoting Dialogic Teaching Among Higher Education Faculty in South Africa," in *Transformative Learning in Practice*, Jack Mezirow and Edward W. Taylor. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009). 102.

church building in an article in the *New York Times*. She was raised in a Protestant denomination, which she left in late adolescence. The immediate reason she chose to attend was a desire to learn how to sing. A friend had suggested that if she wanted to learn how to sing she ought to join a church choir. Laura has been a member of St. Gregory's for over seventeen years and has developed a deep, spiritual, almost mystical appreciation of the church's beauty. Reflecting on the harmony she experiences at St. Gregory's, she says,

> It's very beautiful. The music is awesome and [people] are moved by it. People feel fed by that. It's like a multi-sensorial Eucharist. The whole thing becomes the bread and wine. It gets bigger. It's the majesty of all of the things we can do to glorify Spirit and God.

The harmony of the liturgy connects all of its discrete movements. The harmony of the beauty is one of the things that feeds and sustains those who come to the congregation for worship. All that is offered in the liturgy combines into a single event that gives glory to God. The majestic harmony of the liturgy is a transformative influence in people's lives.

Peter came to St. Gregory's after a long absence from the Roman Catholic Church, during which time he participated in a local meditation group. Peter says that St. Gregory's role in his own transformation has been very important, "The people who come in here, we're exposed to the beauty of God…it's like that seed. And maybe to just be in part of a whole, trying to change, I think, is more than enough." His appreciation for the harmony of St. Gregory's comes from his experience of the liturgy. Speaking of the beauty of the liturgy he says, "I think it's the way each segment of the liturgy is connected. The rhythm, so to speak. And one does lead to the next, into the next, into the next." The experience of beauty is more than a collection of different beautiful objects and events; it is the way that each piece relates to every other piece.

The harmony at St. Gregory's invites people to view their own lives and experiences as locations of harmony and beauty. Stan was raised in a very religious family and attended church regularly until the age of twenty. Decades later he came to St. Gregory's. He says of his reasons for coming back to church, "I found I missed the music, I found I missed the social aspects of it and the friends that I remember having." What Stan discovered at St. Gregory's was a liturgy with a harmonious sense of the relationship between theology, liturgy and honoring people's experience. Stan refers to the painted inscription in the church's cupola, high above the altar table, "The one thing truly worthwhile is becoming God's friend." This verse comes from Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* and describes the goal of human life. Stan says, "Wherever I look I see a version of the same message…we believe that the experience of worship is about bonds of affection, as opposed to fear or awe or obedience or anything I maybe attempted to run away from." The message of living in friendship with God is harmoniously woven throughout the shared life of St. Gregory's. As it has been for other research participants, this insight has been transformative for Stan's understanding of God and himself.

Liturgy

At St. Gregory's, God has more elbow-room than I have ever experienced God having in my life. I found that God just had more ways to reach me. From the side and from the front. The music, the preaching, the community, the feast of the senses.

Sebastian L.

This study finds that participation in the liturgy is a transformative experience in people's lives. We noted in chapter three the contributions of liturgical theology in understanding the process of transformation. Alexander Schmemann makes the point that

this change takes place as people participate in the sacramental life of the church.[204] This

insight is reflected in the experience of the research participants.

Strengthened for Action

This study finds that participation in the liturgy prepares people for service in the

world. Bess describes the transformation that she has experienced in the liturgy as a new

openness to faith, "I feel like my attitude has changed," she says. Like many young adults,

Bess left the church of her childhood, returned to the church by way of a non-

denominational, Evangelical church and then came to the Episcopal Church. Her

development of spiritual practices has been enhanced by her experiences of St. Gregory's,

particularly in the beauty of the liturgy. She describes her experience witnessing baptism,

"I was full on streaming tears. Sally was like, 'Are you okay?' And I'm like, 'Yeah. This

is amazing.'" The liturgy provides her with a space within which to seek peace and

strength and find them in beauty. Bess describes the way in which St. Gregory's has

influenced her own transformation, "Really what I'm getting out of the services and out

of the community and the people is an ability to be of service to my dad in a way that I

have never been able to." She describes this change in an experience of service to her

critically ill father,

> I feel calm. I'm able to show up. My dad was in ICU for a week following
> a couple different surgeries. And he was very clear. He's like, "I don't
> want to die alone." He was so worried that nobody would be there. So I
> slept in ICU for a week. I felt a little crazy toward the end of it — I'm not
> going to lie. But I did it and I prayed, which is totally weird for me — to
> sit and pray at night and ask God for the strength to be able to show up
> and take care of my dad and wipe his face down with face wipes, just
> really basic caring stuff.

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[204] Schmemann, *For the Life of the World,* loc. 58, Kindle.

Bess' participation in the liturgy gives her peace, comfort and a greater ability to manage the crises that occur in her life. The liturgy alone does not give Bess the ability to be present in crises situations; there are other factors in her experience that give her peace and comfort. Bess' experience of serving her father is a step in Mezirow's theory of transformation: provisional trying of new roles.[205] As she takes on new responsibilities, Bess finds that she is competent to offer care. Trying this role was directly related to Bess' experience of participating in the liturgy.

The research participants report that the liturgy supports their engagement in relationships. Ethan describes the liturgy as equally energizing, refreshing and calming. Ethan notes the effect of the liturgy, in both his professional and personal life. He finds that worship strengthens him in the relationship he shares with his husband, Joel. Of equal significance, the liturgy releases him from self-judgment to a degree that he had not experienced before. He states,

> I think just having that at least once a week grounding really helps and it prepares me not just for work, but for my relationship with Joel to help make it work. Now, for every couple that may not be necessary…I can be high strung, just naturally, it brings me down. So I don't hold as much judgment for myself or for him.

Ethan finds that the liturgy provides a time and place for him to quiet himself and attend to his primary relationships. The calm of the liturgy is not soporific; it prepares Ethan to live his life with attention to greater integrity and strength. As with Bess, there are factors outside of St. Greogry's that strengthen Ethan's relationships; the liturgy is not fully responsible for his experience of peace in his relationships. Nevertheless, the liturgy influences his sense of transformation and growth.

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[205] Mezirow, *Transformation Learning in Practice*, 19.

Highly Participatory

This study finds that taking on leadership roles in the liturgy empowers people and is a transformative experience. One of the liturgical values at St. Gregory's is participation in the liturgy by many people. Some of the pieces of work that must be accomplished in the liturgy are formal and canonically defined; for example the presider of the liturgy is a presbyter. However, many of the tasks customarily assumed by the clergy or lay assistants are taken up by members of the assembly. Often these liturgical "jobs" are discovered as the liturgy unfolds. Clayton came to St. Gregory's from another Episcopal Church in New Orleans after moving to San Francisco following Hurricane Katrina. He was very involved in the ministries of his former parish. Clayton says that his sense of transformation at St. Gregory's is related to continuing his ministries after having to evacuate his former home, "St. Gregory's lets me exercise my music ministry, my healing ministry through prayer and visiting people, making music with people who are ill, singing for people. Working with children and the family ministry." In the course of the liturgy one Sunday, Clayton invented a liturgical job that he shares with a child. He steps up to the lectern with a child and assists him or her in adding incense to the standing thurible. He says, "I think when the kids throw some incense on that burning charcoal and it wafts up and hits them in the face and they close their eyes…it's a beautiful moment." After his initial experience of sharing liturgical action with a child, Clayton continued to do so as a regular part of the liturgy. His action is a step in Mezirow's theory of transformation: building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships.[206] The simple action of adding incense to a thurible was one assumed by a

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[206] Ibid.

vested lay leader before Clayton reinvented it. After doing it the first time, he found the transformative power and beauty of the action in his life and the lives of others.

This study finds that theological reflection on liturgical practice leads to action, which in turn leads to transformation. St. Gregory's long-standing custom of "open communion," giving Communion to everyone, regardless of their having been baptized or not, is something that the research participants indicate as contributing to their own transformation. Sebastian says the congregation does not merely talk about theology, it enacts it every Sunday in a very deliberate way. He talks about the experience of Sara Miles, currently the Director of Ministry at St. Gregory's, who came to the liturgy and was given Communion for the first time in her life. He says, "People like Sara Miles come in and cry the first time they are communicated, and their life is fundamentally changed. And I'm part of a congregation that gives God that kind of elbow-room." Sebastian notes that the liturgy at St. Gregory's is an event that is not bound by a sense of nostalgia. He describes this as "expecting God to be God and to act in the course of the liturgy." Sebastian's long experience at St. Gregory's includes participating in open communion as a regular part of the liturgy. He has studied the historical and theological meaning behind the practice of open communion, with the conclusion that it was Jesus' decision to dine with the unprepared that ultimately lead to his crucifixion. Sebastian says,

> I can see how eating with anybody—and eating doesn't have quite the same thing as it did in Jesus' world, but…how eating with anybody really has consequences, and mainly it says something about what God is like: that God just gives himself, herself, to everybody, whether you like it or not. And that I can do the same. I can give myself to people, not push myself: I can give myself freely to people. That's the name of the game.

In the same way that God gives freely to all people of God's very self, so Sebastian feels empowered to give himself to people in service. This transforms a social action, giving

oneself in service to others, into a theological statement, acting as God does in generously giving everything that is needed for healing and wholeness. Participation in the liturgy has the power to transform action, and to do so in a way that has theological integrity and meaning.

Welcome and Participation

This study finds that genuine welcome of strangers and newcomers to the congregation influences the process of transformation in people's lives. St. Gregory's liturgy is planned to deliberately welcome newcomers into the service and explicitly communicate that their participation in the liturgy is important. St. Gregory's liturgy is a fully participative experience; there is no provision made for passive observation of the liturgy, although those who choose to may observe the liturgy unfold. A congregation's welcome without an explicit expectation of participation in the liturgy may appear to be hospitable, but it does not treat visitors as full members of the assembly. St. Gregory's community understands that a hospitable welcome includes the expectation that everyone in the assembly is committed to participation in the liturgy. One example of this is the silence observed during the Liturgy of the Word. The presence of silence in the liturgy is designed to allow people to reflect on their experience both within the liturgy and in their personal lives. Rick came to St. Gregory's after moving to the Bay Area from the East Coast. He and his partner have a daughter. In addition to the urge to introduce their child to church Rick was prompted to return for personal reasons, "I had been disconnected from any community of faith for many years and I wanted to find a path of re-entry in dealing with some big issues that I was facing." He was both challenged and encouraged

by the liturgy and the preaching at St. Gregory's. He reports that the rhythm between silence and action in the liturgy was helpful to him, particularly the silence:

> I have always tried to be a listener, but often times I would listen for what I wanted to hear. And I think one of the most dangerous fallacies is something that you know that you know, but it's not actually true. And being a little bit more open to listening and listening to yourself and perceiving yourself in relation to others. That's a pretty basic thing, but it's taken me longer in life to figure that out.

Silence in the liturgy was not initially comfortable for Rick. "There was a period of pain. It was painful to go through that because you are thinking through very traumatic issues." Rick's personal reflection during the liturgy is an example of one step in Mezirow's theory of transformation: self-examination.[207] Rick came to the community having identified an area in his life that he wanted to address. St. Gregory's takes silent reflection and self-examination as a normal part of the liturgy. The liturgy is designed to encourage the community's personal examination.

Human Touch

St. Gregory's liturgy is deeply embodied. In addition to congregational dance at the end of the liturgy, the assembly processes to the altar table singing and in step. People stand in the rows where they have been seated, turn to face the altar-table in the rotunda, place their right hands on the shoulder of the person in front of them, and walk three steps forward and one step back. Drumming, to keep the assembly in beat, and singing a hymn accompany this step. The effect of this liturgical action is warmly affectionate. Ted is encouraged by this practice, "It takes away any kind of loneliness feeling, since we're all together, that we're all spiritually looking for something." When the liturgy honors human experience, feeds the hunger for beauty, is physically embodied and relies on the

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[207] Ibid.

effort of many people to execute it, there is power to change the lives of worshippers. The liturgy of St. Gregory's assists those who come seeking what the Holy Spirit has to offer. In this seeking, many discover that their lives are being transformed by God's grace.

Music

My voice today is so different than when I started singing and the way I am in the world is so different.

Laura A.

This study finds that unaccompanied, congregational singing is a powerful influence in the process of transformation. St. Gregory's founders emphasized the power of music as perhaps the most significant way of liturgical engagement and transformation. Richard Fabian notes, "Music has always been the most powerful vehicle for liturgical participation and renewal."[208] The whole congregation takes responsibility for making music. Clayton notes,

> This is the only church I've been in where the job is truly handled by the choir to lead the congregation in singing. Every other church says that's the job, and it's a lie. [laughs] Because their job is to sing a beautiful anthem. And have everybody sit in the pew with hands folded and say, 'Isn't that beautiful music.' 'Oh, the choir was so lovely today.' No, 'The *singing* is so lovely' is what it needs to be.

Clayton says that the ability to make music together with the rest of the community is critical to his experience of liturgy: "I love making music with people. Harmonizing with people. The harmony of the motion, the harmony of the sound." Singing together has two benefits: it both feeds the hunger for beauty and requires individuals to listen carefully to those around them. The lack of accompaniment makes it much easier for people to sing;

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[208] Fabian, "Worship at St. Gregory's," 7.

they are able to hear their own voices and those of their neighbors. This practice invites transformation.

Joanna was raised in the Episcopal Church but stopped attending in her early adulthood. She returned to a congregation in the area for a short time before coming to St. Gregory's. She states that she is a nonbeliever, but comes to St. Gregory's because of her relationship to the community. She says, "I guess over the years I have a really strong sense of community here and I didn't so much [before]." Joanna has found that she can contribute to the liturgy in ways that she was not allowed in her former congregation; she finds this a transformative experience. Joanna notes,

> The way in which the music is done is extremely important to me…feeling like I've learned to sing here. I think that's attributable to the way the choir is interspersed in the congregation. That I have gradually learned to stay relatively on pitch and to sing lustily. And that's a really heart expander, to do that.

Joanna's experience shows that music in the liturgy is not only a matter of aesthetic appreciation, it opens people to a new appreciation of themselves and their community. Her experience is another example of building competence and self-confidence.

Singing with Others

Congregational singing has effects that reach beyond the liturgical event to change people's interactions with others; singing affects the way in which people listen to each other in conversation. Ethan reflects on this phenomenon,

> Just knowing that we're all different individuals and that we're sitting there and we're singing together, it's sort of refreshing because it's as if whoever I know that I'll have to have a difficult conversation with in the next week, it's as if we harmonize together.

Ethan finds that even when there is no particular difficulty anticipated, the effect of singing creates a generous space for engaging others. Making music in relationship changes the perception of others in the coming week.

Not only did Laura learn how to sing in the St. Gregory's choir, she found that choral singing required her listen to the other voices in the choir. Learning to listen to others in the choir was the beginning of a transformative experience in her life. She states,

> I listen a lot better in terms of other people. I think that singing in the choir has given me an intentional focus and holding a container for other people's growth and for other people's pain, actually. Frustration. Holding a container for a lot of things. And I learned that through St. Gregory's, through church.

Making music in the choir is a way for Laura to become more conscious of other people's experiences. This consciousness has created in her the capacity to sympathize not only with members of the choir, but also with other people in her life. Listening to others has given Laura a new way to view people and to understand herself; it makes it possible for her to "hold" the other person. This experience demonstrates the final step in Mezirow's theory of transformation: a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.[209] Laura practices the new skills that she has learned at St. Gregory's in the course of her life.

Singing in the Extreme Moments of Life

Over the years, the practice has developed at St. Gregory's of singing for and with those who are dying. This practice began as a natural extension of the liturgy being taken to those who are sick and near death; because so much of the liturgy is sung, it is only natural that those who go to pray with and anoint the sick and dying will do so with

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[209] Mezirow, *Transformation Learning in Practice*, 19.

music. These are regularly instances of transformation in the lives of the sick, the dying, their families, and those who go to pray. Sebastian shared the experience of visiting a parishioner who was in home hospice care:

> I remember when Andre Masterson was getting close to the end of his days, Molly and Jim — who were not particularly musically gifted, nor am I — but we had heard enough stuff and had sung enough short Taizé kinds of things that we had stuff that we could sing around the bedside of this dying man. So having that music not only in *my* head, but in *our* heads gives a shared identity of things we can do when we get together.

Congregational singing is a critical feature of St. Gregory's liturgy that shapes the ways in which members of the church imagine themselves and their abilities to minister to others. Music is not only the work of the choir or of those who are particularly adept at singing; it is something that is shared as a regular course of pastoral ministry by almost everyone who participates in this ministry. Clayton relates a similar experience of singing at the deathbed of a parishioner, "People could hear us down the hall and they sort of gathered around outside to be a part of making that a bigger experience by listening." Prayer and singing at the deathbed of beloved friends becomes an invitation to transformation for those who are not related to the dying person; transformation expands outward into the lives of many people.

Making Art

It's very nice to have permission to create beauty.

Linette P.

This study finds that the process of creating works of art, preparing the church building for the liturgy, and other creative expressions in the church are influences in the process of transformation. Art is an obvious example of the aesthetic. As shown by

Balthasar, Scarry, and de Gruchy, beauty can be known. Olga Lipina's study, reviewed in chapter two, demonstrates that creating art in a group causes transformation. Additionally, the process of creating works of art, either alone or in a group, affects one's sense of beauty. St. Gregory's has a long custom of creating art and music for the use of the congregation in the liturgy. From this early culture of making art, the community has continued to welcome and encourage those who feel a vocation to create art or who simply enjoy participating in the group work of liturgical preparation. Laura says of the work of making beauty at St. Gregory's, "That's the transformative experience."

In the introduction to Clayton's research interview, I used the word "church" as a predicate instead of a subject, which intrigued Clayton. I described the scope of the research project as one that would provide "other congregations ideas for how to make church more deeply." It was an unconscious choice on my part; I frequently talk about the ways in which the work of the church is "churching." Clayton says,

> In your script, you used what normally is a subject as a predicate, church. And I think that's what happened, is that I get to church. I get to be a part of a church, but also get to be the predicate church — we're all churching. And I think that's what we all are doing.

The work of the people of God in preparing and executing the liturgy is the work of "churching." Each person has a role to play in that process and making art and music are only one part. Clayton states,

> I'm just a small part of that. Because everybody is making the music. Everybody is adding the prayers of the people, everyone is finishing the sermon sharing, everyone is decorating the church. We don't have a sexton. We all make coffee hour happen. We church.

When the members of the congregation "church" they are engaging in a process that invites transformation. New insights are gained as new tasks are tried out, another example of Mezirow's steps in transformation: building competence and self-confidence.

Making Beauty Together

Many members of the congregation are regular participants in the work of preparing the building for the Paschal Triduum. Each of the liturgies has a distinct aesthetic quality which relies on changing one set of art objects for another. For example, on Good Friday the entire church is vested in black with small accents of red. These fabrics are not purchased from church supply companies but come from many different sources, including sacred art from other world religions. The building is prepared on Friday morning for the evening liturgy. The next day all of the black fabric is removed and the church is prepared for the Great Vigil of Easter, St. Gregory's chief paschal liturgy. Bright colors, shimmering silks as well as buckets of flowers are used to adorn the sacred space. This is no small task. Well over fifty people are involved in preparing the space for the Vigil. Joanna reflects on her experience of working to create beauty,

> I guess my one experience of that, although it's repeated, is helping with the setting up for Good Friday and helping to set up for the Vigil. The selection of the fabrics, which are just amazing to me during that season, just amazing to me. And also, in terms of the setting up for the Vigil, learning to do things with flowers that I'm not particularly skilled or have no instinctive ability to do, but watching others and either mimicking or realizing mimicking but with a small change that reflects me.

Joanna's experience reflects a step in Mezirow's theory of transformation: acquiring knowledge and skills.[210]

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[210] Ibid.

The work of making beauty in the church is one that invites the members of the community to learn and grown in their abilities to "church." Making church is a work done in companionship with others. It is a transformative experience for many. Ethan comments on his own participation in setting up the church for the Easter Vigil, "They appreciated what I was doing with my hands, helping set this up for Easter or whatever, but for me I then started realizing that it was more than volunteering for volunteer sake, it's also just being present." Being present in the community with others, engaging in creative work, opens new opportunities for growth and change. Accomplishing tasks is not the only point of doing the work together. Of greater benefit is the ability to be together with the other members of the community, sharing not only the work, but also the experience of creating a shared piece of art for the sake of the community's liturgy. It is not only in the creation of art that this dynamic is seen; the community is also strengthened in doing functional work such as cleaning the kitchen or pulling weeds in the garden. It is the sharing of work that nurtures and enriches the community. These provide moments of transformation for the community.

Personalist Aesthetics

I definitely want to be available as I can with that, in creating that beauty…in the beauty…that can come out of a relationship.

Peter M.

This study finds that individuals and relationships are locations of beauty, and that this experience of beauty is transformative. The worldview known as personalism asserts that people have value on the basis of being persons. Personalism claims that the value of persons cannot be questioned. Most schools of personalism posit a belief in a Supreme

Being; these personalists claim that finite persons depend on God for their existence and find their meaning in God, the Supreme Person.[211] Personalism emphasizes the person's nature as a social being. According to personalism, "the person never exists in isolation, and moreover persons find their human perfection only in communion with other persons. Interpersonal relations, consequently, are never superfluous or optional to the person, but are constitutive of his inherent make-up and vocation."[212] Human persons are beautiful, reflecting the beauty that comes from God. The beauty of persons reveals divine beauty. The founding document of St. Gregory's states that one of the motivations for members to maintain relationships with each other is based on the work of God in the life of each individual person. Richard Fabian writes,

> Christians follow [Jesus'] example, not only because he was good and noble, but because we believe the love he showed us is the foundation plan of the world and the true principle of our being. Through sin we lost sight of this principle, and wrestled darkly with our pain and fear, destroying one another and wrecking our world. But God revealed his loving plan to us anew, in a way even our blindness could see.[213]

This loving plan includes the potential for each one to see the other not as a rival, but as one who is beautiful and can be known. Research participants in this study identified individual persons and personal relationships as locations of beauty. Reflecting on his part in making beauty at St. Gregory's Peter says,

> I definitely want to be available as I can with that, in creating that beauty. …and I don't mean that necessarily, visually, beauty. But sometimes, also in the beauty…that can come out of a relationship. And, surely, I always sense, in the relationship that I have with people.

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[211] Jan Olof Bengtsson, *The Worldview of Personalism: Origins and Early Development.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), loc. 31, Google Books.
[212] Thomas D.Williams, and Jan Olof Bengtsson, "Personalism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2014 Edition).* Edited by Edward N. Zalta. March 21, 2014. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/personalism/ (accessed 24 March, 2014).
[213] Fabian, "The Plan," 4.

Peter recognizes that sharing relationship with members of the congregation offers a new way of understanding beauty. Recognizing beauty in the persons that he encounters in the course of his week is a result of Peter's participation in St. Gregory's community.

<p style="text-align:center;">*People in the Liturgy*</p>

Bess shares her reflection on the baptismal liturgy at St. Gregory's and the beauty of relationship it manifests. She says of her experience, "It was this whole community of people surrounding this little guy and welcoming him in…you could just feel the love for this little person…this place is beautiful." The baptismal liturgy places the assembly in a particular, mutually supportive relationship to one another. The entire assembly is called on to support the ongoing life and development of the one who is presented for baptism. The entire assembly welcomes the newly baptized to join them in representing the royal priesthood of Christ.[214] Bess' experience points to the beauty of the relationships that are made and remade in the course of the liturgy. As an initiation rite, the baptismal liturgy is a ritual of transformation. Not only is the one presented for baptism a locus of transformation, those who re-affirm their baptismal promises become loci of transformation. What has been accomplished in baptism is not re-accomplished, but it is reaffirmed and becomes the location for transformation for the whole community. This transformation can be experienced as beautiful.

One of the ministries that Brianne shares at St. Gregory's is working with young people. She identifies the relationships that she has with these students as a location of beauty. The whole community gathers for liturgy on Sunday; there is not a separate space for children or youth during the service. The expectation is that children and youth will join, both as leaders and participants, in the liturgy. For some of the students, this is an

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[214] Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 308.

occasional challenge; they might prefer to be apart from the assembly. Brianne will sometimes sit with a group of students during the liturgy, not to supervise them, but to encourage their presence in the assembly, where she values their companionship as members of the community. It is an opportunity for her to deepen her relationship with the students in the context of worship. She says of these times with students in the liturgy,

> Having them come to rely on it is a beautiful thing. You know, having students who are having a hard time in service and having them come sit near you or ask you to put your hand on their back or something and quiet them down or something, is helpful and satisfying.

Brianne's ministry with the young people of St. Gregory's is more than a job that the community needs someone to do; it is a source of satisfaction for her and a phenomenon in which to appreciate beauty. Her experience is also a critical step in Mezirow's theory of transformation: building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships.

Difficult Beauty

This study finds that difficult beauty has a transformative effect in people's lives. Bernard Bosanquet proposes a category of aesthetics he terms "difficult beauty."[215] Bosanquet states that difficult beauty includes "the terrible, tragic, grotesque, sublime, and 'disguised' ugliness."[216] Difficult beauty includes events, persons and objects of aesthetic power that are both beautiful and difficult to appreciate in conventional terms of beauty. As stated earlier in this chapter, a number of St. Gregory's parishioners died in the course of the study. One of these was a long-time member of the community, Patty,

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[215] Dale Jacquette, "Bosanquet's Concept of Difficult Beauty," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43, no. 1 (1984): 79-87, accessed April 14, 2014, www.jstor.org.grace.gtu.edu/stable/430194.
[216] Jacquette, 79.

who was born with a congenital disease, *osteogenesis imperfecta,* or brittle bone disease. This condition resulted in malformed arms and legs, as well as being confined to a motorized wheelchair. She was an active member of St. Gregory's, serving for many years as one of the Sunday morning greeters. Patty was also a photographer, taking as her vantage point the wheelchair in which she spent most of her time. Clayton reports that, in his estimation, the most beautiful aspect of St. Gregory's was Patty. He states,

> The joy that this twisted body contained was unbelievable. And that through her lens she was showing me all these different aspects of beauty. I have two of her photographs framed and hanging on my wall. Beauty through her eye. The world through her eye. The welcoming world through her eye. And then just being able to talk about joy and also being able to talk about despair. And just to talk about all those emotions. And there was such an important place for her in our church.

Clayton reflects that beauty is found in "all the different places where light shines." In addition to the icons and artwork, the beautiful textiles and architectural space, the light also shines through the persons who constitute the community of St. Gregory's. People who would normally have little reason to interact socially with each other form relationships as a result of their membership at St. Gregory's. These relationships nurture transformation by placing socially dissimilar persons in relationship to each other.

Research participants say that being in liturgy with people who are different from them in terms of experience, age, sexual orientation, economic class, and theological understanding can reveal beauty. Adults who are unused to children sometimes find that young people are annoying; young people find that some adults are demanding and rigid. Finding beauty in relationship to others is not always a simple process; it challenges one's sense of autonomy and personal choice. Stan notes that the benefit of relationship is worth the tension,

For me, the most beautiful things are not perfect, pristine; they're marred, they show rough edges, sweat, and pain. One of the things I like a lot at St. Gregory's, sometimes, when there's roughness to the whole procedure. Maybe that's some kids squalling or running around. Sometimes it just draws my attention and I want to be somewhere more peaceful. I'm much more interested in the moments…where someone is crying and is part of a group of people that is allowing that person to talk and cry. So, I find that beautiful.

The beauty of persons and relationships is not idealized; it is real, earthy, and incarnate. People can be difficult to relate to, and for some members of St. Gregory's this difficulty outweighs the benefit of being in a relationship with others, or results in sharing relationships only with those who are familiar. Such a limited experience of relationships is culturally normative for many, but it does not empower transformation in the same way as relationships with those who are dissimilar to one. At St. Gregory's, beauty is found in welcoming what is difficult. As different people are knit together in relationship, beauty is created, God is revealed, and transformation is enabled.

Summary of Aesthetic Influences on Transformation

The power of aesthetic experience, in many different expressions, has significance in the transformation that participants identify in the research data. Evidence points to aesthetic experience as a significant part of people's spiritual lives, participation in the congregation, engagement in the liturgy, and relationships. Research participants state that creating beauty is sometimes a risk, but the power of beauty is worth the challenge. The research participants find that St. Gregory's is a place that gratefully accepts the gifts of beauty brought into the community, and also encourages the membership to actively engage in acts that create aesthetic experiences. The research participants state that beauty inspires them and feeds their souls, a fundamental need that they bring to the

church. The liturgy is a particular location of beauty for many research participants. The harmonious relationship between the discrete elements of the liturgy is inspirational. Actively participating in the liturgy is important to the research participants; it gives them a sense of meaning in the community. Whether it is in making music, sharing experiences, forging new relationships, or creating works of art the research participants find that taking an active role in the congregation transforms their lives; they find that beauty is deeply meaningful. All of these experiences show the beauty of God, alive and present in the community.

Part Two: The Effect of Social Engagement on Transformation

Choosing Social Engagement

God is at work here and I feel that it's going to make a difference all the way around and in other ways – in a lot of people's lives.

Mona B.

This study finds that participation in social engagement influence transformation in congregational life. In chapter three we defined social engagement as the ability to work constructively within and between social groups to create more resilient and sustainable communities.[217] Social engagement is a starting point for dismantling violence that exists on both micro and macro levels of society. Social engagement is about justice and charity, working for change and being changed by that process. The expression of social engagement in congregations ranges from direct charitable acts to

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[217] Millican, "Social Engagement," http://arts.brighton.ac.uk /__data/assets/ pdf_file/0019/6274/ Social-Engagement-2.pdf.

political activism; from feeding the hungry to lobbying elected officials. St. Gregory's experience of social engagement is distinct from many churches.

According to the founding document of the congregation, the theological rationale for social engagement begins with the example of Christ, "Jesus forgave sinners, healed the sick, welcomed outcasts, and laid down his life for his friends; and his Spirit moves men and women everywhere to love and to serve as he did."[218] At St. Gregory's this theological position is functionalized not on the basis of congregational programs managed by the staff or vestry, but as members of the congregation are empowered to fulfill their own need to serve others within the context of their own lives. The process of social engagement also includes members of the congregation sharing their experiences of action with other members of the community, thus expanding the number of people engaged in a particular area of service. Hence, St. Gregory's has never had an "outreach committee" responsible for organizing the community to do social engagement. The decision to choose social engagement is a part of each person's responsibility to the whole membership of the church and is an expression of each member's desire to grow in the Spirit of Jesus and his service to the world. This model of social engagement avoids the model of church management where, as the founding document states, "Each parish [is] an economic base for one member [the priest] to do pastoral work…[which] reinforces many laypeople's despair that they themselves can be competent to love and to help."[219]

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[218] Fabian, "The Plan," 4.
[219] Fabian, "The Plan," 5.

Finding Work to Do

This study finds that the process of transformation is influenced by participation in social outreach that is freely chosen by people on the basis of their own desire to serve. St. Gregory's embraces practices of social engagement that emerge from the congregation as members experience instances of want or injustice in their lives and respond to them, enlisting others from within the membership to share in the work. Mona notes that social engagement was not a priority early in the congregation's history, a situation related to the parish's rapid growth, but one that emerged on the basis of individual action by a member of the parish,

> …we were so busy growing and going that we just hadn't been able to switch on to that part of the track. I think it was Jim that had us make 27 pies for Martin de Porres. I think that was our first venture into "Oh, this is what you do as a church."

Martin de Porres House of Hospitality is a community inspired by the Catholic Worker Movement. They are located near St. Gregory's. Jim, a former member of St. Gregory's, learned of this feeding ministry and discovered that they were recruiting volunteers to assist with meal preparation. He understood his participation in this ministry to be part of his commitment to the membership at St. Gregory's, and also understood that he was responsible for sharing his experience of service with the membership. As a result, Mona and others became volunteers, discovering new ways to serve the community, an early example of the way in which members of St. Gregory's chose social engagement as a fulfillment of their roles as followers of Jesus Christ. This experience reflects one of the stages of Mezirow's theory of transformation: provisional trying of new roles.[220] Before embarking on the work at Martin's, St. Gregory's members did not have a completely

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[220] Mezirow, *Transformation Learning in Practice*, 19.

clear understanding of what their roles in the ministry would be. Instead of waiting until everything was known, they tried out their roles as cooks in a feeding center.

For some who come to St. Gregory's, the opportunity to engage the neediness of the world is a prime reason for participation in the community. As stated above, rather than compelling people to act out of a sense guilt or duty, the community looks to people's own desire to serve as a motivation for social engagement. Although Mezirow's theory of transformation identifies guilt as a potential result of self-examination, it is in no sense a motivation for change, merely a side effect of relating to a new, emerging worldview.[221] St. Gregory's choice to motivate change from the place of desire invites people to be mindful of their own experiences in life and encourages people to share these experiences with others. Those who have not participated in social engagement discover that, as a result of their experience at St. Gregory's, they have a desire to act. Stan, who had not been a church member for some twenty-five years before coming to St. Gregory's, notes,

> If there are moments and incidents in my life where I feel like I'm making
> progress toward being an agent of healing and grace, which I'd like to be,
> it comes directly from experiences that I have here…I'm not interested in
> conflict; I'm interested in forgiveness and understanding.

The transformative ability of social engagement begins with an inner conviction and expression of desire that prepares one for action. For Stan, this is an inner conviction that pursuing forgiveness and understanding are superior to living in conflict, and a personal desire to become an agent of healing and grace in the relationships that he enjoys. Both the conviction and the desire are nurtured by his participation at St. Gregory's. Action out

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[221] Sharan B. Merriam and M. Carolyn Clark, "Learning and Development: The Connection in Adulthood," in *Handbook of Adult Development and Learning*, ed. Carol Hoare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 35, accessed April 8, 2014, http://books.google.com/books.

of a sense of guilt or a requirement of duty does not have transformative potential, and it is not the articulated purpose for social engagement at St. Gregory's.

Changing Behaviors

This study finds that transformation in individuals' lives can be identified by changes in behavior. The research participants reflect on the ways that St. Gregory's has directly affected their commitment to social engagement in daily life, and the ways that it changes their actions. Cliff describes the influence that St. Gregory's has had in his insight regarding "the theological push towards a view of God that is love and inclusion. It's probably the most important thing that makes Saint Gregory's mine." Cliff's theological insight that in God there is no violence, or warrant for violence among God's people, has spurred him to change his behavior. He says,

> I had plenty of family and friends who were running up the flagpole that God is violent. So, to finally decide that God isn't, affects how I relate to any conflict whatsoever, across the board: it affects what I eat, how I eat…I've been vegetarian, sort of vegetarian, for a while, years. But I ate fish and chicken. And even the whole thing of the nonviolence, I'm trying to be just vegetarian, because I want to distance myself from violence. But I want to see if avoiding things that involve killing and what I know of how our food is kept away from us so that we don't see what's actually done…There's something about it that feels, that's not the way it's supposed to be. So that whole idea has changed my cooking habits.

Social engagement encompasses a broad range of concerns, including issues related to the food supply system and the ethics of eating other animals. Although many who believe in the non-violence of God continue to eat meat, vegetarianism is a reasonable position to adopt on the basis of that theological conviction. The process that Cliff articulates is one of the steps in Mezirow's theory of transformation: planning a course of

action.[222] His plan includes a radical alteration in his diet and finding ways that he is able to implement it in his life.

Similarly, Stan comments that his commitment to social engagement has resulted in a changed perspective on the homeless individuals that he encounters regularly in his life. As a result of his experience at St. Gregory's, Stan has embraced not only a new perspective but also a new pattern of behavior toward the homeless. He says, "I'm much more willing to become engaged with people that I normally would walk around. I'm talking about people on the street, people asking for money, people panhandling." The experience of social engagement has changed the way that members of St. Gregory's behave, both personally and relationally. Stan not only reflects on these experiences; he shares them with other members in a study group of which he is a member. Thus, his experience begins to influence the ideas and actions of other members of the congregation, further evidence of the power of shared experience.

The phenomenon of reflecting on an experience and its influence in transformation is supported by the work of B.A. Hewitt, which was noted in chapter two. She claims, "Intentional, progressive, and well-integrated reflection generated greater transformation" in research participants than did the experience of service alone.[223] Hewitt's research also supports the significance of personal engagement with those who are being served, a phenomenon that Stan reports in his engagement with homeless people. Hewitt writes, "Interaction, the quality of relationship between study participants

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[222] Mezirow, *Transformation Learning in Practice*, 19.
[223] Hewitt, 1.

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and persons being served, was also shown to correlate significantly with perspective transformation."[224]

Challenges to Social Engagement

This study finds that there are challenges to social engagement in congregational life. Some participants in this study name burnout as one such challenge. Before accepting a job in the tech industry, Brianne worked for a non-profit organization that assisted individuals with critical needs. Although she embarked on the work with enthusiasm, she soon found that it diminished her capacity to advocate for change; she was overwhelmed by what she calls the "flood of needs" in the organization. Although she felt supported in her work by the people of St. Gregory's, the burden of the work was too much for her. Regarding her desire to distance herself from social engagement, Brianne identifies a lack of a supportive community outside of the congregation as one of the factors that led to her burnout. She attributes this to "the lack of more communities like Saint Gregory's." She continues to describe the difficult of social engagement, "I can be a part of something, but I'm never going to be a part of something big enough to substantiate change on the level that would be defined as terrible things, or the normal terribleness of the world." The desire to participate in social engagement is diminished by a lack of support from communities, including churches. Challenging the "normal terribleness of the world" requires a robust, consistent community of support to be sustained; it is more than one person can support alone. The polling data analyzed by Chaeyoon Lim, presented in chapter two, supports Brianne's experience of wanting more supportive community in the process of social engagement. In order for it to progress in

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[224] Ibid.

people's lives, the process of transformation must be consistently supported in different communities.

Ted notes another challenge to choosing social engagement: the fact that the consequences of one's actions are not always obvious. He states, "I think you can do small things that have a ripple effect out there, and we don't really know what all the implications are." Although the particular effect of one's actions may not ever be known, social engagement remains an attractive option for Ted. The ambiguity of the phenomenon that Ted identifies can be addressed by theological reflection. Ted says that when the result of his action is unclear or unknowable, he must rely on a faithful appreciation of God's action. Ted speaks of this confidence, "If you do something and maybe someone else can pick up on that and do a lot of impact as well, and that God will be using us as the starting point." Brian Ward's research on the phenomenon of transformation and faith, noted in chapter two, demonstrates that Ted's experience is one in which personal transformation is possible. Ward writes, "faith translates to living forth into one's ultimate meaning in spite of the inability to grasp the outcome; it means risking the dangers of existence for the burning soul of one's being." Uncertainty in regard to one's actions may be a discomforting experience, but it does not necessarily stop the process of transformation.

Nurturing Social Engagement in Children

This study finds that for many parents their children are an important influence in choosing social engagement, and as children are related to social engagement, influence transformation. For many, the choice of social engagement is a part of raising their children. Rick's professional life involves work with different organizations that are

trying to effect social change nationally and internationally. Although his days are spent advocating for large-scale change, he identifies parenting as the most important way in which he engages society. He says, "My biggest priority is my daughter. Both her as an individual herself and what she can achieve, that's my primary vector; that she develops in a beautiful way." Similarly, Carly states that her expertise in social engagement includes both her work in the food distribution system and as a parent. She says, "I'm trying to raise children that are going to be part of a generation that are literally going to have to save the world. I do believe that very strongly." Madeline's professional work is in management, but she understands that her investment in social engagement is in being a parent. She says that raising her child fulfills this desire, "because that's how you try to help this person to have good values and be confident to be able to go out and carry…that forward."

Each of these research participants places a priority on parenting their children as a way in which he or she hopes to effect positive change on the macro-social level. Each of them came to St. Gregory's in part because she or he wanted to have the community of the church as part of their children's lives. St. Gregory's practice of grounding social engagement in people's desire is a part of the culture in which these parents are raising their children. Hewitt finds, in her research regarding the effect of transformation in service, that parental influences were significant in children's participation in social engagement. She cites Arthur Stukas in her research to support this finding, "A study of junior high students reported that students with parental helping models were, on the whole, more likely to be committed to future helping and more likely to have altruistic

self-images."[225] The choice to raise children in the church, and to choose social engagement as a part of that involvement, positively influences their choice to serve others.

Relational Engagement vs. Social Services

This study finds that social engagement must be relational in order to influence transformation. Social engagement at St. Gregory's is of a different quality than the work of a secular social service agency; such agencies are able to effect change in ways that are profound and necessary, but St. Gregory's concern is different. St. Gregory's work of social engagement is personal, based in a desire to share with another person and be changed in the process. Social engagement at St. Gregory's strives to avoid what Peter Buffett describes as "philanthropic colonialism," an attempt to solve other people's problems with little particular knowledge of or experience in those persons' particular context.[226] Instead, members of St. Gregory's try to understand the ways in which they are able to, on the basis of their own lived experience, enter the world in the Spirit of Jesus who longs to serve all people. Eileen captures this sense when she says, "I think that the core of this is not how to figure out how to be more helpful in the world it's more how to be in the world in a way that is more receptive to being a part of it all." At St. Gregory's, social engagement is essentially relational; it is interacting with those who have both wisdom to share and needs to be addressed. In this sense, the exercise of social engagement is reflective of the way in which relationships are experienced within the

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[225] Arthur Stukas, "Parental helping models, gender, and service-learning," in *Educating Students to Make-a-difference: Community-Based Service Learning*, ed. J. Ferrari and J. Chapman (New York: Haworth Press, 1999), 5-18, in Hewitt, 21.

[226] Peter Buffett, "The Charitable-Industrial Complex", *New York Times*, July 7, 2013, accessed March 26, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/27/opinion/the-charitable-industrial-complex.html?_r=0, (accessed 26 March 2014).

congregation. The transformative potential of this phenomenon is supported by the work of Hewitt cited above in relation to Stan's experience with the homeless. Carly notes that in this mode of social engagement, "It's not our place to judge whether people deserve our help." Mercy, as opposed to judgment, is one of the marks of social engagement at St. Gregory's. This hope is fundamental to the community's identity and is expressed in both social engagement. Turning away from judgment, while turning toward the virtues of mercy, love, respect and dignity, makes the work of St. Gregory's members significant.

Social engagement at St. Gregory's comes from the desire of people to serve others in real ways in everyday life. When these experiences are shared with members of the congregation, the desire to work for change expands and is taken up by others. Transformation is one of the effects of this process and is seen in new behaviors in people's lives. In order to take up the work of social engagement one needs the support of the congregation, as well as a community with whom to reflect theologically on the experiences that take place in the process. One must approach social engagement with humility, trusting that God is already at work making the world anew. Whether it is by committing to raise one's children in the church, or in direct action in the community, social engagement is relational; it leads to transformation as the value of the other is honored. This work is not confined to an elite cadre of the congregation; it is something that every member can engage.

The following sections describe different phenomena which are expressions of social engagement at St. Gregory's, most of which focus on the Food Pantry. It is, by necessity, an incomplete list; new ways of addressing the needs of others are discovered

every time a member of St. Gregory's pays attention to his or her desire, takes up new work, and shares it with the community.

The Food Pantry

I think that we're living the statement of Christian communities believing in "feed the sheep."

<div align="right">Clayton B.</div>

This study finds that social engagement is transformative when it is based in a loving, supportive community. Since being established at St. Gregory's by Sara Miles in 2000, the Food Pantry has become an internationally known location of social engagement in the San Francisco Bay Area. The Pantry is a part of a national distribution chain of surplus food. In cities all over the country food banks collect surplus food and sell it for pennies on the dollar to non-profit organizations that feed hungry people. Most of the food distribution centers give food only to those who live within the neighborhood in which the center is located. St. Gregory's Pantry is distinct in San Francisco; early in its history it chose to become a citywide site that gives groceries to everyone who comes, regardless of where they live. No one must prove his or her worthiness to receive groceries; everyone is welcome to come and get food. This practice is intentionally based on St. Gregory's practice of giving Communion to everyone who comes to the liturgy.

The Pantry takes place on Fridays within the church building, in the rotunda. Every week hundreds of people are fed. Food is set out around the altar and those who come walk around the table selecting the groceries that they would like to have. Many of those who initially came to receive groceries now work as volunteers at the Pantry, including the operations manager who has been a volunteer since the Pantry's founding

<div align="center">130</div>

year. Of the 40 – 50 volunteers at the Pantry less than 5% are members of St. Gregory's. A small number of Pantry volunteers, less than 1% of the congregation, have become members of St. Gregory's. Only one of the research participants for this study is an active volunteer at the Pantry. However, almost all of the research participants affirm the Pantry as a significant site of social engagement at St. Gregory's, one that they celebrate and advocate. The majority of volunteers who run the Pantry belong to their own religious congregations, or none at all. Although they are not members of St. Gregory's, for all of the volunteers the Pantry serves as an important community of service, spiritual care and mutual support. Mona, an active volunteer at the pantry says,

> The Pantry serves a number of people…there are many, many bags of groceries that go out to people in this community and the people who make up the Pantry. That makes a big difference. People come and they volunteer and for them the church is not their community, the Pantry is their community. It makes a huge heck of a big difference. This is where they shine for the many hours that they're here. They feel included. They feel people aren't judging them for anything other than what they want to do here. That's a good thing, I think.

The Pantry is a robust community, committed to social engagement that results in transformation. This phenomenon is readily seen in the lives of the pantry volunteers, most of whom are also recipients of food at the Pantry. Just as their own hunger drew them to the pantry to get food, and their hunger to join in the work of giving food away, so their hunger for an experience of spiritual community urges them forward. The volunteers feed each other around the altar. They care for each other when one is in the hospital or jail. They call people who are absent on a Friday. They welcome others to come and share in the work of giving the food away, including those who came in the

first place to get food. They do all of this work, and in doing it they incarnate the Spirit of Jesus.

Hewitt finds in her research that mutuality in the relationship between service providers, and those being served, is important in the process of transformation. She writes, "It is difficult to have real integrity in partnerships between parties that have been seen as inherently unequal. Assistance is needed in promoting reciprocity and mutuality in service settings."[227] The Pantry accomplishes this goal as it strives to follow the teaching carved on the altar, "Do not distinguish between worthy and unworthy." Those who participate in the work of the Pantry find it to be a transformative experience in their lives. The Pantry also has an influence in the lives of those who do not volunteer; the entire congregation is blessed by the work of the Pantry.

The Power of Social Engagement on Non-Participants

Something's going on. I've heard it's positive. But I haven't participated in it.

Brianne

This study finds that the influence of social engagement on transformation is effective in the lives of those who do not directly participate in it. For many of the participants in this study, the awareness of various acts of service is a source of transformation. This finding echoes the position of Elaine Scarry, noted in chapter 3, that locations of beauty are important to persons who have never experienced them at first hand. Eileen comments,

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[227] Hewitt, 141.

It means a lot to me to know that what happens on Friday is also considered part of the church, as part of the wider community of the congregation in it's own way. Even though I can't participate in the food pantry community in a direct way, I feel the importance of that connection: just appreciating that we bring the church to the community and invite the community in in a broad way.

Although some of the research participants would volunteer at the Food Pantry if their schedules permitted hearing others share their experience of service at the Pantry encourages them to take ownership of the Pantry's work.

People's admiration of social engagement reveals that it is not only in direct participation that the process of transformation takes place, but also by reflecting on the experience of others who are engaged in acts of service. Madeline says, "I'm not very personally involved with all the aspects yet. But the community service, I read through all the weekly updates and newsletters and things. It's very impressive to me, the programs and the outreach and the kind of connectivity that goes on." Knowing that social engagement is taking place in the community gives people an opportunity to reflect on their beliefs about the church's ability to effect change in the world. However, appreciation cannot be equated with actual participation in the work of the Pantry. Hewitt's research, reviewed in chapter two, clearly shows that interaction with those who are being served makes a significant difference in the quality of transformation in people's lives. Appreciation of service at a distance is valuable in the process of transformation but is less significant than actual participation.

A Cautious Approach

This study finds that St. Gregory's approach to social engagement comes with helpful criticism from members of the congregation. A cautious appreciation of the work of social engagement does not necessarily mean a rejection of the idea. Laura says,

> I'm not so sure that Christianity should move the way of social action.
> …Is it the most efficient structure to do social action? I'm not so sure.
> Although it raises people up to do social action. It feeds people that are
> doing social action. But I'm not so sure with its sort of antiquated
> hierarchy and bureaucracy whether it's the place where political
> momentum happens.

Laura's position indicates a concern for the efficiency with which the church can address

social ills relative to larger structures. While admitting this concern, she also indicates an

appreciation of the influence that service to the community has in the lives of those who

participate in social action. There are many benefits when the church engages the social

structures of which it is a part. But, as Rick notes,

> A soup kitchen will never put itself out of business. Soup kitchens are
> really, really important and fundamental but they'll always be with us.
> They will never solve the problem, where other organizations, I think, are
> looking at deeper root causes and can create systemic changes.

Rick's concern is related to Laura's question. Is the church the best institution to create

social change that will have a deep, long lasting effect on those in need? The Pantry at St.

Gregory's addresses the needs of real people who are hungry. As an institution, it does

not publicly advocate for systemic social change around issues of hunger. There is a

sense from Rick that the work of the pantry is important, but its importance is relative to

other values that the church expresses. He says, "Now, there's clearly a level of pastoral

care and relationships that are clearly the job of the church, that's what we do as a

community." The Pantry exercises pastoral ministry in the midst of its food distribution, a

function that is of great significance to the volunteers. The Pantry gives food to as many

people as the volunteers are functionally able to give, but the Pantry will never be able to

feed all of the hungry people in San Francisco. Both Rick and Laura share a perspective

on social engagement that reflects one of the steps in Mezirow's theory of

transformation: a critical assessment of assumptions.[228] Their critique is a useful part of the ongoing refinement of St. Gregory's approach to social engagement; it raises questions that have the potential for creating new opportunities in the community. In addition, Rick and Laura point to the transformative quality of social engagement, not in righting all social ills, but in forging relationships between people.

Liturgy and Social Engagement

Our prayer really does make a difference. Our connecting in real ways with each other makes a difference in the world.

Eileen

This study finds that social engagement that is linked with the liturgy has great influence in the lives of people. The unique quality of relationships shared among those who come to volunteer at the Food Pantry could not happen apart from St. Gregory's liturgical practice. The nurturing of spiritual growth in the congregation is based in service to others rather than in the sense of entitlement or superiority. The congregation is formed on the proposition that giving people opportunities to serve others is the surest way to come to spiritual insight and maturity. Further, the Pantry both enlivens and changes the experience of worship and the members as worshippers. This claim rests on a core value of St. Gregory's: service to the community and the liturgy of the congregation are a single reality. Eileen points to this reality,

> The Food Pantry's amazing. I mean it's just, it's like, it challenges the whole question of what does it mean to help? To be mission and ministry? It's not some people's job to give and some other people's job to receive. We're all doing both.

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[228] Mezirow, Transformation Learning in Practice, 19.

Sebastian says that the combination of liturgy and social engagement at the Pantry is one of the qualities that distinguishes St. Gregory's,

> I'm proud to be part of a church that has a model food pantry that is not only about giving food away, but is about praying with people during it. I'm proud to be part of a church where the structure of that is actually thought out: where everything happens around the altar table.

The intentional choice to have the Pantry inside of the church building, around the altar, is a strong sign that social engagement is a part of the congregation's shared life in beauty. Instead of locating the Pantry in a basement or outside in the parking lot, the community makes a claim about social engagement: it is holy work, as dignified as the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Transformation hinges on seeing that beauty and justice need each other in order to be fully realized. The Pantry's founder, Sara Miles writes,

> Sharing groceries around that table, like sharing communion bread, allowed me to not just say but begin to act as if Jesus were real—as if the stuff we did on Sundays meant something, and was a guide to our whole lives, in church and outside. I could see worship and service as parts of a whole; the Friday food pantry and the Sunday Eucharist just different expressions of the same thing—of Jesus' demands on his people.[229]

The spiritual benefit of social engagement is expressed every time the doors of the church are opened to welcome the hungry to receive food, both the Bread of Heaven and a sack full of groceries.

The Prayers of the People as Social Engagement

The relationship between liturgy and social engagement is also expressed in the Sunday liturgy during the prayers of the people. The standard response to each intercession is "Lord have mercy." There is no liturgical leader who reads all of the

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[229] Sara Miles, *Jesus Freak: Feeding, Healing, Rasing the Dead,* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), xiv.

prayers; those who speak the prayers are the people themselves. Instead of writing these prayers, or using one of the six forms of prayer in the Rite Two liturgy in the Book of Common Prayer, the people call out their own prayers loudly for everyone to hear. The intercessions come from the people's own need and desire. The assembly listens as individual members offer their own prayers, and respond with one voice. Laura identifies this moment in the liturgy as a time when she turns her attention to social engagement. One member of St. Gregory's, Tabitha, works for the exoneration of innocent prisoners and frequently names them during the prayers of the people. Reflecting on this event, Laura says, "I think of Tabitha…I mean, there are people out there that are doing hard things that are not going to be done. They'll be dead before it's ever done. Looking for justice for the innocents." Tabitha brings the concerns of the world into the liturgy in a way that stirs the imaginations of the members of the assembly to pray for justice, and because it is grounded in her own experience it speaks to justice in an authentic way.

The liturgy demonstrates that God is at work in the ambiguity of human life, in trust and doubt, in personal relationships and loneliness, in the known, loved members of the congregation and in strangers. As it places personal experience of human concern in the consciousness of the assembly, prayer attunes the community to social engagement. Eileen says, "Our prayer really does make a difference. Our connecting in real ways with each other makes a difference in the world." The people's desire to name the world's need in the liturgy, and the assembly's reception of that experience is transformative.

Strangers, Beauty, and Social Engagement

Here's this new thing and we'll find a way to make it part of our shared duty. We'll find a way.

Sebastian

This study finds that the presence of strangers in the assembly creates opportunities for transformation, and in this there is beauty. Since its founding, St. Gregory's has made a preferential choice to welcome strangers into the liturgy without an expectation that they must conform themselves to the congregation's faith or understanding. This insight is based on one of the primary assumptions of St. Gregory's community life: God, who longs to draw the whole world in love, is revealed to the community in the presence of the stranger. This position is articulated in the Sunday liturgy by this opening prayer,

> Blessed be God the Word, who came to his own and his own received him
> not; for in this way God glorifies the stranger. O God, show us your image
> in all who come to us today that we may welcome them and you.[230]

It is God who glorifies strangers, and God's people respond to this divine action by doing the same thing. Glorifying the stranger admits that he or she brings a gift to the community: newness, possibility and potential; this makes the stranger beautiful. When a stranger comes into the assembly it is a sign of God's presence, making the whole world new. In response, members go out of their way to welcome the stranger, hoping that, in the encounter, they will discover something that they had not known before of God and God's action in the world. Clayton says, "I can share myself and whatever joy I have with strangers." Sharing oneself with a stranger begins in the desire to form a relationship with the stranger, to know and be known by the stranger. This practice within the context

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[230] Gregory Nazianzen, quoted in Fabian, "Worship at St. Gregory's," 4.

of the liturgy also becomes a practice in life. The hope of a relationship with another is a moment of beauty; the stranger ceases being a threat and begins to bear the potential of friendship.

Welcoming the Stranger

Welcome and hospitality are the ways in which the congregation turns outward to welcome those who come bearing the image of God. By welcoming strangers, people learn about their own desire to be new, to understand more about God's action in the world and how transformation may come from that engagement. Clayton notes that his experience of St. Gregory's is one in which the community reaches out to draw in those who have not yet been inside the church. He says, "I think that we're dancing through history and that we live out the idea of welcoming the stranger. That daily and weekly, that's before us…welcoming the stranger to be God's friend, to become God's friend." Clayton strives to share with those who come to the church the treasure that he has found at St. Gregory's, friendship with God.

St. Gregory's welcomes the stranger, not only as an attempt at social inclusion, but in order to live into the divine image. Welcoming the stranger is not just a social action that the church is obliged to follow for purposes of etiquette; it is a theological and spiritual exercise that expects the beauty of holiness to be revealed in the lives of strangers. This position is articulated in an experience that Stan shares,

> For the last six months or so I've realized that there's a particular – he's not homeless, but he's very down and out, he lives in a sort of group home – there's an older man in a wheelchair that I run into more often than seems to be coincidence. When that started to happen instead of just sort of thinking, "Isn't that odd." I had a different attitude with myself, which was "God is putting this man in my path in some way. And I want to engage in that." And so, whenever I see him we sit and we talk. I make

sure he's had some food that day. Yesterday we had a long talk about his
background and he was telling me how cold he is at night. So, it was like,
okay, the next time I'm going to get some blankets and put them in the car
so the next time I see him I can give him some blankets and that type of
thing.

Stan began this process of social engagement by reflecting on a theological insight: that
there was a divine intention in a seemingly random encounter with a stranger. Rather than
ignore this calling, Stan chose to pursue it and engage this stranger in conversation,
discovering that the neediness of the other was something that he could address himself.
Social engagement becomes social transformation, not on the basis of St. Gregory's own
achievement or greatness, but on the magnificence of God who calls the whole world into
friendship.

Summary of the Influence of Social Engagement on Transformation

Social engagement at St. Gregory's has as its first goal establishing relationships
between people in the context of a nurturing community. Although the work of social
engagement is carried out in an orderly fashion to address the neediness of others in the
world, efficiency in delivering social services is not its principal goal. Rather, it is the
transformation of life in the power of Jesus' Spirit for which the community bears a
hopeful expectation. Even those who do not take a direct role in social engagement find
the effect of it powerful in their lives. Transformation comes on the basis of hearing
other's experiences and reflecting on those experiences. This kind of reflection gives
people a new way of understanding themselves and the world in which they live; it also
gives them new actions to take on. The liturgy bears a great influence on the ways that
this process takes place; the larger narrative that enfolds the liturgy allows a new optic
through which to witness the world, history and humanity.

The congregation's participation in social engagement is a significant influence in the transformation that research participants identify in the study data. Evidence points to four distinct dynamics that aid personal transformation. The first is St. Gregory's custom of social engagement on the basis of personal desire. Instead of taking on the work of social engagement out of a sense of guilt, people find work that interests them and share the experience of the work with other members. Second, research participants say that to do the work of social engagement they rely on the ongoing support of the community. In addition, they say that faith in God's desire to transform the world motivates and supports them when their efforts have indeterminate conclusions. Third, the research participants identify the intersection of the liturgy and social engagement as instrumental in their own personal transformation. This is particularly seen in the ministry of the Food Pantry. Finally, the research participants note that St. Gregory's practice of hospitality and offering a preferential, non-judgmental welcome to strangers is a significant influence on their own transformation. They find that social engagement is primarily about personal relationship and emerging friendships. Social engagement at St. Gregory's is different from that of a social service agency; the work the congregation seeks to accomplish is based in the primacy of friendship as a communal norm.

Part Three: The Effect of Friendship on Transformation

Finding God in Relationships

From the beginning God made people to share his own life of love, and in living that life together to find their true selves, and his purpose for them. This common life changes form with times and places, but it is one life, because God wishes people of all times and places to become one in him.[231]

So at St. Gregory's there's a lot of emphasis on finding God through relationships, through the community, through the set of relationships one cultivates over time, that being in love is a complicated thing and it doesn't mean that you feel happy about everybody all the time.

Rick C.

This study finds that sharing friendship with others is an influence in transformation in congregational life. As noted earlier, this finding emerged from the research data. From its inception, St. Gregory's has been a community that is marked by God's invitation to live in friendship. The invitation is first between God and each person. On his last night with the disciples, Jesus said,

> I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.[232]

In this saying of Jesus the church has received its identity: in Christ all are called into a new relationship to God. Friendship is not only between God and the individual; God's friendship is also communal. The communal nature of God's friendship is found in Jesus' definition of friendship for his disciples, the template upon which the church is built. Those who follow Jesus are none other than his friends, and they are able, on the basis of that friendship, to establish new relationships with each other.

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[231] Fabian, "The Plan," 1.
[232] John 15:15, NRSV.

Bruce Malina makes the point that the friendship to which Jesus calls his disciples, in John's Gospel, is in the context of a fictive kinship network.[233] This relationship is distinct from either one's biological family, or a patron-client relationship, each of which were common forms of friendship in first-century Judea. Malina writes, "Fictive-kinship friends were persons who treated each other as though they were kin, as members of the same family."[234] Jesus establishes a relationship with his followers and commands them to continue living in a relationship with one another that is based in mutual, freely chosen love. The friendship to which Jesus calls his followers is to seek the well-being of the other, even at the cost of his or her own reputation.[235]

From this gospel imperative, friendship as defined in the church is not based on affinity, but is living out a theological position that gives God's people a new identity. The call of friendship means living in a way typified by loving service in the Spirit of Jesus. Friendship in the church is not based simply on warm affection for the other person, as pleasant as that is. Personal preference cannot define friendship since it is God who defines it for the church. The church's choice is living in obedience to the call of God; one may ignore the call to friendship, but such a choice will not lead to transformation. The *decision* to love, the *decision* to live in friendship with others, is what influences transformation.

Many of the research participants reflect on sharing friendship with others as a way their lives have been changed as a result of coming to St. Gregory's. The research participants reflect that the friendships they have in the congregation are unique from

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[233] Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary On the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 236.
[234] Ibid.
[235] Ibid.

those they experience in their lives outside of the church. Ethan says, "Going to St. Gregory's, knowing that I enjoy being there, forces me to have friendship and community with people that I wouldn't necessarily spend any time with." These friendships are based in Ethan's choice to engage people whom he would not normally have anything to do with. He says, "I love the community because it forces me to interact with people that I wouldn't necessarily. And so I don't lose touch with — I don't want to use too big of a word here but, lose touch with humanity." Friendship leads to a deepened sense of one's essential nature. Even if friends are only encountered as a result of attending St. Gregory's, these relationships are critical in defining one as a follower of Christ.

Friendship is defined in this study as a choice to interact with others, supporting them and advocating for their well-being, and being open to the possibility of being changed as a result of the relationship. The influence of friendship on transformation was found both in relationships within the congregation of St. Gregory's and in relationships outside of the congregation. In each case, an understanding of friendship as it is taught and practiced at St. Gregory's was a common factor.

Preferential Hospitality and Strangers

As described above, friendship is not necessarily the same as affectionate relationship; it is found and nurtured in action on the basis of decision. The founding document of St. Gregory's defines the context of this action in terms of hospitality, "The quality of a community's life is obvious first of all in hospitality, because members treat outsiders much as they treat each other. For this reason hospitality will receive constant attention at St. Gregory's."[236] The members of the community strive to behave toward each person who comes to St. Gregory's as if they are already "insiders" in the

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[236] Fabian, "The Plan," 7.

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congregation. Strangers, as described in the previous section, are given a preferential welcome on the basis of bearing a unique image of God for the community. Relationship is built from this basic understanding. Opportunity is given for newcomers to participate in the liturgy and community life of the parish as fully as they wish. Sharing in the highly participatory nature of the community gives opportunity for familiarity to grow between newcomers and members; in this shared experience friendship grows between everyone.

Community without Boundaries

This study finds friendships that cross social boundaries influence the process of transformation in congregational life. At St. Gregory's friendship is shared between those who might naturally be attracted to one another as well as between those who find little natural affinity. Friendship is found across a spectrum that includes social, economic, racial, ethnic, gender, sexual-orientation and age differences. Crossing social boundaries to form a friendship is a distinct opportunity that the church possesses that is not always put into action. Linette notes, "You know, a lot of churches want families; I am not a family. They say, 'Oh, gray haired people!' You know, it's supposed to be a lifelong commitment, so you stay when you have gray hair…[St. Gregory's] is a real community." St. Gregory's proposes that friendship in the church be experienced across social lines that other congregations sometimes seek to enforce. This preference means that members include like and unlike persons in their circle of friends. Ethan notes that his behavior has changed by attending to relationships with those he likes and those he likes less,

> There are people at Saint Gregory's that I get really excited about seeing. There are those at Saint Gregory's that I think, "Oh no, here we go again, we're going to get this long diatribe." But it forces me to sit down and appreciate them. For that alone, I wouldn't change that experience.

Ethan finds that the community's emphasis on friendship compels him to spend time in conscious appreciation of those he might otherwise ignore. His choice to have friendships with those for whom he may or may not feel affection expands Ethan's understanding of himself and the meaning of community. He says, "No matter whether we see eye-to-eye or not, we still want you to be a part of the community. We still need you here." Carly notes that friendship at St. Gregory's is "a different kind of chosen relationship with people." The emphasis on choice in her statement demonstrates the quality of friendship that is nurtured at St. Gregory's; it is always a choice to live in a particular way with people, one based in friendship. Likewise, Cliff notes that the actions that members and strangers share in the congregation create a unique quality of friendship at St. Gregory's, "I don't get a sense of Jesus having any type of social club or any type of church service. I get, just, here we are, we're together. This is what we do when we're together." He finds that friendship is the normative pattern of behavior at St. Gregory's, a finding that implies an honest sense of inclusion and love in the congregation. Ted states that sharing friendship with others at St. Gregory's "takes away any kind of loneliness feeling, since we're all together, that we're all spiritually looking for something." This sense of connection is transformative in his life. As the community engages in the shared work of spiritual exploration, a communal sense of warmth is nurtured that Ted finds significant in his own development. St. Gregory's choice to emphasize friendship as both a theological goal and an organizing principle is not necessarily the most comfortable way of constituting a congregation, but it is one that is rich and nurtures transformation in people's lives.

Friendship and Transformation

I'm very comfortable with the people here and have actually learned over the years to become a great deal more genuinely tolerant of people who annoy the shit out of me.

Joanna S.

The friendships that people experience at St. Gregory's significantly influence the process of transformation in the lives of research participants. Change is experienced in both the actions carried out in the parish and as insights gained at St. Gregory's are put into practice in other areas of life. Sebastian reflects on his own vocational process at St. Gregory's. He felt a call to ordained ministry and worked with the vocations committee at the church. The process of his discernment resulted in his being rejected from the ordination process. His was, understandably, a very disorienting experience. The role of friendship and community in the midst of the experience played a large part in Sebastian's ability to remain engaged in the congregation's life. He says, "I can easily imagine myself feeling ashamed and embarrassed and wanting to distance myself; that was not and has not been my experience at St. Gregory's…something around staying through thick and thin." Friendship in the community played a significant role in Sebastian's decision to remain a part of the church. Instead of being defined on the basis of shame and loss, Sebastian was able to redefine his vocational challenge in a community bound in friendship. He says,

> There was just never any sense of embarrassment or shame that had any other source except me, and I was pretty clear about that. I never felt anything like that. I never felt people whispering in the corners or anything like that. They may well have, but I had no clue. But I never felt that, and I doubt that. I guess it goes back to the friendship thing: friendships that last and can survive ups and downs and twists and turns in

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my life. So how am I behaving differently? Maybe something about fidelity, "stick-to-it-ive-ness."

Friendship as it is experienced at St. Gregory's includes a sense of stability, loyalty and constancy. As he continues in relationships with the people of St. Gregory's, Sebastian finds them lasting and meaningful. He says friendship with others in the community "really affected my life and not just spiritually and religiously, although certainly that way, but with friendship and warmth. I do not know if I would have remained Christian without St. Gregory's." Fidelity is one of the qualities of friendship that holds transformative potential in the lives of people.

Long-Term Relationships

This study finds that long-term friendships influence transformation in congregational life. Research participants found that the idea of friendship at St. Gregory's, and in particular sharing friendship over a long period, helps them to navigate difficult relationships, both within and outside of the parish. Living in friendship with others, over a long period, opens the possibility for transformation. Joanna says, "I'm very comfortable with the people here and have actually learned over the years to become a great deal more genuinely tolerant of people who annoy the shit out of me." Despite the annoyance that she finds in relation to others, Joanna has committed herself to friendship in the community and found that there is a potential for her to change in relation to others. Rather than waiting until she experiences an ideal relationship with other members, Joanna has decided to maintain friendships with those she finds difficult, hoping that the relationship will change. The significance of long-term relationships in the process of transformation stands in tension with the transformative potential of friendship with strangers. The longer one is known in relationship, the more affinity may develop in that

relationship with the potential the "particular" relationship will be of greater importance than developing friendship with a stranger. Extending oneself in friendship to someone who is little known, as described in the previous section, bears a great potential for transformation. Long-term relationships and friendship with strangers must be held in balance for the influence of each to be seen in the process of transformation.

Research participants note that the experience of friendship and community at St. Gregory's influences the ways in which they are in relationship with others outside of the parish. Brianne shares an experience that reflects this dynamic,

> We have a friend in Madison who's transitioning from male to female, one of Allen's [her husband's] college friends. Someone I've known as long as I've known Allen. And Jace — who's transitioning — Jace's wife is going to stay with Jace is then coming out as a lesbian, herself. And we are the people they're checking in with. I was the person that Carrie asked if she could call when she came out to her family and said, "Jace is transitioning and I'm staying with Jace." And I don't think I would have known what to do before Saint Gregory's. I mean, I think I would have been open to it, but I may not have been accepting of it or affirming of it. Instead, I'm like, "Absolutely! Call me." And kind of talked about what you do when your family's mean to you. And what you do when there are things you can't handle in your life, which I think is all stuff I've learned from Saint Gregory's. And then, also, being like, "Well, there's not much we can do except affirm their love and invite them for Thanksgiving." So, we invited them for Thanksgiving and said, "If you have nowhere to go, you're coming here." And we sent flowers and said we believe in you.

The question for Brianne was not whether or not she would accept her friend's decision to transition from male to female, or her other friend's decision to remain with her partner as a lesbian; the question was to act out of the love that she chose. Tolerance for others is quite different from love for others, and Brianne explicitly chooses love. She says, "I think what a lot of it has been at Saint Gregory's…is just kind of knowing the basis is

affirming love and being open and making sure you can be the family for people who don't have that."

Love, as an expression of friendship, has the power to transform people and to assist them in choosing deeper levels of relationship with others. Carly finds that the cultural message she hears, "pull yourself up from your bootstraps and don't ever need anything from anybody because then you'll owe them something," is countered by the friendships she enjoys at St. Gregory's. Carly has received a gift from the community of St. Gregory's that supports her in her professional life, "The most important part is being given the opportunity to receive gifts from other people; gifts of their kindness, gifts of their patience with me. That's been for me, in terms of the community, the most valuable aspect." Living in friendship with others has given Carly the opportunity to express herself professionally in new ways. Rick finds that St. Gregory's gives him a greater ability to relate to others, a phenomenon that is transformative in his life. He says,

> I'm really good at ideas. I'm less good — although, hopefully getting better — at connecting ideas to people and having the humility and ability to translate those ideas into stuff that works. And that's where St. Gregory's, I would say, has some influence.

Practicing friendship in community gives Rick an opportunity to consider his professional relationships in a new way. Interaction with others at St. Gregory's gives him a new context within which to build relationships. Friendship has the potential to prepare people to live differently in the world.

Summary of the Influence of Friendship on Transformation

The friendships that members of the congregation share with each other and which is extended to strangers who come into the community is a significant influence in the process of transformation that research participants identify in the study data. There is

evidence that friendship affects the process of transformation in three ways. First, sharing friendship over the long term adds a sense of stability in the lives of research participants, something that is sometimes missing in other areas of their lives. Next, friendships at St. Gregory's cross social boundaries, allowing research participants the opportunity to engage people with whom they would have little chance of interacting. Crossing social boundaries leads to a broader experience of relationship for the research participants, something to which many of them have no other access. Finally, friendship provides a context within which to practice relational skills that can be applied in other areas of the research participants' lives. In each of these three areas, friendship is a phenomenon that influences the process of transformation in the lives of St. Gregory's members.

Part Four: Summary of Findings

Proposals for Transforming Congregations

A lot of things in St. Gregory's practice have changed me as a human being I think.

Sebastian L.

This study proposes that transformation is a phenomenon that takes place in the lives of congregation members. Evidence of transformation comes from the research participants' own testimony of change in their lives caused by participation in the Church of St. Gregory of Nyssa. Transformation is identified as research participants make personal insights, develop new relationships, take up spiritual practices, and make behavioral changes. For some, the experience of transformation is profound, for others it is less global but still significant. The process of transformation for each one is

influenced by variables that can be grouped into three categories: aesthetic experience, social engagement, and friendship.

This study proposes that aesthetic experiences contribute to the process of transformation in people's lives as beauty is welcomed into the life of the community. The presence of beauty creates opportunities for people to experience the presence of God. Such an experience has the power to create a new awareness in the lives of community members; this awareness is critical in the process of transformation. The question of what constitutes beauty in the congregation is complex; although art is a primary location of beauty, it is not the only place where beauty is found. Beauty is realized in relationships and actions, as well as objects. Questions of taste and culture often complicate the definition of beauty. Therefore, beauty must first be understood as a component of theological aesthetics. The aesthetics of beauty must include liveliness, openness and authenticity. Beauty must communicate truth, harmony and fairness. What hinders the expression of beauty are nostalgia, triviality and exclusivity. Above all, beauty must capture the imagination of the community and direct it toward God. Beauty that is so considered can feed the hungry souls of those who come to the church to be made new by God's presence.

This study proposes that the influence of beauty in transformation increases as people participate in its creation. Examples of this include congregational singing, working together to create art, and sharing abilities and experiences in the liturgy. This work is not only for the sake of creating objects and events; it also fosters relationships among congregation members. The work of creating beauty extends to the church's liturgy. The liturgy enacts the beauty of God for the world as well as for the assembly. In

order for it to maximize its transformational ability, those who plan and execute the liturgy must attend to the aesthetic qualities that define beauty. The liturgy must be lively, open, authentic, and communicate truth, harmony and fairness. Ultimately, the liturgy is influential in transformation because it is primary theology for the assembly; the people are formed in God's image as they enact the event of God's presence in humanity.

This study proposes that the congregation's social engagement empowers transformation in the lives of its members. Transformative power comes from the encounter that congregation members have with those who are unknown and who represent communities apart from St. Gregory's. There is transformative power in this encounter whether or not it is experienced first hand, and as the experience is shared with other people. In all cases, desire must be the starting place of social engagement, not guilt. There is a generative quality to social engagement; as people share their experience of doing this work with others, they extended the reach of social engagement to other members.

Social engagement relates members of the congregation to others, including those who are the "object" of the engagement. New relationships are created on this basis; strangers become friends and their experiences influence the lives of congregation members. Transformation in social engagement is hindered when it is considered an obligation, or a form of social service to the "less fortunate." Such hindrances are mitigated as participants recognize the single humanity that they share with others. The process of transformation is strengthened by self-reflection and sharing the experiences gathered with others privately and in the liturgy.

The Food Pantry at St. Gregory's has been critical in the congregation's understanding social engagement. The greatest influence that the Pantry exercises in the process of transformation in the congregation is its founder's insight that creating a spiritual community accomplishes the work of social engagement, not operating as a social service agency. Additionally, the Pantry has shown that the liturgy, besides being an aesthetic experience, also influences the manner in which social engagement is carried out. The correlation between the liturgy and social engagement at St. Gregory's is a distinct part of the community's transformative experience.

This study proposes that friendship is an influence in the process of transformation. Friendship is instrumental in transformation to the degree that it is inclusive of others, not on the basis of personal affinity, but as a reflection of the friendship that God promises to each person. Thus, friendship is marked by relationships that cross social boundaries, increasing people's understanding of the world and themselves. Members experience transformation in their friendships as individuals share work in the church, personal experiences, and spiritual practice.

This study proposes that the task the congregation must take up, in order to achieve transformation in the friendship of God, is to welcome all people as full members of the community irrespective of belief, differences, or familiarity. The generous welcome of strangers and newcomers into the congregation's life is most clearly explicated as Holy Communion is given to all people. As Christ chose to dine in ways that scandalized his contemporaries, so must his Body, the Church, become a scandal by including all people at the eucharistic table. The prodigal welcome, extended by God's people, influences transformation in the lives of the people of St. Gregory's Church.

There are ways in which the findings of this study are unique to the congregation of St. Gregory of Nyssa. However, there are ways that the findings can be generalized to the phenomenon of transformation in other congregations. The fact that St. Gregory's was founded with a unique vocation, under the consistent leadership of its founders for almost thirty years, cannot be denied as a significant factor in the quality of the congregation today; these distinctions extend to the process of transformation. For example, the findings in this study show that the aesthetic of the liturgy is a transformative experience for people at St. Gregory's. Not every Episcopal church emphasizes the aesthetics of worship in the same way that St. Gregory's does; not all congregations use art objects from different cultures and religions in the regular course of the liturgy. Although the aesthetic in worship may not be expressed in the same way in other congregations, every parish can make decisions about the way in which beauty is expressed in the context of their own liturgical traditions. If the core values of a congregation are examined in light of this study's findings, individual expressions congruent with the culture of the congregation can be put into practice for the sake of transformation. Every community has a set of core values that will either consciously or unconsciously pattern their shared experience. The core values that inform any congregation are about the decisions that the community is willing to make; making those decisions with an interest in their transformative potential is something that every church can accomplish.

Some of the findings in this study, practices that have developed out of the unique experience of St. Gregory's, are directly adaptable to other congregations. For example, the priority placed on welcoming strangers into the liturgy can readily be taken up by any

congregation in the Episcopal Church. This study finds that welcoming strangers, without requiring them to conform to the established culture of the congregation, is a transformative experience for congregational members, newcomers and visitors. Such a generous welcome places the experience of the first-time visitor at the center of the community's planning and execution of the liturgy, community life, formation and other aspects of parish life. The congregation's need for welcoming strangers must be expressed as part of its own culture and practice. The experience and practice of St. Gregory's community in welcoming strangers can directly serve other congregations' practices of welcoming new people into the parish, and will serve as a potent influence on transformation.

St. Gregory's exists as a community in order to demonstrate, in all that it does, the day when God will be all in all. To this end the community seeks to structure its shared life to demonstrate that God is reaching out to all beings, calling all into friendship. There can be no distinction between those who are well known and those who are strangers to the community; God has established all as beloved friends. Thus, as God's beloved friends, the people of St. Gregory's realize that they are being made new. In Paul's Epistle to the Colossians the writer says,

> You have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all![237]

The influences on transformation found in this study are each connected by the understanding that God in Christ is making the church anew, breaking down divisions,

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[237] Col. 3:9b-11 NRSV

and calling all to renewal of life. The renewal of God's people includes the insight that the church cannot define itself against those who have not yet come to the faith of Jesus Christ; the church is called to find Christ in all people. In order to amplify this understanding, St. Gregory's uses art, music and liturgy that stretch people's imaginations; there is a deliberate intermingling of cultures, ages, and styles. By mixing the expected and the unexpected the community gains a sense that God is at work breaking down the divisions that deform human persons and institutions. The community recognizes that God is at work in what it does not already know, and so it engages the unknown world where God is to be found. Transformation occurs as people recognize God's presence in their experiences, relationships and efforts at creating what has not yet been known. In all of this, St. Gregory's strives to grow into the image of the Creator, to whom no one is a stranger. Thus, friendship with God, established by the loving service of Jesus Christ to all humanity, remakes the church's identity as a community of friends, each striving to do the work of Christ in the world.

Chapter 6

The Harmony of That Motion

Once there was a time when the whole rational creation formed a single dancing chorus looking upward to the one leader of this dance. And the harmony of motion that they learned from his law found its way into their dancing.[238]

Gregory of Nyssa

As I write, it is the Friday before the beginning of Holy Week at St. Gregory of Nyssa in San Francisco. As happens every Friday, the Food Pantry has begun handing away groceries to the 400 clients who will come to be fed. The church is full of produce: oranges, cabbages, green apples, red potatoes, yogurt, canned and dry goods. The doors open and the first clients arrive. They are the ones who arrive early, to be at the front of the line when the doors open. They are predominately Chinese elders who do their part in providing for their large extended families, coming to the Pantry and other feeding stations in the city to get groceries. This Friday is different from many; at the end of the building opposite the piles of groceries and circling lines of people coming for food is a quintet of men, rehearsing for a Holy Week concert, singing Thomas Tallis' *Lamentations of Jeremiah*. They stand in the apse of the church and sing the sad, stately music that begs the people to turn from their failing faith and return to God: *Ierusalem, Ierusalem, convertere ad Dominum Deum tuum:* "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return unto the Lord thy God."[239] The sound of the singing mixes with the sound of the Pantry clients as they chat with the volunteers who come, week by week, to do the work of Christ and his

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[238] Ronald Gagne, Thomas Kane, and Robert VerEecke, *Introducing Dance in Christian Worship* (Portland: Pastoral Press, 1999), 41.

[239] Thomas Tallis, "Lyrics for T. Tallis: Lamentations of Jeremiah, Part 1," Reverbnation.com, n.d., accessed April 11, 2014, http://www.reverbnation.com/epmortensen/song/17987783-t-tallis-lamentations-jeremiah/lyrics.

people: feeding the hungry, comforting the afflicted, caring for strangers. The singing enfolds the space in a complex, Renaissance harmony as the clients walk round and round the altar, receiving the fruit of the earth as freely as all humanity receives the grace of God. At one end of the building a quintet of men is creating beauty in the beautiful space, and at the other the volunteers and clients do the same thing; the quintet makes music, the Pantry makes food available for hungry strangers, and each is beautiful. In this mad confluence of the expected and unexpected transformation happens, and it happens because of St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church.

When the expected and the unexpected are mixed together, people's attention is captured and focused on the point of God's engagement with humankind: the intermingling that we had thought was unclean is revealed to be the purpose of God. In the beginning of creation, God called all that was made good; it is only in the blindness to God's great love for humankind that people make what is good into what is impure. God's ongoing engagement with humankind is a way of revealing that the goodness and holiness of creation, including human beings, continues to draw people to newness, life, and transformation. St. Gregory's concern for beauty, harmony, friendship, engagement and fairness is a response to God's wooing of humankind. The community's work seeks to point out the places where God is coming with promises of love.

God's presence is always with humankind. However, the promise of the Gospel is that God is uniquely present to human awareness when the community is assembled for worship. Thus, it is in the liturgy that St. Gregory's communal identity is formed. The liturgy is a container for mystery and field upon which mystery plays. The mystery at play with the assembly is the mystery of God, present and active; this is the reality that St.

Gregory's community seeks to disclose in the liturgy. The liturgy is a means of discipleship for St. Gregory's; it works to form both friends and strangers into the image of God. As the community turns out from itself and toward those it does not yet know with genuine hospitality, it learns about the community's own desire to be made new, to understand more of God's creation and to experience more of God's presence in the liturgy.

St. Gregory's was begun by a small group of young adults under the leadership of two gifted priests. Among the works that led the congregation in its early life was a founding document, written by Richard Fabian, which laid out a vision for a new kind of church. In the congregation's early years, this document acted as a map; it gave a way forward into an unknown future. Any congregation of Christ's church must have such a map, a guide to becoming a community that will assist in establishing core values and finding ways to express those values in its work and ministry. Without the founding document, St. Gregory's likely would have failed as an ecclesial experiment. The founding document presented to the new congregation whom they wanted to become: a community where the extravagant gift of God's love was experienced week by week in the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood. So it is from the altar that each person discovers her or his identity: all people are God's friends. People are made friends of God by the loving service of Christ. Friendship with God comes freely to all beings; it comes as an expression of the eternal love that is God the Holy Trinity. Friendship with God comes with the expectation that, in it, people's lives will be transformed by divine love. Transformation happens in the relationships enjoyed within the community; this gives St. Gregory's a rule of life, a way to grow in maturity and depth. At the center of this rule of

life is the commitment each member makes to the other to build the life of the congregation out of the insights and experiences that each brings, and out of the imaginations and working hands of each one. Anyone who has ever dreamed of starting a congregation of the Episcopal Church should consider developing a founding document that will provide a map for the community's future growth.

St. Gregory's founding was intentionally directed by its first leaders in a particular direction; nothing was taken for granted and everything was "on the table" in terms of what was required to create a functional, generative community that would serve both those disaffected by the church and those who deeply cherished its heritage. These values continue to be expressed at St. Gregory's as its leadership and members reflect on the congregation's practice of liturgy, formation, community life and service. St. Gregory's leadership and members make changes in the various aspects of its common life, not for the sake of novelty or innovation, but as deeply considered ways of living into its core values and founding ideals. In all aspects of its common life, St. Gregory's expects that the people who come to share in its *koinonia* will be transformed. St. Gregory's is not just a place to seek comfort; it is a place in which everyone can turn from one way of being to a new way of becoming. In other words, it is a community that calls people to repent. But it is not the image of the street preacher ranting to the crowds that is advocated; it is the image of a welcoming God, who rushes toward us with arms spread wide and offers each more than can be imagined. The life of the community is found as it comes together with others in need of *metanoia* – repentance – both old friends and strangers, children and adults, turning toward God. The community's turning toward God is based not in the sense of guilt, but in a desire to be recreated, to be new.

As the second generation of leadership in the congregation, I have a responsibility to honor the genius of St. Gregory's founders, and to find ways to unfold the implications of their work for more people both within the Episcopal Church and in other denominations. The challenge of the transition from the first to the second generation of leadership is in moving from the charismatic energy of St. Gregory's earlier years to a more institutionally stable community that is still open to the newness of the Spirit's leading. The greatest temptations in this process have been to either a static recapitulation of the idea of St. Gregory's or to an institutional mainstreaming of the congregation within the Episcopal Church. With God's help, I believe that we have succumbed to neither of these. Instead, St. Gregory's continues to be a community that expresses its unique identity with gratitude for all that our past has meant and with a view to the future in which God is always found as a friend to each person.

Gregory of Nyssa taught that God desires friendship with all beings, is active in human life and is always in conversation with humankind. His teaching is the cornerstone of the community's life; it is the basis that supports everything the community does. Instead of building on a foundation of guilt and inadequacy, St. Gregory's builds on the assumption that God desires relationship with everyone. Since the community believes that God desires everyone, it can welcome strangers and newcomers with the same desire. The community does not have to identify the other's faults and seek to change them; all live in a relationship established by God. These relationships nurture the entire community. Since the community does not require newcomers to know everything that it knows, or act as it does, members of St. Gregory's can avoid the resentment that comes when we think, "those people just don't get it." All are God's beloved children who stand

in assurance of God's love. The assurance of God's love provides the energy to serve others, just as Christ serves all people.

In this shared identity, the community finds beauty. The beauty that comes from knowing God as a friend draws the community to find new ways to express beauty. The community makes art and music, works of service and advocacy, healing and prayer for the delight of the beauty that each act produces. The harmony of the motion of the aesthetic, penetrating the ideal of social engagement, bound in the bonds of friendship tunes the members of the community to transformation. Not only are the individual members of the congregation transformed; the entire community is changed by the transformation that each of its constituent members experiences. The process of this systemic transformation, an explanation of which is beyond the scope of this project, is an area of scholarly concern that should be explored at some future date. What can be stated in this regard is the fact that new opportunities for knowing God, and expressing God's wisdom, come to consciousness in the lives of St. Gregory's members; in this newness, God is revealed anew to the entire congregation and it gains a new appreciation of its vocation and ministry.

St. Gregory's mission includes an aspiration to serve the whole church. In its 36 years, the community and its leaders have sought to influence the life of the Episcopal Church and other denominations. St. Gregory's strives to exert its influence, not out of arrogance and pride, although the community and its leaders sometimes yield to the temptation of both. The congregation and its leaders strive to influence the church out of a genuine sense of wonder at God's presence in the community and pleasure in its

vocation. It is from the position of wonder and pleasure that this study offers the following recommendations to the church.

First, the church must affirm its hope in the power of God to transform the lives of God's people. All of the church's work is an expression of God's working in creation. What the church has to offer the world is nothing less than the Good News of salvation, seen in the effervescent and eternal life of Jesus Christ, setting the world alight. In this new light, all people are welcome to see the love of God that will not stop until all things are made new. The church's work is to recognize God's work in the world and to take its part in it. In order to take part in God's work the church must keep its gaze fixed on the servant nature of Christ and his sacrificial love for all beings. The church cannot work for the transformation of people's lives from a place of arrogance or privilege; it is only in humility and joy that there is power to work for transformation.

Next, congregations must gratefully receive the beauty of God as God's people bring it into the church's fellowship. The definition of beauty and the presence of God cannot be divided; wherever God is, there is beauty. Beauty is a fraught idea socially and politically, but it is easily perceived spiritually and prayerfully. Too often the church stops its consideration of beauty in terms of taste and social class. However, the approach of beauty cannot be tamed by the church's attempts at neutering it. Beauty is reckless and profligate; it always seeks to draw human desire. The wildness of beauty may seem beyond the ken of the church, but in beauty itself the church is urged to see God. All people bring beauty into the fellowship of the church; all that the church must do is gratefully receive it, celebrate it, and draw life from it. The approach of beauty in the church brings transformation.

Next, congregations are encouraged to take up the work of social engagement relationally as a spiritual practice. The divisions that separate social groups, the economic and class divides that feed a terror of the other, the perceived scarcity of goods, and exploitation of the weak are all the church's concern. Each of these concerns, and all that are to come in human history are first spiritual and personal crises. To address these crises apart from the light of the Gospel renders the church little more than a social service agency, and a generally ineffective one. The energy required to address the crises of the coming days is the same energy that flows from the Eucharist; what is common is offered to God and transformed into heavenly food. Serving others in the Spirit of Christ, welcoming the other as holy, opens the church to transformation.

Finally, congregations must recognize that the bonds of friendship that bind the church in union are a reflection of the friendship to which God calls each one. Friendship in the context of the church is not identical with friendship found in other social groups. The friendship to which Christ calls the people of God is based on mutual service, striving for the good of the other and including all people as members of the household of God. The love that is expressed in the church's friendship is *agape*, love that commits persons to one another selflessly. *Agape* is the love that Christ commands the church to practice as the basis of its common life. Without *agape*, the church loses its distinctive vocation to form a kinship network that must welcome all people as members, brothers and sisters. Neither age, gender, role, class nor any other social category can be used to distinguish between friends in the church; all must be welcome into the household of God. Friendship in the church is different from personal affection or affinity; regardless of one's personal feelings for another member of the church, he or she is called "friend" by

God and is, therefore, a friend to all the members. One is made worthy of friendship by God's choice, not human choice. God chooses all to be God's friends; therefore, all are friends together. The church is the last truly public institution in North American culture; everyone may come to the church as they are, on their own terms, without having to pay an entrance fee. The public nature of the church makes it both extremely valuable, as an institution, and potentially unmanageable. When the church chooses management of people over welcoming people, it fails at exemplifying the friendship of God. Friendship in the church is based, not on affinity or homogeneity, but on God's free choice to love all people and, in Jesus Christ, to call all people friends. As friendship is practiced in the church, welcoming relationships with those who are similar and dissimilar, its life is deepened and its mission to live as the Body of Christ is empowered. There can be no strangers in the church. Friendship embraced and practiced as the gift of God, welcomes transformation in the church.

There is further research to accomplish on the topic of transformation in congregational life. In addition to the question posed above, the effect of individual transformation on systemic transformation in congregations, other areas that stand out include the following. First, the influence of the congregation's own core values in the process of transformation. Next, the ways in which transition, either in congregational leadership or the community's neighborhood, affects the congregation's process of transformation. Finally, there are undoubtedly other ways, distinct to other congregations, in which transformation is influenced in people's lives. For the time being, I leave these areas of research to other scholars.

This study has shown me that the value of congregational life need not be diminished as the church lives in the twenty-first century. Although discouragement may attend the experience of many who find themselves in leadership in the church, it must not have the last word. God is continually making everything new, including the church. Although I was initially impressed by St. Gregory's exoticism and eccentricity, I have found it to be a place that is deeply orthodox and committed to the mission of God. St. Gregory's orthodoxy is not rooted in arrogance or conservatism but in a deeply held confidence that God is at work in the world, and that God's people are invited to follow Christ's leading in sharing that work. I have experienced St. Gregory of Nyssa as a place that is fundamentally committed to showing the church something new about the ways that God is known in the world. In beauty, social engagement, friendship and countless other ways, the community strives to be made anew in its common life. St. Gregory's exists for those who have not yet come through the doors of its building. God established this congregation for strangers and seekers, for the prepared and the unprepared, for the righteous and the impious. It is my hope that, as the years progress, it will continue to be a place that welcomes many who are hungry, who seek to be fed in body and soul. It is my hope that all who come will discover within its walls a place that says "yes" more than it says "no." It is my hope that it will always be a place where God is seen in the common and extraordinary things of life.

Appendix I

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

My name is Paul Fromberg and I am a doctoral candidate at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley. I invite you to participate in research I am doing for my project. I want to find out more about transformation in congregational life, both individually and as a part of the congregational system. In studying transformation, there are two variables that I'm interested in exploring. These variables are aesthetics (our life in art) and social engagement (our life in action). I want to find out if these variables work in the process of transformation. Further, I want to see if they operate as separate phenomena or if they work in tandem.

You can help further my research by allowing me to interview you on this subject. I have a certain set of questions all ready to ask you, but am also interested in hearing anything else you might have to say about transformation that is not covered by my questions. I also want to hear your experience of aesthetics and social engagement at St. Gregory's. The amount of time the interview will take is hard to judge precisely, but I expect it will last around ninety minutes. The interview can be held in whatever (mutually agreeable) place is best for you. I will need to take notes, but will tape record the interview only if you agree.

You may have an experience that counters my thesis – maybe you think that people *aren't* transformed as a result of participation in congregational life – and that is very useful information for me. Or you may think that transformation happens, but *only* in relation to aesthetic experience or *only* in relation to social engagement. That is also useful data for me to hear. No matter what your experience is, I will keep our conversation confidential and anonymous. I will assign you a number ("respondent #___ ") so your name will not appear in the thesis and no one will be able to identity you by what you say to me.

If you request it I will prepare a write up of our interview(s) for you to approve before I use the material in my research, or if you prefer, give you a digital audio copy of the interview. In any case you are free not to answer any specific question or questions, and you can leave of the study at any time.

While I will retain all intellectual and commercial rights to the interview materials (copyright), I freely consent to give you access to the materials pertaining to your interview to cite or quote for your own use.

I can be reached at 415-xxx-xxxx or at paul@xxxxxxx.com.

I hope that you will consider participating in my research
and let me know when we can meet for the interview.

I *(please print name)* _____ voluntarily and with understanding consent to be interviewed by Paul Fromberg as a participant in his doctoral project research on transformation in congregational life. I understand that I am free to not answer any specific question(s), and may terminate the interview and/or withdraw from the research project at any time. I understand that the reporting of my participation in this study will be entirely anonymous and confidential.

_____ I consent to the audio recording of my interview.

Please sign here _____ Date _____

Appendix II

HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTOCOL FOR PROJECT RESEARCH
Paul D. Fromberg
Doctor of Ministry, Church Divinity School of the Pacific

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

My project seeks to find out more about transformation in congregational life, both individually and as a part of the congregational system. In studying transformation, there are two variables that I'm interested in exploring. These variables are aesthetics (our life in art) and social engagement (our life in action). I want to find out if these variables work in the process of transformation. Further, I want to see if they operate as separate phenomena or if they work in tandem. This study will involve interviewing people who are members of St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco. The purpose of the interviews is to determine the participants' experience of transformation as a result of participation at St. Gregory's. The interviews will also ask what variables have contributed to the experience of transformation, and if aesthetic experience and/or social engagement has been a factor. The number of interviewees will be 25 – 30.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

I will interview participants at a place of their choosing. In most cases I intend one interview per participant. Because I plan to make parts of the interviews open-ended, the interviews may take varying lengths of time, although I expect most will last about ninety minutes. I will take notes during the interview and will audio record the interview if the participant gives permission.

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT/SELECTION

I will work with a small cohort of co-researchers to identify participants for the project. I want to interview a fair cross-section of the congregation, including people of all ages (over 18 years). I will also strive to include both long-tenured members of the community and newcomers. Once identified, the participants will self-select by either agreeing or refusing to be interviewed.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

I believe there is virtually no risk involved for any of the participants. All of the participants are members of my congregation, so I will know all of them and will have a

range of experience of them. Some will be more intimately related to me due to the nature of our pastoral relationship, and with these participants I will be exceedingly cautious about "selective listening" to their experiences. To guard against bias, I will use the same set of interview questions with each participant and the guidelines of this field research. I will explain the project and the sorts of questions to be asked before any participants agree to be interviewed. Participants will be completely free not to answer any particular question. Additionally, if a participant feels that their particular interview should not be included, I will not use it in the project. All of the participants will be at least eighteen years old.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

I will know the identities of the participants, and will preserve their anonymity in the project by assigning each a discrete number with which I will identify the interviewee. The interviews will be treated with absolute confidentiality. At the participant's request, I will make available a transcript of our interview, or a digital copy of the audio recording (if one is made) of the interview. These will be available, at the participants' request, for approval before that interview is considered for use in the project. After each interview is completed, and while the project is being written, I will store the resulting notes/recordings and data files in a secure lock box, with the conversion list which translates the names into respondent number kept in a separate secure location. The raw materials of the interviews (notes, recordings) will be kept only until the project is successfully defended, at which point all supporting materials will be destroyed (notes and paper transcripts will be shredded; digital audio recordings will be erased). I will draft a codicil to my will directing that all interview materials be destroyed if I should die before completing this phase of the project.

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