

RECLAIMING A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE
FOR THE WORSHIP OF ST. JOHN'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY
OF THE ROBERT E. WEBBER INSTITUTE FOR WORSHIP STUDIES
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF WORSHIP STUDIES

BY
JUSTIN LOWERY ADDINGTON

APRIL 2019

APPROVAL FORM

RECLAIMING A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE
FOR THE WORSHIP OF ST. JOHN'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA

JUSTIN LOWERY ADDINGTON

Approved by:

_____ (Thesis Director)

_____ (Thesis Supervisor)

_____ (President)

Date: _____

In memory of my grandmothers

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
ABSTRACT.....	x
CHAPTER	
1. THE MINISTRY CONTEXT.....	1
Introduction.....	1
The Issue	2
Purpose and Goals	5
Conclusion	7
2. BIBLICAL, HISTORICAL, AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS	9
Introduction.....	9
Biblical Foundations.....	10
Creation Was Good – Genesis 1.....	10
The Greatest Commandment – Mark 12-28-34	15
Do All Things Well and for the Glory of God – Colossians 3:1-17	19
Historical and Theological Foundations.....	24
Solomon’s Temple and Sacrifices.....	25
John Wesley and Christian Perfection.....	33
Current Times and the Need for Excellence	41
Conclusion.....	50
3. PROJECT DESIGN	52
Introduction	52
Contextual Analysis	53

Project Design	56
Project Implementation	57
Conclusion.....	61
4. DATA ANALYSIS.....	63
Introduction	63
Data Analysis	64
First Overarching Question	64
Second Overarching Question.....	69
Third Overarching Question.....	74
Conclusion.....	79
5. PROJECT ANALYSIS	81
Introduction	81
Reflections on the Project.....	82
Reflections on the Goals.....	85
Implications for Worship Studies.....	88
Conclusion.....	89
APPENDIX	
A. LIST OF CONCERNS.....	92
B. PRE- AND POST-SESSION SURVEY	94
C. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	97
D. NOTES FROM CLASS AND GROUP DISCUSSIONS	99
E. TEACHING OUTLINE.....	105
F. DATA	108

BIBLIOGRAPHY	138
--------------------	-----

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all who have loved and supported me along this journey. I thank my parents for believing in me and nurturing me in the faith from an early age. I thank my entire family for always pushing me to live into who God called me to be. I thank Rev. Jim Giddens and the congregation and staff of Skidaway Island United Methodist Church (SIUMC) for making my education possible. I would also like to thank Dr. Robert Haney and the Music Ministry Sunday School Class at SIUMC for supporting me through the projects for my other IWS classes. I thank the congregation and staff of St. John's United Methodist Church for allowing me to join their ministry team and for approving this thesis project. I especially thank Maureen McDonald and the other members of the Worship Committee for their participation and encouragement. I also wish to thank Rev. Debra Quilling Smith, Rev. Rett Hasselden, and Dr. Rodney Powell for their blessing of this project. I thank all of my professors at IWS, especially my thesis supervisor, Dr. Don Frazure, and my thesis director, Dr. Jessica Howe Jones. I would also like to thank all in my IOTA 2 cohort, especially Jim Knarr, Vince Godfrey, and Christopher Goodson. I thank my dear friends, Lori Lee, Dr. Sarah Swofford, Bill Cooper, Martin Meek, Huger Caughman, Luke Upchurch, Ben Boyles, Dr. Marinn Pierce, Kathy Hyatt, Sarah Crockford, Anne Bowen, Rev. James Richardson, and most of all Evan Goetz for inspiring me to see this project to completion.

Finally, I thank God for all the blessings of life and for using this thesis as a means of drawing me closer.

ABSTRACT

God deserves our best. Through the efforts of an all-day retreat, select members of the Worship Committee of St. John's United Methodist Church in Rock Hill, South Carolina, endeavored to learn more about excellence as it pertains to Christian worship. After studying the biblical, historical, and theological foundations of excellence, members of the group examined the current worship of the church and explored ways through which the day's teachings could be applied to bring about positive change.

CHAPTER 1

THE MINISTRY CONTEXT

Introduction

From an early age most of us were challenged to do our best. Whether it be in the classroom or on the sports field, giving our best was an expectation. Giving our best, however, requires work and even sacrifice. Giving our best can sometimes be frustrating when things go wrong, and at times we can feel like giving up. When we look at the church, we can easily see many opportunities through which we can give our best to God, but where does excellence in service to God begin? I would argue that the journey toward giving our best to God begins with ourselves. Achieving excellence or giving the best of ourselves is a matter of the heart...a matter of the soul...an integral part of our journey toward recreation and oneness with God.

God deserves our very best. No matter what we are doing, whether it be in our relationships with others or in our service to the church, God deserves our best. Not only does God deserve our best, but God also calls for our best. Giving our best is a means through which we as Christians can live into the lives for which God has called us, and a means through which we can grow in our love for God and one another. Giving our best is a way of living out the teachings of Jesus. Giving our best is a way of following the example of the early church. Giving of our best is a means of living into the doctrines of our faith. Excellence in the life of the church or in the life of worship begins in the life of

the believer. Every Christian must come to know that the effort and intention which they give to their work is a direct reflection of their faith. We give our best because God gave the best for us. God calls us to recreation and we must joyfully respond.

The Issue

St. John's United Methodist Church, one of the largest United Methodist congregations in South Carolina, is a 2,000-member church located in historic downtown Rock Hill, South Carolina. The church's weekly combined attendance at three worship services averages around 500. The membership is multi-generational and predominately middle-class Caucasian, several of whom are lifelong United Methodists, including some families that reach back to the church's founding. The church was established in 1856, and has maintained an active presence in the community throughout its ministry. The theological and political leanings of the church tend to be somewhat liberal, which is evidenced by their active role with social justice issues in the community.

At St. John's I serve as Director of Music and Worship. My duties include directing the Chancel Choir, directing two adult handbell choirs, overseeing three children's choirs, and playing the organ for all worship services. I also serve as staff liaison to the Worship Committee, act as the point person for all activities that occur within the Sanctuary, and meet periodically with the pastoral leadership to plan and discuss worship. The staff of the church is quite large, but the duties are not well organized, which makes the church operate in an inefficient way, especially for a church the size of St. John's.

The issue within my context that I have chosen to address is the lack of excellence within the worship of my congregation. When I first arrived at St. John's, there were many problems within the worship service. These problems ranged from misprints in the

bulletin to traffic jams during processions. Over the span of a few months, such instances were documented for the purposes of this project.¹ At first, I thought the problems were just innocent mistakes or oversights in planning and preparation. The longer I served in my context, however, the more it became clear that church members and worship leaders did not see a connection between their faith lives and their work in the church.

In order to understand and delve into the current mentality of the congregation, it is important to describe some of the events of recent history. In the 1990s, St. John's was one of the best-known churches in South Carolina Methodism. It had healthy attendance and a large budget that allowed for numerous ministries, which were executed to a very high standard. In 2006, however, St. John's underwent a massive campaign to build a new children's and youth facility. The building is beautiful and has totally transformed the church's outreach to young people in our community, including the addition of a daycare and an afterschool program. Nevertheless, the debt on this building, which was completed right around the time of the market crises of 2009, financially crippled the congregation and majorly affected their approach to ministry moving forward.

As a result of the building debt, the congregation developed a fear of spending money. The fear meant that funds were no longer being allocated for new equipment and ministries. As a result, the church seemed to sink into a self-made comfort zone where absolutely nothing changed or improved. The congregation's fear also meant that funds were not being set aside for the care and maintenance of the current facility and its furnishings. Over the span of ten years, the historic portion of the building fell into disrepair. The Sanctuary roof began to leak and divisions of the organ were damaged and

¹ See Appendix A for List of Concerns.

made unplayable. Rather than be proactive about improving the situation, the issues have been ignored in hopes that the problems would go away.

The mentality of fear has spilled over into the worship life of the church, affecting the attitudes of those who have been given charge over this important aspect of congregational life. The attitude has caused worship services to go unevaluated in order to determine if they have been effective and meaningful to those in attendance. Also, with the same format being followed week to week and year after year, static worship has become easier and safer than the alternative of working diligently to ensure fresh and vital worship. Finally, there has been little or no planning for the execution of the services, with the staff no longer proofing the bulletin or talking through the order or logistics of the service prior to Sunday morning. Whenever things go wrong in worship, I have heard members say, “Welcome to St. John’s!” The statement shows that people understand that there is a problem, but also that they do not fully understand the formative significance of worship within the overall life of the church.

Upon my arrival at St. John’s it seemed that the worship leaders were not being good stewards of the facilities and appointments for which they have been charged. It also seemed that the financial fears had caused church leaders to ignore the needs of corporate worship. In turn, the leadership was unintentionally providing the congregation with worship experiences that were less than what they could be. I believe that the situation, in turn, strongly influenced the faith lives of the people in the church. The leadership did not see any connection between the heart and quality of their work and their personal relationship with God. The true problem might reach beyond mere fear and laziness, but to the spiritual needs of church members, especially the worship leaders.

In conversations with church members, they have shared stories with me about the way worship used to be at St. John's.² There was once a high standard for worship, with quality music and liturgy being offered in praise to God and in joyful expression of the Christian community. Overtime, however, the standard began to fall. Mistakes started to occur in the services, materials and facilities were not cared for, and the problems continued to get worse. I do not believe that the move was intentional, but the damage was done, none the less. I also believe that once the issue progressed to a certain point, many in the worship leadership felt that the problem was so great that they did not know where to begin to repair the damage. It was my desire when this project began to work with others in reclaiming the heritage of excellence, not just for the worship life of the congregation, but for the ministries of the entire church as well.

Purpose and Goals

I believe that our work in the church is a type of worship in and of itself and should be treated with the utmost care and devotion. At St. John's there is a faith disconnect between the worship of God and the quality of work being offered by those who have been responsible for the congregation's weekly services. A lack of energy, a culture of complacency, and a sense of fear caused the standard of excellence in the worship of the church to diminish over time. In the course of this project, it is my goal for the Worship Committee of St. John's to come to a place where they will see worship as an important aspect of their spiritual lives and understand the significance of their roles in worship leadership. A second goal for members of the team is for them to see worship as an

² See Appendix F for Data.

extension of their life in Christ. The third goal for team members is for them to approach their service in the church, especially in their efforts to execute and prepare for corporate worship, as a type of sacrifice or gift to God. In turn, I hope that the committee leaders will impart knowledge to those who serve under them, and that their approach to worship will inspire others in the church to give of their best in their service to God.

I have always had an innate desire for things to be correct, for things to be even, and for there to be proper order. My strong attention to detail makes me very good at my job, but it also makes me the brunt of many jokes. From time to time, my obsessive nature causes others in the church to look down on me, or to think of me as being snobby and/or pretentious. Assumptions of that nature are hurtful to me and simply not true. I want the best in all that I do, not just for me, but for God. When I was a young boy, my grandmother told me to always give God my very best. Likewise, my father told me never to cheat the Lord. The ideals of my childhood have stayed with me throughout my ministry and have strongly influence how I approach my work in the church, especially in my preparation for worship.

The question I get asked most often in my efforts toward excellence is “Why?” Why does it need to be correct, why does it need to be even, why do we have to follow a proper order? I always knew there were answers, especially in the Bible and in the works of great theologians, but those were never readily available to me when the need arose. In the course of this project, I wanted to learn for myself the biblical, historical, and theological truths which support the need for excellence in our service to God, especially in Christian worship. I wanted to be able to lead, inspire, and respond with authority so that I could affect positive change within the worship life of my congregation. God

deserves our best, and this project was designed to explore the foundations of that truth and then share it with others in such a manner to bring about positive change.

Conclusion

God deserves our best. After examining the problems at St. John's and the need for growth and understanding, I have decided to use the concept of giving our best to God as a way to share foundational truths with leadership in my church. I have also tried to use the concept of giving our best to God as a way to bring about a return to excellence in the worship life of the church. Through the disciplines of the thesis project, I have desired to grow in my own understanding of excellence as it pertains to the life of faith and the quality of Christian worship. I believe that a return to excellence in the worship of St. John's can bring about excellence in all areas of the church. If so, then not only will the people of St. John's be inspired to more faithful Christian living through excellent worship, but the workings and ministries of the church will also benefit from the devotion and love that such worship will naturally inspire and cultivate. I can easily foresee relationships being mended and made stronger through excellent worship, and I can envision the means by which the church will be able to reach out in ministry to an ever-strengthening surrounding community.

In Chapter 2 we will examine biblical, historical, and theological foundations for why we should give our best to God. Specifically, we will explore the teachings of John Wesley on the matter of perfection in hopes of gleaning specific truths from Methodist heritage. We will also examine the tumultuous nature of U.S. post-modern culture and how the post-modern times have negatively influenced the culture of excellence in the church. In Chapter 3 we will examine the structure of the all-day retreat, and in Chapter 4

we will explore the data collected to see if growth occurred among participants. God deserves the best...the best of ourselves and even all of ourselves. Excellence begins in the heart, but as we will see, the heart has the power to influence the worship of God and the people of God in profound ways.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL, HISTORICAL, AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

God deserves our best. Whether we look to our personal times of devotion, our relationships with one another, our efforts as we go about our work, or even the excellence of our worship, God deserves the best we can give. The desire comes not only as a response to the great love shown to us in Christ Jesus, but also out of a desire to give thanks to God and draw closer in relationship with God and one another. In the pages that follow I will examine from biblical, historical, and theological points of view, the need for humankind to give their best to God. I will begin the biblical portion of my work by studying the goodness named and assessed by God in the story of creation from the book of Genesis. I will also examine the call for wholehearted love and devotion presented by Jesus Christ in the greatest commandment as found in the Gospel of Mark. I will then observe the instructions of Paul to the Colossians on how to live within the perfect model of love and community.

Following the biblical foundations, I will explore a combination of historical and theological foundations by looking at three distinct time periods and doctrines. First, I will examine the quality and sacrifice demonstrated in the construction and worship in Solomon's Temple. Next, I will survey the Wesleyan doctrine of Christian Perfection and the intentional refinement of Methodist worship. Finally, I will survey the modern-day

trend toward mediocrity, and the need for a return to excellence in the spiritual lives of individuals and in the corporate worship life of the church.

Biblical Foundations

In the first portion of this chapter I will examine three Scripture texts which support the concept of giving God our best. The first is from the Old Testament, reflecting God's covenantal nature with his creation. The second is taken from the Gospels, demonstrating Christ's perfect example of love. The last is taken from the Epistles, exhibiting a model for worship in the early church.

Creation Was Good – Genesis 1

The book of Genesis is the beginning of the story of God's people. Genesis reveals the beauty and order of creation, the perfection of humanity's intended relationship with the Divine, and the significant differences between good and evil. Genesis gives us a glimpse of the world as it was intended to be, and challenges us as modern-day Christians to strive toward a return to Eden. As we examine the concept of giving our best to God in worship, we naturally look to the first biblical example of where good and goodness were named and assessed by God.

The book of Genesis contains two accounts of creation (Gen 1:1-2:4 and Gen 2:5-25). Even though the two accounts focus on different aspects of the creation story, the two give an overall picture of the beginning of time.¹ Genesis was not intended to serve

¹ Terence E. Fretheim, "Genesis," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 1, *Genesis to Leviticus*, ed. Leander Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 340.

as documentation or proof of historical events.² Genesis was a starting point for the relationship between God and Israel.³ The creation account found in Genesis was heavily influenced by the culture of the Near East, which was mythological in nature.⁴ Noted theologian Walter Brueggemann argues that the Genesis account cannot be read as an historical account, nor can it be thought of simply as a myth.⁵ Instead, Brueggemann feels that the text is a “proclamation of God’s decisive dealing with his creation.”⁶ Genesis discloses how and why the world was created, and offers insight into God’s redemptive nature.

The story of creation is difficult for modern readers to comprehend because of our understanding of science;⁷ however, we must not forget that the first book of the Bible was written with a specific culture in mind, and served as a vehicle through which the promise of God was conveyed to God’s people.⁸ The conviction that Israel held regarding the truth of their creation story was not about the facts or details, but rather a means

² Fretheim, “Genesis,” 326.

³ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2010), 2.

⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Fretheim, “Genesis,” 337.

⁸ Ibid., 376.

through which they could express their faith in God.⁹ The creation story, like their God, could not be fully explained.¹⁰

The entire first chapter of Genesis details the seven days of creation. On the first day God created light and darkness. In verse four we read, “And God saw that the light was good and separated it from darkness”¹¹ (Gen 1:4). After each successive day the Creator evaluated the day’s work and continued to pronounce it as good. At the end of the week God pronounced the entirety of creation as very good. The use of the word good, however, does not suggest that creation was perfect. Creation contained the divine elements of beauty, purpose, and praise, which meant that creation was pleasing to God.¹² In Greek, the word for good is *kalosis*, which means beautiful and worthy.¹³

Walter Brueggemann holds that creation was a treasure to God.¹⁴ God saw creation as good. God willed good for creation, including humankind, because everything was created in God’s image and reflected God’s innate goodness.¹⁵ God’s original purpose for creation included unity between creation and the Creator, as well as relational

⁹ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 4.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ All biblical quotations contained herein are taken from the New Revised Standard version of the Bible unless otherwise notated.

¹² Fretheim, “Genesis,” 344.

¹³ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Concise Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson. Inc., 2005), 160.

¹⁴ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 19.

¹⁵ Ibid.

and aesthetic beauty.¹⁶ Unfortunately, God's original intention for creation became skewed when sin entered the human experience.¹⁷ After the Fall in Gen 2, creation was separated from God and no longer reflected God's intended design;¹⁸ however, God continued to desire good for creation, and would set into motion a plan to restore creation through the incarnation of Jesus Christ.¹⁹

The repetition of certain phrases within the creation account brings to mind the form of a litany, which sets creation within the context of worship. Brueggemann goes as far as to state that the Genesis text is "a poetic narrative that likely was formed for liturgical usage."²⁰ At the start of each day of creation, God said "let there be" (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, and 24). In a similar fashion, each day concluded with God seeing that "it was good"²¹ (Gen 1:3, 10, 18, 21, and 25). Brueggemann points out the symmetry of the creation account, which moves in a sequence of time, command, execution, assessment, and then time again.²² The pattern of the cycle relies on what Brueggemann calls the

¹⁶ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁸ Mark P. Surburg, "Good Stuff!: The Material Creation and the Christian Faith," *Concordia Journal* 36, no. 3 (2010), 248.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 257.

²⁰ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 22.

²¹ Fretheim, "Genesis," 343.

²² Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 30.

“good order of the created world under the supreme rule of God.”²³ The symmetry of the Genesis liturgy also implies a sense of good order within creation itself.²⁴

Brueggemann discloses that within the liturgy of Genesis, the worshipping congregation is invited to “confess and celebrate the world as God intended it to be.”²⁵ There is even a call to repentance on the part of the congregation to turn from old ways and move toward the new creation.²⁶ Through the liturgy implied in Genesis, we are then called to worship in ways which celebrate creation and bring about recreation. Jonathan R. Wilson believes that, “Worship in the shape of creation affords us the chance to renew Sabbath rest, restore hope in the resurrection, recapture the story of the creation’s redemption, reorient ourselves by the vision of new creation, and reclaim a life with God that leads to new creation.”²⁷ The story of our salvation is closely aligned with the story of creation, and our worship should be informed by and reflective of the good that was established by God at the dawn of time.

God saw creation as good, thus establishing a standard for all creative endeavors that would follow. God would also give of the best of himself in the form of Jesus, the second Adam, in an effort to bring creation back to God.²⁸ The examples found in

²³ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 30.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 30.

²⁶ Ibid., 38.

²⁷ Jonathan R. Wilson, *Gods Good World: Reclaiming the Doctrine of Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 252.

²⁸ Jerry L. Sumney and Jennifer K. Cox, *Colossians: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2008), 203.

Genesis set forth a clear standard for our lives and for our worship. Genesis is open ended, leaving room for God's promises to be fulfilled.²⁹

The Greatest Commandment – Mark 12:28-34

In Genesis we found clear evidence for God's good assessment of creation, which supports our ongoing aspiration to give our best in worship. Only once in the creation account did God declare an element as "not good," which was the idea of man being alone (Gen 1:18). The negative assessment by the Creator in verse 18 indicates from the beginning the importance of human love and relationships.³⁰ Jesus would solidify the ideal of love during his ministry by naming our affections for one another as part of the Greatest Commandment (Mark 12:33). Jesus' mandate of love was accompanied by a call for us to give the best, even all, of ourselves to God. As we will find in the Gospel account of Mark, and even in the Epistle text we examine afterwards, giving our best not only applies to our relationships with God and one another, but to our worship, as well.

In Mark 12 Jesus is engaged in the act of corporate worship, discussing with the scribes in the temple the importance of Scripture. When asked by a scribe which commandment is the most important, Jesus responds by quoting two completely different segments of the Torah.³¹ The first portion of Jesus' answer included a fragment of the *Shema* from Deut 6:5-6, with the second portion of Jesus' answer taken from Lev 19:18.

²⁹ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 20.

³⁰ Fretheim, "Genesis," 348.

³¹ Robert H. Stein, *Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 560.

These two passages are very important, and were considered by Hellenistic texts to be a summary of all Jewish Law.³²

The Shema, which holds an important place in the worship of the Jewish people, served as a covenant between God and a nation that had been saved from bondage in Egypt.³³ The first part of the Shema does not command, but rather proclaims the one and only God of Israel.³⁴ The second half of the Shema calls for the reader to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength” (Mark 12:30). By starting with the reference to the Shema, Jesus is drawing on a tradition that the scribes would have known from their many years of study and worship.³⁵ The scribe who raised the question even adds the word understanding to the list of whole ways in which we are to love the Lord.³⁶ This addition suggests that Jesus is showing love of neighbor by identifying with the intellectual side of the scribes.³⁷

The second half of Jesus’ answer to the scribe challenges the reader to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:33). In Leviticus, this command would have referred to fellow Israelites, but in the Gospel context, Jesus is also referring to our enemies.³⁸

³² Pheme Perkins, “Mark,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 8, *Matthew to Mark*, ed. Leander Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995), 678.

³³ Stein, *Mark*, 561.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Joseph Vlcek Kozar, “Complementary Insight: A Scribe’s Approval of the ‘Most Important’ Commandment in Mark 12:28-34.” *Proceedings* 22 (2002): 37.

³⁶ Mark 12:33.

³⁷ Kozar, “Complementary Insight,” 37.

³⁸ Stein, *Mark*, 562.

Together, the two parts of the Greatest Commandment demonstrate that a life lived fully in God is achieved by loving our neighbors, who were created in God's image.³⁹ Jesus is the bridge between the two parts of the commandment, showing the connection between a life of sacrifice and a life of love.⁴⁰ Loving others is our human way of mirroring the perfect life of Christ.

Following Jesus' answer, the scribe, who had been arguing with him, responds in affirmation of his teaching.⁴¹ The dialogue between the scribe and Jesus serves as the perfect example of living out the Greatest Commandment.⁴² Out of an argument, Jesus and the scribe were able to set aside their differences in order to profess their common faith and their devotion to God.⁴³ Presbyterian pastor and commentator Agnes Northfleet believes that there is "true give and take in the exchange" between Jesus and the scribe.⁴⁴ Northfleet continues by stating that, "In his interpretation of Jesus' words, the scribe links faithful living and worship."⁴⁵ In the exchange between Jesus and the scribe we see both individuals treating each other with kindness and respect. Such actions are born out of true faithful living, which is nurtured within the bond of worship and community.

³⁹ Stein, *Mark*, 562.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Mark 12:32.

⁴² Perkins, "Mark," 678.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Agnes W. Norfleet, "Mark 12:28-34," *Interpretation* 51, no. 4 (Oct. 1997): 404.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 405.

When the scribe summarizes Jesus' answer, he indicates that love of God and love of neighbor are better than burnt offerings.⁴⁶ Burnt offerings were a vital part of Jewish worship.⁴⁷ The scribe's comment in this passage implies that loving God and loving our neighbor are acts of worship in and of themselves, even further indicating that all aspects of our lives can be seen as acts of worship to God. Mark also makes a point of allowing the reader to note how the scribe recounts Jesus' answer as well or good, which affirms Jesus' authority and teaching.⁴⁸

The priority of loving God and neighbor over routine acts of worship also serves as a warning not to allow the ritual of the church to outweigh the call of the Gospel.⁴⁹ The warning supports Jesus' earlier teachings in chapter seven in which he stated that purity was determined by the love in a person's heart, rather than outside ritual.⁵⁰ As commentator Robert Stein states, "Love is more important than ritual. With the coming destruction of the Temple (CE 70), the scribe's words would provide understanding for both Jewish and Gentile Christians on the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus."⁵¹ When God sacrificed Jesus for the sake of the created world, Jesus erased the need for sacrifices as

⁴⁶ Perkins, "Mark," 678.

⁴⁷ Burnt offerings will be discussed in detail in the next portion of this chapter.

⁴⁸ Perkins, "Mark," 678.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Stein, *Mark*, 563.

understood by Jews of the time. Sacrifice would no longer be required because the ultimate price had been paid by Christ on the cross.

As Christians, our love for God and others stems from our understanding of God having loved us first (1 John 4:19).⁵² Mark demonstrates that we give the best of ourselves as a response to our love for God. Giving our best means that the quality of our work and even our worship is informed by our relationship with God.⁵³ The concept of loving God and others challenges believers to be like Christ in all that we do, knowing that Christ was perfect and the very best gift from God.⁵⁴

Do All Things Well and for the Glory of God – Colossians 3:1-17

In Mark's Gospel we read of the ways in which Christ instructed us to love God and one another. The love exemplified in Mark's writings is a perfect love, a love that moves us toward excellence. Love in such a sense could and should be best exemplified within the community of believers and in the act of corporate worship. Unfortunately, disagreements over worship styles and church practices within a congregation often result in problems and divisions.⁵⁵ The letter to the Colossians was written by the apostle Paul and includes exhortations regarding how the members of the early church were to live

⁵² Stein, *Mark*, 561.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Norfleet, "Mark 12:28-34," 406.

⁵⁵ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming God's Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 84.

their lives, treat one another, and worship.⁵⁶ Colossians embodies the overarching themes of Christology and Eschatology, and deals with what commentator Andrew Lincoln defines as the “Christian existence in the church and in the world.”⁵⁷ In Colossians, as in his other letters, Paul admonishes the early church to live and worship in ways that reflect the perfect love of Christ.

As a means of preparing the reader for his teachings on love within the Christian community, Paul examines the new lives individuals take on when entering the body of Christ. The new life of a Christian informs all aspects of being, especially love within the community and the effort associated with work and worship. Verses 5-11 of Colossians 3 examine what Christians must reject if they are to live new lives in Christ.⁵⁸ Paul states that believers should clothe themselves with “the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to its creator” (Col 3:10). Paul’s words bring to mind recreation, which implies the goodness and perfection that we have already examined. When believers take on a new life in Christ, it is a means of returning to the goodness of creation, and a way of living out the perfect love of Jesus.

The five virtues listed in verse 12 (compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience) parallel the vices (fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed, anger, malice, slander, and abusive language) listed in verses 5-8.⁵⁹ The virtues listed are aspects

⁵⁶ Andrew T. Lincoln, “Colossians,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 11, *Corinthians-Philemon*, ed. Leander Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 553.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 575.

⁵⁸ Sumney and Cox, *Colossians*, 208.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 212.

of living that contribute to the overall good of the Christian community⁶⁰ and put forth what is required for peaceful dealings within the church.⁶¹ According to commentator Andrew Lincoln, the virtues “reflect a realism about the problems of relationships in any community and the inevitability of complaints, clashes, and grievances. The solution offered is bearing with one another and forgiving one another.”⁶² Love is the virtue to be strived for above all others.⁶³ Love then is perfect, and is the means by which the individual may strive for perfection within the community.⁶⁴

The list of virtues found in Colossians calls for believers to imitate Christ, who is the perfect embodiment of all virtues.⁶⁵ The use of the word “seek” in verse 1 is a clear indication that faith is a journey and that there is no “moral perfectionism.”⁶⁶ The new life desired in Col 3 requires struggling in the present, which supports the concept of recreation also being a journey.⁶⁷ Theologians and commentators Jerry Sumney and Jennifer Cox state, “Love, then, binds together Christian virtues and thus leads to ‘perfection’ or maturity.”⁶⁸ Paul makes it clear that love and the concept of giving our

⁶⁰ Sumney and Cox, *Colossians*, 214.

⁶¹ Ibid., 674.

⁶² Ibid., 648.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 215.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 176.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 181.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 219.

best are closely related. Paul also implies that the move toward excellence in any form is a discipline of faith, a spiritual process through which we are renewed in relationship with God and one another.

In verses 15 and 16 Paul describes what authentic worship should look like. The corporate response to new life in Christ is praise and thanksgiving, which brings new life and love into the context of worship.⁶⁹ The new life in Christ sets a new standard for work and worship . . . imparting a desire in the believer to give their best. Lincoln concurs by stating, “The life of the Christian community living in the world as the bridgehead of the new humanity is to be distinguished not only by the quality of its interpersonal relationships but also by the quality of its worship.”⁷⁰ Worship is our opportunity to live out the new life in Christ through the ways that we work and interact with one another. Quality in worship, and the move toward excellence, is a natural extension of the new life of the believer. We must constantly seek to improve our worship and our lives as a means of insuring that excellence is always achieved.

In worship, our love for God is lived out through thanksgiving and praise.⁷¹ Our love for one another is lived out in worship through the sacraments.⁷² One sacrament of worship that has strong connections to the new life of the believer is baptism. In Col 2:12, the readers have already been told that they were buried with Christ in baptism and raised

⁶⁹ Sumney and Cox, *Colossians*, 222.

⁷⁰ Lincoln, “Colossians,” 650.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 651.

⁷² *Ibid*.

with him through faith.⁷³ According to Sumney and Cox, “Believers must rid themselves of sin because their old existence was stripped off at baptism. Colossians uses the imagery of changing clothes for the transformation that happens to believers in baptism.”⁷⁴ Paul’s reference to baptism clearly connects worship to new life, supporting the concept that new life and worship are both informed by the other. If new life is genuine, individuals will live, love, and work differently, all the while giving their best. If worship is influenced by the new life of the believers, it will be more authentic, and will consist of the best of the believers’ efforts so that worship can then strengthen the community. It is clear that the new life expressed in Colossians is both born in and lived out within the context of worship.

After Paul exhorts new life and describes true worship, he once again reminds the readers of how the excellence associated with new life and worship should be exemplified in all aspects of life. In verse 17 Paul declares, “And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3:17). According to Sumney and Cox, the thought, word, and deed mentioned in verse 17 could be a reference to liturgy.⁷⁵ Sumney and Cox go on to state that if liturgy is implied in verse 17, then it must be seen as call for life to model worship.⁷⁶ The language in verse 17 makes clear the new life in Christ is being extended

⁷³ Michael D. Barram, “Colossians 3:1-17,” *Interpretation* 59, no. 2 (April 2005): 188, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 4, 2017).

⁷⁴ Sumney and Cox, *Colossians*, 199.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 228.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*.

outside of the community to encompass all facets of existence.⁷⁷ Worship is not something that occurs only on Sunday, rather, worship is an entire way of life that informs excellence in relationships and work. There is a call for excellence in worship, excellence in the spiritual life, and excellence in dealings within the Christian community. Excellence is to encompass all of the believer.

The new humanity exhibited in the Christian community in Colossians is perhaps our greatest example for church relations today. Paul understood that gaining a deeper understanding of Christ would lead to Christlike living. Doing liturgy, the work of worship, enables believers to submit fully to the work of Christ in their lives, and allows God's word and ways to become a part of their being. Everything that believers do is affected by their life in Christ. Living for the glory of God implies that everything we do, especially our worship of God and any ministry in the church, should be done to the very best of our ability.⁷⁸ The concept of a life of worship demonstrates a clear biblical precedent for a connection between excellence in worship and excellence in our spiritual and communal lives.⁷⁹

Historical and Theological Foundations

As we continue to examine the concept of giving our best to God, we look next to historical and theological examples which demonstrate humanity's efforts in that regard.

⁷⁷ Sumney and Cox, *Colossians*, 649.

⁷⁸ Robert, Cueni R. "Sending Forth This Servant of God: Colossians 3:12-17," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 37, no. 1-2 (2002): 87.

⁷⁹ Lincoln, "Colossians," 649.

In the pages that follow, we will examine the detail and sacrifices of the Temple of Solomon, John Wesley's methodical journey toward Christian Perfection, and our modern-day struggle to remain faithful in our pursuit of excellence.

Solomon's Temple and Sacrifices

One of the most detailed and documented examples of humanity's effort to give glory to God through the best of their efforts is the building of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the sacrifices offered as part of the worship therein. The First Temple in Jerusalem was built in the fourth year of King Solomon's reign (970 to 931 BCE), following Israel's long journey in the wilderness to the Promised Land (1 Kgs 6:1). The First Temple replaced the also well-documented Tabernacle, which was portable in nature (Exod 25-31 and 35-40). The First Temple, which would eventually become known as Solomon's Temple, stood until the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 598 BCE (2 Kgs 25:8-17). The Second Temple stood from 516 BCE to 70 CE, making it the Temple Christ would have known during his lifetime.⁸⁰ For the purposes of this paper, we will examine the beauty and detail of the First Temple, the Temple of Solomon.

Throughout biblical history God gave clear instructions for how people were to build structures for worship.⁸¹ In a similar manner, God gave very specific plans for Israel's first permanent Temple in the Promised Land. The First Temple was the epitome of all structures of worship that preceded it, incorporating designs and elements that were

⁸⁰ Kevin J. Conner, *The Temple of Solomon* (Blackburn South, Victoria, Australia: Conner Publications, 1988), 10.

⁸¹ The Tabernacle of Moses is detailed in Exod 25-40 and the Tabernacle of David is detailed in 1 Chr 15-17 and 2 Sam 6.

consistent with all.⁸² For example, the plan of the new temple was very similar, and almost exactly double in dimensions to that of the Tabernacle.⁸³ God's clear plan of building upon and improving pre-existing structures puts forth a journey toward excellence and perfection that would ultimately come to completion in the form of Jesus Christ as the Temple.⁸⁴ Christ would become the focus of worship, the ultimate sacrifice, and the perfect example of life and love.

1 Kgs 6 gives a very detailed account of the building of Solomon's Temple. The detail is a continuation of the instructions given to King David in 1 Chr 22-29. According to Temple historian Kevin J. Conner, "Solomon did not originate the Temple's design or plan. The plan originated with the Lord, it was given to David, and then it was presented to King Solomon to build to the divine pattern."⁸⁵ The details laid out by God for the design of the Temple bring to mind a sense of order, duty, and even sacrifice, demonstrating that God used the building of the Temple as a way for God's followers to grow in their faith and in their dedication.

In a manner similar to the details for construction, the requirements for the furnishings and materials of the Temple were extensive (1 Kgs 5). The fine materials used to build the Temple were acquired through freewill offerings (1 Chr 29:5-22). The freewill offerings were gifts from the people of Israel above and beyond their regular

⁸² Conner, *The Temple of Solomon*, 16.

⁸³ Ibid., 37.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

tithe to the ministry of the Temple.⁸⁶ According to Conner, “When Israel received the wealth of the promised land and the disinherited nations, a land of gold, silver, brass, iron and precious stones, as well as other spoils from their enemies, God had in mind the building of His Temple.”⁸⁷ The type of giving demonstrated here suggests an immense sense of sacrifice, yet also an immense sense of gratitude and thanksgiving. In a fashion comparable to the way in which God would sacrifice his Son for the redemption of the world, the people gave back to God out of what God had already given to them.⁸⁸

The workers of the temple were numerous and skillful, (1 Kgs 5:15; 9:1-2, 20-21; 2 Chr 7:17-18) and the materials used in the building of the Temple were of the finest quality.⁸⁹ Conner states that, “The believer, in the house of the Lord, experiences redemptively all the truths symbolized in the preparation, ornamentation, and beautification of the materials for the Temple of God.”⁹⁰ The materials included cloth, metal, stone, and wood. Each material, which was a reflection of God’s beauty in creation, was symbolic in some way of God’s promises to Israel.⁹¹ According to Conner, God used elements of the kingdoms of earth (animal, plant, and mineral) to set into motion the elements of the redemptive kingdom of heaven.⁹² The gold used in the

⁸⁶ Conner, *The Temple of Solomon*, 50.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 45.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 80.

⁹¹ Ibid., 51.

⁹² Ibid.

Temple was symbolic of the divine nature of God.⁹³ Silver was symbolic of redemption.⁹⁴ Brass was symbolic of judgment.⁹⁵ Iron was symbolic of strength.⁹⁶ Quarried stones were symbolic of God's people being shaped in God's image.⁹⁷ Lastly, wood from trees was symbolic of the various regions of the world.⁹⁸ Conner concludes his discussion on symbols with, "The Lord used actual materials to build His house. The material He uses today is people. God's people are the material He uses to build a spiritual house, His new covenant Temple."⁹⁹

In examining the building of Solomon's temple, we can clearly see a deliberate attempt on behalf of Israel to carry out in an excellent manner the desires of God through detailed construction and sacrificial giving. Sacrifice itself was an integral part of worship in the Temple and a central theme of the Old Testament.¹⁰⁰ The first time we learn of sacrifice in the Old Testament is the story of Cain and Abel.¹⁰¹ In Genesis, the

⁹³ Conner, *The Temple of Solomon*, 53.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 53-54.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 54.

¹⁰⁰ Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 75.

¹⁰¹ Daniel Isaac Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 249.

sacrifices offered seem to be a spontaneous response to the events taking place at the time. By the time of the Exodus, however, a significant amount of detailed instructions had developed regarding sacrifices.¹⁰² The vast sacrificial system used in the worship of the Temple in Jerusalem developed over time, and provided the opportunity for the people of God to engage in and respond to their covenant relationship with YHWH.¹⁰³ Much like the detailed instructions for the construction of the Temple, the strict and numerous rules that developed for who, what, when, why, and how sacrifices were to be made indicated a clear desire on behalf of Israel to do sacrifices well.¹⁰⁴

According to Walter Brueggemann, the sacrifices modeled in Temple worship served a threefold purpose.¹⁰⁵ First, sacrifices were gifts to God— an act of thanksgiving.¹⁰⁶ Second, sacrifices were often occasions for a meal, through which community could be enjoyed and nurtured.¹⁰⁷ Third, and most important, sacrifices were means through which the Israelites could atone for their sins.¹⁰⁸ Brueggemann concludes

¹⁰² Block, *For the Glory of God*, 250.

¹⁰³ Walter Brueggemann, *Worship in Ancient Israel: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 20.

¹⁰⁴ Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, 75.

¹⁰⁵ Brueggemann, *Worship in Ancient Israel*, 20.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

that sacrifices in worship are about our relationship with God, “binding the community to the creator God who forgives and begins again with Israel.”¹⁰⁹

There were also many different types of offerings. The types of sacrifices included burnt/whole offerings, which symbolized a surrender to God; sin/purification offerings, which were the most important types of sacrifices and often offered retrospective atonement at festivals; trespass offerings for sins that had been committed unintentionally; reparation/guilt offerings,¹¹⁰ which made right a wrong that had been committed; and a peace/fellowship offering, which followed all sacrifices and served as an offering of completion.¹¹¹ In all cases, repentance was needed to accompany the offering.¹¹²

There are detailed instructions in Lev 3 about the animals that could be used in sacrifices.¹¹³ The bodies of the animals used were of the created world, but their souls were of the spiritual realm.¹¹⁴ As a result, they served as a mediator between humanity and the divine.¹¹⁵ One of the most popular animals used in sacrifices was the lamb.¹¹⁶ The

¹⁰⁹ Brueggemann, *Worship in Ancient Israel*, 23.

¹¹⁰ Block, *For the Glory of God*, 254.

¹¹¹ Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, 99.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 95.

¹¹³ Norman Henry Snaith, “Sacrifice in the Old Testament,” *Vetus Testamentum* 7, no. 3 (July 1953): 311.

¹¹⁴ Block, *For the Glory of God*, 248.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 265.

use of a lamb was first mentioned in the story of Abraham in Gen 22. Lambs are then used again in the Passover story of Exod 12. The Messiah is referred to as a lamb in Isa 53, paving the way for Christ to be the Lamb of God. (1 Cor 5:7) The imagery of the lamb would return in Rev 5:8-14.

Norman H. Snaith believes that Old Testament sacrifices were a precursor to the sacrificial life of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁷ God sacrificed the very best for us in the form of the Paschal Lamb. Most sacrifices in ancient Israel used blood in some way or another.¹¹⁸ Alfred Edersheim argues that there is no atonement if there is no blood, which draws a clear connection between the Old Testament sacrifices being fulfilled in the New Testament sacrifice of God in the form of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁹ In the way that offerings were our substitute to God, Christ is now a substitute.¹²⁰ Catholic theologian James E. Coleran writes, “God’s divine providence preserving, directing, and preparing the pure ideas and ideals of men for the day of the great sacrifice of the Divine Victim on Calvary.”¹²¹ In essence, the people of the Old Testament had been preparing for the Sacrifice of Christ for thousands of years, daily experiencing the acts of forgiveness and pardon in tangible ways. The practices of sacrifice would take on a new and powerful meaning when Christ became sacrifice for the sins of all the world.

¹¹⁷ Snaith, “Sacrifice in the Old Testament,” 316.

¹¹⁸ Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, 77.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 91.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ James E. Coleran, “Origins of Old Testament Sacrifice,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (Apr. 1940): 144.

Daniel I. Block believes that sacrifices were not only a gift to God, but also a means of unifying the worshiping community.¹²² The model of unification demonstrates that the spirit and intent through which we offer our sacrifices can in turn inform the relationships and functions of the church body. Walter Brueggemann believes that a true sacrifice to God is, as stated in Psalm 51, a pure heart.¹²³ The idea of a pure sacrifice demonstrates that the true nature of sacrifice was to bring God's people into a covenant relationship. Relationships in community are still needed today in order for our sacrifices of work and worship to be excellent in the sight of God. Daniel Block summarizes such sacrificial worship in this way, "True worship is expressed not by giving so we may get, but by giving because we have already freely received above and beyond what we deserve."¹²⁴

The Temple of Solomon was an extremely important part of worship for ancient Israel. Even after its destruction, Solomon's Temple influenced the design of the Second Temple, offered a stage for Christ's childhood and ministry, was a source of imagery for Christ's teachings, and continues to influence the theology and architecture of the church today. The Old Testament model of sacrifice demonstrates that sacrifices are the result of a human desire to give our best to God. The rules found in the Old Testament are but a guide to ensure that our lives do the same. Sacrificial living was at one time the norm, and could be used as a model to inspire similar living today. The detail and attention

¹²² Block, *For the Glory of God*, 248.

¹²³ Brueggemann, *Worship in Ancient Israel*, 23.

¹²⁴ Block, *For the Glory of God*, 270.

surrounding the sacrifices of the Old Testament strongly show the great care and love with which we are to prepare for and respond to the gifts of God.

John Wesley and Christian Perfection

John Wesley (1703-1791) was a priest in the Church of England and founder of the Methodist movement. He, along with his brother Charles, the great hymn writer, had a profound influence on the Christian Church and labored for perfection in their spiritual lives and in their worship. John Wesley was born in 1703 in the parish of Epworth, England.¹²⁵ John's father, Samuel, was priest of the St. Andrew's parish church in Epworth.¹²⁶ Samuel was not well liked, showing John from an early age the unpleasantness of Christian ministry.¹²⁷ John's mother, Susanna, was a strict but loving influence on John, contributing significantly to his structured approach to life and ministry.¹²⁸ Educated at home as a child, John was expected to read and write at an early age, speak in multiple languages, and memorize large portions of the Bible.¹²⁹ Susanna, a spiritual pioneer in her own right, was responsible for much of John's early spiritual development, preparing him for his rigorous studies at Oxford.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ John Wesley, *The Journal of John Wesley* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1952), 15.

¹²⁶ Stephen Tompkins, *John Wesley: A Biography* (Oxford, UK: Lion Publishing Inc., 2003), 6.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 13.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

In 1720 John entered Christ Church College at Oxford University.¹³¹ When he arrived at Oxford, John already held very strong beliefs about life and spirituality from his strict upbringing.¹³² John lived a very methodical life of study, prayer, and fasting, yet still longed to grow deeper in his faith.¹³³ Upon completing an undergraduate degree in 1724, John pursued a master's degree, becoming a fellow of the university in 1726. During his studies, John pursued holy orders, being ordained as a priest of the Church of England in 1725.¹³⁴ Upon returning to Oxford University in 1729 to accept a teaching position, John, along with his brother Charles, began to convene with others at Oxford who held similar ideals about life and theology.¹³⁵ The group of like-minded students, called the Holy Club, met daily to pray, to worship, and to hold each other accountable. The methodical behavior of the Holy Club was considered fanatical at the time, causing other students at Oxford to give them the derogatory name Methodists.¹³⁶

John's membership in the Holy Club was a clear early indicator of his desire to grow and improve in his faith, something that would guide his life and ministry for many years to come. Following his time teaching at Oxford, John endured a miserable ministry to Savannah, GA, where he failed at trying to enforce his methods of dogmatic Christian

¹³¹ Tompkins, *John Wesley*, 21.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 31.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

living on his parishioners.¹³⁷ When he returned to London, John had his heartwarming conversion experience, which set him on fire for preaching the new life offered through Jesus Christ.¹³⁸ John Wesley's journal provides clear and detailed insight into the life of a man who strove for perfection in all aspects of life, demonstrating firsthand that the move toward perfection is a journey with moments of discouragement, growth, and joy.¹³⁹

One of the most poignant examples of Wesley's aim for perfection, especially as it pertained to corporate worship, was his use and refinement of *The Book of Common Prayer*.¹⁴⁰ In Wesley's time, the worship of the Church of England was formed by the 1662 edition of *The Book of Common Prayer*.¹⁴¹ In opposition to most clergy of the day, John Wesley was an ardent supporter of the prayer book and encouraged the use of its services among his followers.¹⁴² Wesley is quoted as saying, "I believe there is no liturgy in the world, either in ancient or modern language, which breathes more of a solid, scriptural, rational Piety, than the Common Prayer of the Church of England."¹⁴³

¹³⁷ Wesley, *The Journal of John Wesley*, 45.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *The Book of Common Prayer*, first compiled in 1549, contains the prayers and services for the Church of England.

¹⁴¹ Hoyt T. Hickman, *Worshipping with United Methodists* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 35.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁴³ James F. White, *John Wesley's Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1984), 1.

Of special importance to Wesley was the prayer book's emphasis on the sacrament of Holy Communion.¹⁴⁴ Wesley took communion every day and saw it as a means of grace—a way in which an act of worship could be a channel for rebirth.¹⁴⁵ John Wesley longed for the sacraments, especially communion, to be celebrated in such a precise, accurate, and meaningful way that they made a significant impact on the spiritual lives of the worshipers.¹⁴⁶ According to Methodist Theologian Hoyt Hickman, “One of the benefits of the Wesleyan revival to the Church of England was a marked improvement in popular enthusiasm for the Lord’s Supper.”¹⁴⁷

When Methodism spread to America in the 1760s as a result of increasing tensions within the Church of England, John Wesley offered strong guidance for Methodist worship of God in the colonies.¹⁴⁸ To aid the Methodists in their practices, Wesley compiled his own version of *The Book of Common Prayer*, which he titled *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*.¹⁴⁹ The new book was much shorter than *The Book of Common Prayer*, taking out the services of which Wesley did not approve, and was revised significantly to reflect more accurately his thoughts on theology and worship.¹⁵⁰ The book was also edited and simplified in an effort to minister

¹⁴⁴ Hickman, *Worshiping with United Methodists*, 36.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 37.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

effectively to the new class of people in America, whom Wesley referred to as “those poor sheep in the wilderness.”¹⁵¹ The book reflects no services other than those for the Lord’s Day, indicating that the book was produced for the sole purpose of guiding and perfecting corporate worship rather than personal prayer.¹⁵² Wesley’s version of the prayer book provides a clear example for how Wesley made meaningful adjustments to the worship of the church in order that it might prove more meaningful to the people and more earnest in its intentions.

John Wesley’s desire for perfection is evident in his efforts to reinvigorate the worship of Methodists. Wesley, however, also aimed for perfection within the Christian life.¹⁵³ A well-known quote among Methodists is “going on to perfection.”¹⁵⁴ The quote is based on Hebrews 6:1, and speaks to the Christian’s journey toward spiritual maturity. John Wesley believed that the only way to move toward perfection in this life was to model one’s life after the example of Jesus Christ. In 1738, John Wesley published his own, almost biographical, document on the subject of Christian Perfection entitled “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection.”¹⁵⁵ John Wesley drew heavily on the teachings of

¹⁵¹ White, *John Wesley’s Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, 9.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁵³ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God’s Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 82.

¹⁵⁴ John Wesley, “Sermon 76,” *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 5-6 (Baker Book House, 2002), 411.

¹⁵⁵ John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1738. Reprint, Columbia: Pantianos Classics), 2017

Luther and Calvin on Christian Perfection, and continued to study and preach on the topic throughout his life.¹⁵⁶

In his sermon entitled “The More Excellent Way,” Wesley addressed how those seeking perfection should eat, sleep, raise a family, pray, do business, manage money, and engage in casual conversation.¹⁵⁷ Wesley also used the sermon to touch on the writings of other theologians on the topic of perfection in the Christian life. The most notable and most influential on Wesley was William Law’s “A Practical Treatise on Christian Perfection,” published in 1726.¹⁵⁸ Wesley states that Law’s writings convinced him of “the absolute impossibility of being half a Christian.”¹⁵⁹ Wesley agreed with Law and believed that in order to fully be a Christian one had to give their entire being to God. Wesley was determined to give all of himself in soul, body, and substance.¹⁶⁰ The process of giving entirely moves one closer to the image of God and on toward perfection.

Christian Perfection is defined as a sincere move toward the heart of Christ.¹⁶¹ The model of moving toward the heart of Christ demonstrates that if anything we do,

¹⁵⁶ Irv Brendlinger and Erin E. Mueller, “Psychological Implications of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection with Special Reference to John Wesley’s View,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 60, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 275.

¹⁵⁷ John Wesley, “Sermon 89,” *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 7-8 (Baker Book House, 2002), 26-37.

¹⁵⁸ John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 5.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 225.

including our work in the church, is to be perfect, it must be done with the purest of intentions and in the most fervent love of God. The doctrine of Christian Perfection encourages Christians to strive for the best as a result of the example of Christ, the only perfect human (Heb 5:9). Such Christian piety is a form of sacrifice and worship in and of itself, which brings the concept of moral living and Christian Perfection into the context of Christian worship. Living a life of worship and perfection in Christ inspires us to offer God our best in our work, as well. The idea of living in the image of God encourages the concept of Christian Perfection as being a key part of one's ministry and vocation.¹⁶²

The idea of achieving perfection within the Christian life can seem like a daunting task, but perfection is still a worthy cause. Our lives must be spent striving to be like Jesus, all the while knowing that such perfection can never be obtained on earth. Theologian Irv Brendlinger and Psychologist Eric Mueller argue that while some see Christian Perfection as an ideal goal, the doctrine can cause others to feel disappointment and failure.¹⁶³ We must, however, remember that Wesley's understanding of perfection had less to do with our actions and achievements and more to do with the way we love others.¹⁶⁴ Much like we read in the Gospel of Mark, the way humans can best be like Jesus is to love God and neighbor.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 83.

¹⁶³ Brendlinger and Mueller, "Psychological Implications of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection with Special Reference to John Wesley's View," 275.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 279.

¹⁶⁵ Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*, 231.

The doctrine of Christian Perfection was extremely important to John Wesley, and influenced the theology of early Methodism. According to Runyon, “The anticipation of Christian Perfection in this life was therefore a key element in Methodist piety and lent to it its distinctive character. The goal gave shape to the process.”¹⁶⁶ After creation was complete, God’s glory and goodness were exemplified in the beauty of God’s handiwork. Wesley saw this Pre-Fall existence as perfection. Wesley saw all of God’s actions that followed as a means of grace, which would ultimately return creation to its original state of perfection.¹⁶⁷ In the incarnation, God entered material creation in order to save it.¹⁶⁸

Runyon also brings together the Wesleyan doctrine of Christian Perfection with the goodness achieved in God’s creation and the sacraments of the church.¹⁶⁹ In the United Methodist Communion Liturgy, which still draws from the influence of Wesley’s liturgy and teachings, we proclaim the “new covenant by water and the Spirit” that is established by Christ.¹⁷⁰ In the form of Jesus, God entered creation and used the created elements of bread and wine as a way to share the joys of the incarnation.¹⁷¹ In the United Methodist Baptism Liturgy, the congregation welcomes the new member being baptized

¹⁶⁶ Runyon, *The New Creation*, 97.

¹⁶⁷ John Wesley, *Notes on the Old Testament: Historical Books, Genesis-II Chronicles* (Reprint, Oxford, UK: Benediction Classics, 2010), 18.

¹⁶⁸ Surburg, “Good Stuff!: The Material Creation and the Christian Faith,” 248.

¹⁶⁹ Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today*, 225.

¹⁷⁰ Carlton R. Young, ed., *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 13.

¹⁷¹ Surburg, “Good Stuff!: The Material Creation and the Christian Faith,” 251.

with the words, “Through baptism you are incorporated by the Holy Spirit into God’s new creation and made to share in Christ’s royal priesthood.”¹⁷² In our worship, God uses ordinary materials such as water to invite us into the perfect nature of recreation.¹⁷³

The liturgies of the United Methodist Church still adhere to the ardent desires of John Wesley. All actions found within today’s Methodist Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion point toward a perfect and restored creation.¹⁷⁴ John Wesley lived a methodical life of structure, prayer, and praise. He longed for and studied Christian Perfection, and preached and studied the topic throughout his life. Wesley also desired perfection in the worship life of his followers, and labored to refine the liturgies and practices of the people called Methodists. Wesley’s constant desire to move toward perfection in his spiritual life and in his worship offer a clear example of how we are to give our best to God.

Current Times and the Need for Excellence

John Wesley saw a need for spiritual perfection in his time, and there is still a need for intentional excellence today. The modern-day trend of mediocrity is a phenomenon that has invaded the society of the postmodern age. The permeating culture of indifference has caused a major shift in society’s priorities, affecting not only our social interactions, but also the work associated with our faith. According to Dean of Duke Divinity School Gregory Jones, Christianity in contemporary America is marked

¹⁷² Young, ed., *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 37.

¹⁷³ Surburg, “Good Stuff!: The Material Creation and the Christian Faith,” 251.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 252.

more by mediocrity than by excellence.¹⁷⁵ At the same time, Jones notes that there seems to be a “yearning for the Gospel and a need for its healing and transforming power.”¹⁷⁶ There is a need for a return to excellence in our times, not only in the worship life of the church, but in the personal and spiritual lives of the church’s members.

A major decline in the standard of excellence has occurred within our modern culture, and the church has not escaped the decline. The influence of mediocrity in the church has caused a decreased spirituality among believers, poor relationships within the Christian community, and a lack of intention and effort associated with work and worship.¹⁷⁷ The modern culture has also caused a decrease in the theology associated with worship, producing models of worship that are directed at non-believers more than they are the life of the corporate body.¹⁷⁸ Such a watering down of worship has created a culture of incompetence, laziness, and unintentionality which has caused services in many churches to become lifeless.¹⁷⁹ The worship of today lacks excellence, which means we are not fully giving God our best.

¹⁷⁵ Gregory L. Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006), 24.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 190.

¹⁷⁸ Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship*, 81.

¹⁷⁹ Anthony Ruff, “Monks, Megachurches, and Mediocrity” *Worship* 92 (March 2018): 104.

The church is often a guide for culture, but as stated above, culture has infiltrated the church in ways that are not productive to the mission of the church.¹⁸⁰ In his book, *Dining with the Devil*, social critic Os Guinness, names the state of present-day culture as Modernity.¹⁸¹ Modernity is defined as “the character and system of the world produced by the forces of development and modernization, especially capitalism, industrialized technology, and telecommunications.”¹⁸² Modernity has caused the church and Christianity to lose much of their influence on shaping the lives of believers.¹⁸³ In a similar manner, the church has allowed the mediocre attitudes of society to influence the operation and ideals of the church. Guinness believes that the three most damaging trends in our modern culture as they relate to the church are secularization, privatization, and pluralization.¹⁸⁴

Guinness describes secularization as a removal of the society’s sectors that influence religion.¹⁸⁵ Through secularization, society and the church move further apart. Privatization is defined as the sharp separation of the public and the private sectors. Through privatization, the private sector, which is where religion is free to thrive, is

¹⁸⁰ Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship*, 82.

¹⁸¹ Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), 16.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

moved further away from the mainstream of society.¹⁸⁶ Lastly, pluralization is detailed as the increase of options available to people within the private sector. Through pluralization, society is faced with contrasting faiths and points of view. Guinness states, “the result is a greater sense of relativism, subjectivism, uncertainty, and anxiety surrounding religion in the modern world.”¹⁸⁷ People seem to be uneasy about the church, and thus do not give their faith and the church the attention they once enjoyed. The lack of attention can be seen especially in the quality and intentionality of corporate worship.

Theologian and musician Donald Hustad concurs with the findings of Oz Guinness, arguing that the current state of worship today is due to a shift in cultural priorities.¹⁸⁸ Hustad feels that we live in a post-Christian time of “unprecedented cultural change,”¹⁸⁹ and that worship in our modern times has become almost like a form of entertainment.¹⁹⁰ Unfortunately, the concept of striving for spiritual excellence in Christian worship goes against the modern-day culture of performance, which is greatly responsible for the shift in how many persons view worship in the life of the church. Hustad argues that, “each time we encounter God in worship should be a vital, fresh, life-changing experience.”¹⁹¹ When we sacrifice the principles of excellence in worship

¹⁸⁶ Guinness, *Dining with the Devil*, 48.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Donald P. Hustad, *True Worship: Reclaiming the Wonder and Majesty* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1998), 195.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 21.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 22.

merely to appeal to current culture, we give in to popular preferences, lose the identity of the Christian community, and minimize the important role of the arts, music, and preaching in worship.¹⁹² In short, worship becomes compromised and the church loses its focus when we strive to meet cultural needs over of giving our best to God.

Given the current state of mediocrity in our culture, church leaders naturally wonder how or where to begin fixing the problem. Walter Brueggemann believes that the way to resist the influence of mediocrity in modern culture is to reclaim the sanctity of worship and the Sabbath.¹⁹³ Brueggemann argues that observing the Sabbath is “not only resistance . . . it is alternative. It is an alternative to the demanding, chattering, pervasive presence of advertising and its great liturgical claim of professional sports that devour our ‘rest time.’”¹⁹⁴ Brueggemann blames the move away from Sabbath on the pursuit of consumer goods, professional sports, and the violence in society and on television.¹⁹⁵ Here is yet another example of how modern culture is plaguing the church. It is time for the church to observe the Sabbath and Sabbath worship in a more excellent way.

The approach of reclaiming the Sabbath argues that a look inward at the spiritual life of the Christian can affect and improve the culture around us.¹⁹⁶ Reclaiming the Sabbath can most definitely apply to the care and excellence given to the planning and

¹⁹² Hustad, *True Worship*, 24.

¹⁹³ Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), ix.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, xiv.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁹⁶ Jones and Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence*, 2.

execution of the worship services on Sundays. Sabbath, however, can also apply to the time we as individuals spend in private prayer and study. Our personal faith must be nurtured if we are ever to bring about a move toward excellence within the worship of the corporate body of Christ. We must see our role as leaders and participants in worship as an extension of our spiritual lives, thus allowing our faith to inform our work.

A move away from present culture demonstrates that the excellence we strive for in our spiritual lives can impact our worship. In their book, *Resurrecting Excellence*, Gregory Jones and Kevin Armstrong believe that, “Resurrecting excellence in Christian life and ministry finds its referent, standard, and source in the excellence of the Triune God.”¹⁹⁷ God’s excellence was shown forth at creation, Jesus’s perfect love was demonstrated in his death and resurrection, and the Holy Spirit is constantly making us and all things new.¹⁹⁸ The authors advocate for church leaders to achieve excellence through lives of discipleship, prayer, and love. At the conclusion of their book, Gregory and Armstrong state that, “Resurrecting excellence is fundamentally shaped by a lifelong attentiveness and obedience to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”¹⁹⁹ Jones and Armstrong clearly show that if there is to be a move toward excellence in the worship of our current times, there must also be a move toward excellence in our spiritual lives.

The move toward excellence in our spiritual lives and in our worship is not only a reflection of the goodness of God, but also a response of praise and gratitude for the love

¹⁹⁷ Jones and Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence*, 49.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 176.

and goodness offered to us in Christ Jesus. In his book, *The Complete Worship Service*, Kevin Navarro believes that quality matters, and that we owe Jesus Christ our best as a response for giving himself for us.²⁰⁰ Navarro challenges modern Christians to reexamine the excellence of our worship by stating, “We strive for excellence first and foremost to please God, but we also strive for excellence because it matters to us . . . and when we strive to please God and satisfy our own desire for excellence, the people we minister to will be the benefactors of really great worship experiences.”²⁰¹ The only way that the Church will ever turn the tide on mediocrity in worship is for individual Christians to see their role in the church as a part of the greater effort for corporate excellence. Our spiritual lives inform what we do, and great care must be taken that our personal faith is being nurtured and strengthened. We must also come to see that the effort we put in to our faith life directly influences the community of faith and its worship.

As individuals, we must look for ways that the dedication of our spiritual lives can inform and even improve our worship. Creativity is an integral part of excellent worship. Music, the arts, and preaching are all creative means through which individuals glorify God collectively. Creativity allows us to reflect God’s vision for creation and allows us to enter into the fullness of who we were created to be in Christ Jesus. In our current times, music and the arts can be a perfect starting point for a renewal of excellence in worship.

In her book, *The Sounds of Our Offerings*, Charlotte Kroeker examines the ways through which musicians in the church can give their best to God in contrast to the

²⁰⁰ Kevin J. Navarro, *The Complete Worship Service: Creating a Taste of Heaven on Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 60.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

culture of the world around them.²⁰² As a suggested plan to correct the culture of mediocrity, Kroeker offers that there be a commitment to education among both musicians and clergy, and that both try to more fully understand the areas of study of the other.²⁰³ Excellence in worship can only be appreciated and understood when there is communication among those who are responsible for the planning and implementation of worship. Kroeker also advocates for intentional renewal of relationships not only between clergy and musicians, but between staff and congregation, as well.²⁰⁴ There must be dialogue and trust between the leaders of the church and the people if the excellent efforts of either party are to be recognized and affirmed. Kroeker's people-driven concept of excellence demonstrates that a nurtured Christian character, proper pastoral leadership, and congregational education and support are all necessary tools for achieving excellence in any area of ministry in the modern church.

The pursuit of excellence should be an integral part of our spiritual and corporate lives, but we must be careful not to get frustrated when excellence is not immediately achieved. In her article on excellence in Christian teaching, professor and theologian Belden C. Lane concurs that "good teaching is always more than just a product, measured in strictly quantifiable ways. It is also a process . . . a lifelong attitude of being open to learning, acquiring a desire for what is not yet known but has a potential for transforming

²⁰² Charlotte Kroeker, *The Sounds of Our Offerings* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2011), xii.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 198.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 215.

our lives.”²⁰⁵ Much like John Wesley’s move toward Christian Perfection, the path toward excellence in teaching and in worship is also a journey that requires dedication and devotion. We must constantly evaluate what we are doing, holding our work up to what we know from Scripture and what we gather from our lives in God. Lane classifies the lifelong process as the excellence of desire, consisting of the love of learning and the desire for God.²⁰⁶ The desire for excellence in anything, including education and worship, stems from a desire to more perfectly know and learn of God. In this way, excellence in ministry and worship is tied to excellence in the spiritual life.

The post-modern church has moved away from a culture of excellence. Mediocrity has invaded not only the worship of the church, but the spiritual lives of individuals, as well.²⁰⁷ There is a clear need for a return to excellence and a renewed intentionality concerning our work and ministry in the church.²⁰⁸ Our modern-day culture can inform how the church ministers, but it should never completely change who we are and how we operate in the name of Christ.²⁰⁹ The church needs to strive for the best in our present times out of response for the great love shown to us at creation and in the form of Jesus Christ.

²⁰⁵ Belden C. Lane, “Excellence in Teaching and a Spirituality of Desire,” *Horizons* 27, no. 2 (Sept. 2000): 312.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 313.

²⁰⁷ Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 197.

²⁰⁸ Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship*, 86.

²⁰⁹ Ruff, “Monks, Megachurches, and Mediocrity,” 101.

Conclusion

Through the examination of biblical, historical, and theological foundations, we have seen a clear call and precedence for giving our best to God in all aspects of our lives. In Genesis we saw that creation was good, and reflected the best of God and God's desire for a restored humanity. In the Gospel of Mark, we saw the goodness of Christ reflected in the Greatest Commandment—a plea for us to love God with all of our efforts, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. In the Epistle of Colossians, Paul instructed the readers on how to live into their new lives in Christ and how to do everything for the glory of God. In examining the construction and worship of Solomon's Temple, we saw clear instructions from God on how to give our best and a detailed effort on behalf of the people of Israel to respond sacrificially to God's faithfulness in their lives. Through the life of John Wesley, we saw a methodical desire for improvement in the personal lives of individuals and in the worship of the church. Finally, in our study of modern times, we have seen a rise in mediocrity and a strong need for the church of Christ to return to a culture of spiritual and liturgical excellence.

At first glance, it would be easy to assume that our findings point only to perfection and excellence as they relate to tangible things, such as the beauty of creation or the detailed sacrifices in Solomon's Temple. If we look closely at the foundations we have explored, however, we can see that in order to achieve perfection or excellence in anything tangible, there must first be a perfection of desire and spirit. Excellence begins on the inside with a right relationship with God—a relationship aimed at restoring us to the goodness of creation. Excellence then moves beyond ourselves and out into the worshiping community. Loving our neighbors as ourselves and dealing with each other in

kindness and forgiveness both point toward an excellence that manifests itself in the harmony of community. The best of ourselves is not an instant outcome, but the result of a lifelong commitment of faith and an intentional journey closer to God and one another. There is a clear need for a return to excellence today, and I believe that the worshiping life of the church can instill and nurture a desire for excellence in church members, show forth excellence in the work of liturgy, and practice it daily within the bond of the body of Christ. God gave his very best for us and we are called to give the same in return.

CHAPTER 3

PROJECT DESIGN

Introduction

The biblical, historical, and theological foundations examined in Chapter 2 clearly demonstrate that we are to give our very best to God. As we read in Chapter 1, the congregation of St. John's United Methodist Church in Rock Hill, SC, has been affected by the mediocrity of modern culture. After serving the church for over a year and documenting certain problems and situations, I believe that a lack of connection between people's faith and their work in the church contributes to the mediocre culture of worship.¹ I also believe that the culture of mediocrity moves beyond the quality of work and worship and affects the church's overall ability to share the Gospel and adequately care for others.

In an effort to impart a desire for excellence among members of my congregation and to find solutions that move the church toward excellence, I decided, along with the pastoral leadership of the church, to hold an all-day retreat for selected members of the congregation's Worship Committee. At this retreat I shared the findings of my research in Chapter 2, discussed the current issues I have discovered in the church, and worked with others to develop creative solutions for moving forward.

¹ See Appendix A.

Contextual Analysis

As described in Chapter 1, members of St. John's United Methodist Church did not see a connection between their work in the church and their spiritual lives, which contributed to the lack of effort and excellence associated with ministry and worship.² At first, I assumed that the culture of mediocrity was simply the result of laziness. I soon realized, however, that the problem was much more serious, stemming from years of fear related to financial instability, frequent pastoral changes, and poor lay leadership. In simple terms, the congregation found it safer to do nothing rather than explore creative means for maintaining and improving their worship and other ministries. The result is an out-of-date form of ministry, and worship services and venues that had not been cared for or updated.

The Senior Minister of my church was slated to retire when I began this project. She was passionate about seeing this concept implemented, so she was most supportive of the all-day retreat occurring before her retirement in June of 2018. The short time frame was the main reason for deciding to hold a retreat, rather than a series of classes. The outgoing Senior Minister felt that if a good foundation could be laid for evaluating and improving the worship of St. John's, the foundation would accomplish one of two possibilities. First, if the new Senior Minister was overwhelmed by the new position, the outgoing Senior Minister felt that the findings of our retreat could make the transition easier for everyone by empowering the laity to take an active role in worship planning leadership. Secondly, the outgoing Senior Minister felt that if the ideals of excellence in

² Evidence to support the statement above may be found in the answers to survey and interview questions found in Appendix F.

worship were not a priority for the incoming Senior Minister, the Worship Committee would already be poised to evoke a change toward excellence on their own.

When selecting individuals to participate in the all-day retreat, I had multiple meetings with the Senior Minister to gauge her thoughts and to receive input. Based on the parameters of my project, and knowing that the team for the retreat could not be too large, we set out selecting specific members from the larger Worship Committee to participate. The Worship Committee of St. John's contains chairs of various subcommittees and multiple congregational representatives. For the purposes of the retreat, we decided to limit the group to no more than twelve. We also decided that the twelve selected should consist of as many of the chairs associated with worship as possible. The thinking was that these individuals would have the greatest opportunity to influence change by relaying the findings of our time together to those who serve under them in the preparation and planning of worship.

Those ultimately chosen to participate in the all-day retreat included the Senior Minister, the Associate Minister, the chair of the Worship Committee, the recording secretary of the Worship Committee, the chair of the Communion Stewards, the chair of the Altar Guild, the Wedding Coordinator, two representatives from the Chancel Choir, a representative from the Praise Band, and two congregational representatives. I had hoped to have more leadership from the chairs of other committees, such as the Ushers and Acolytes, but they were not available. The Worship Committee's lack of participation was disappointing due to the fact that many of our current problems noted in my study dealt with hospitality and worship logistics.

The retreat was held at the church on Friday, May 25, 2018. The event was held in a large classroom near the sanctuary that included tables arranged in a U shape so that participants could see me and one another. At the front of the class was a large flat screen television for visual aids and a dry erase board for making notes and guiding discussion. There was also a piano at the front of the room, which was used for leading hymn singing throughout the day. In addition to my PowerPoint, I gave each participant a simplified version of my teaching outline so that each person could take notes throughout the day and be reminded of our discussions together.³

There were no real limitations enforced on my project by the church. I was allowed to structure the timeline for the interviews and retreat in any way I desired after the date was set. My Senior Minister trusted me to do what would be best for the church, all the while fulfilling the requirements of the thesis. The only parameters put on the project by the Senior Minister was that she desired any solutions or ideas that came out of the group discussion be taken back to the larger Worship Committee for discussion and feedback. The Senior Minister saw this as a formality and a way of supporting the committee structures of the church.

My means of assessment for the retreat included pre- and post-session surveys, pre- and post-session interviews, and notes/observations from the class. The questions on all assessments centered around the following three overarching questions.⁴

1. What do the participants need to know about excellence in Christian ministry?
2. Do the participants see a relation between their work in the church and their personal relationship with God?

³ See Teaching Outline in Appendix E.

⁴ See Survey in Appendix B and Interview Questions in Appendix C.

3. How might a move towards excellence in the area of worship contribute to the overall life of the church?

The entire retreat was formulated around the three overarching questions, which all pointed to the main idea of giving our best to God.

Project Design

The time during the all-day retreat was used to educate the participants on the findings of my research and to provide class members the opportunity to brainstorm and discuss ideas for the worship life of St. John's. It was important to share the findings of the research because there were some skeptics in the group who would question the need for such a class or conversation. The goal was to provide support for the teachings and arguments, all the while providing support and affirmation for those in the group who already felt strongly about the need for improvements in our worship.

The all-day retreat was divided into two sections. The first portion of the day centered around my research of biblical, historical, and theological foundations.⁵ The second portion of the day focused on striving for excellence in the various aspects of worship. The last portion of the day allowed me the opportunity to go into greater detail regarding specific areas of worship. The areas included intentional long-range planning, productive committee meetings, collaborative worship planning, proper communication, and the importance of printed materials in worship.

The instruction consisted of a mix of lectures, videos, group discussions, and games. The hope was to inspire but not overwhelm. A PowerPoint presentation was created to follow the teaching outline. The presentation included all pictures, quotes,

⁵ See Teaching Outline in Appendix E.

questions, games, and videos so that the time could be used as effectively as possible. Through group discussions the participants engaged in active and productive dialogue about the current state of worship at our church. The hope was for the participants to identify key issues based on the teachings they heard, and then together formulate reasonable solutions to the problems and needs.

Project Implementation

The day started with introductions. I asked everyone to introduce themselves, share their current role on the Worship Committee, and share a Scripture verse that had a special significance for them in regard to their work in the church. Next, I told about my degree program and the scope of the thesis project. I then gave a brief overview of the history of Christian worship and examined the definitions of worship and excellence. I also asked participants to share memories they had of excellence that they had experienced in the life of the church.⁶

I began my teaching by sharing the findings from my research. I started with the Biblical Foundations and structured the three Scripture lessons around the concept of the Holy Trinity. The text from Genesis demonstrated God the creator, the text from Mark demonstrated Jesus the Son and his love for us, and the text from the Epistle of Colossians demonstrated the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the early church.

The later part of the morning focused on analyzing the three historical periods and doctrines outlined in Chapter 2. I began by discussing the construction and worship of Solomon's Temple. I showed pictures of what scholars believe the temple looked like,

⁶ See Class Notes in Appendix D.

and then together we examined Scripture verses which detailed the materials and craftsmanship. I then explained the various types of sacrifices associated with Temple worship. Again, we spent some time reading aloud and discussing related Scriptures.

Next, I moved on to the life and ministry of John Wesley. After giving a brief overview of Wesley's life, I introduced the doctrine of Christian Perfection and Wesley's desire for constant improvement in all aspects of his life. Together, we read portions of his journal and examined some of his most significant writings on the subject. We also spent some time studying Wesley's attempts to reform and perfect Methodist Worship. This included time looking through his *Sunday Services for the Methodists in North America*, and his famous "Rules for Singing," which are found at the front of The United Methodist Hymnal.

Finally, I closed the morning session with a brief discussion about the modern-day trends toward mediocrity and the need for a return to excellence in our spiritual lives and in the worship life of the church. Before the group broke for lunch, I provided them with questions to guide their lunch discussion. Members of the group provided a nice sandwich lunch, which allowed a good amount of time for fellowship and conversation.

The lectures throughout the day included opportunities for class discussion. The discussions were facilitated by sets of questions which followed each major topic of the lecture.⁷ The discussions showed forth varying levels of understanding among participants, and also demonstrated a growing interest among participants about the material being presented. I answered all questions to the best of my ability, with only one or two being beyond the scope of my research. I did, however, promise that I would look

⁷ A list of questions and answers may be found in Appendix D.

up anything that I could not answer and email the person who raised the question the following week. Fortunately, the pastors of the church were both on hand and were able to offer greater insight in regard to Scripture and theological matters. I also videoed the retreat so that I could go back and document in greater detail the questions asked and the direction of group discussion.

Following lunch, the group reassembled for a time of discussion. During the discussion, I invited members of the group to share their conclusions from their time of discussion at lunch. The first question was: How has your thinking on worship changed during our time together? The answers included: I know that I am there to praise God, but I also thought I was supposed to be entertained in some way; we should think of worship in everything we do in the church; and God is the audience. Participants also shared that they need to see the move toward excellence as a journey, and that the move toward excellence can draw us closer to God. We then took the opportunity to name things that our church does to a true level of excellence, as well as some things on which we need to improve. The post-lunch discussion provided a good foundation for the afternoon material on examining excellence in specific areas of the church.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent examining the pursuit of excellence, and the ways that we could apply the findings of the morning's teachings to the worship life of our congregation. The topics covered included Excellence in Leadership, Excellence in Planning, Excellence in Communication, Excellence in Hospitality, Excellence in Maintenance, and Excellence in Education. The afternoon also included a mix of funny stories and illustrations so that the topic did not weigh too heavily on the participants. The last thing I wanted was for the class members to get discouraged.

The topic Excellence in Leadership examined spiritual gifts and the qualities of a good pastoral leader. The topic Excellence in Planning examined the benefits of good planning for worship, as well as examples and shared stories of things that go wrong when services are not planned well. Excellence in Communication examined the importance of clear and consistent communication in printed worship documents, as well as humorous examples of church bulletin typos. Excellence in Hospitality examined the crucial role of ushers and greeters, and the impact they can have on first time visitors. Excellence in Maintenance examined the need for good care of buildings and worship related appointments, not only as a means of first impressions, but also as an example of stewardship. Finally, Excellence in Education examined the ongoing need for support and guidance regarding worship and the concept of excellence if positive change is ever to occur.

The day concluded with an adjusted form of John Wesley's Covenant Renewal Service.⁸ The congregation of St. John's is accustomed to participating in this service around the first of the year, so I knew the service would resonate with participants. The service took place in the chapel of our church and was led by the Senior Minister. The service included the Sacrament of Holy Communion, which enabled us to tie together the concepts of giving our lives in service to Christ and living fully within the Christian community. The chapel also includes stained glass windows that depict the life of John Wesley, which supported the group's time spent earlier in the day examining the life of

⁸ Carlton R. Young, ed., *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), p. 13.

John Wesley and his thoughts on Christian Perfection. Before the group left, I asked them to sign up for a time to meet with me following the lecture for post-session interviews.

Conclusion

By the conclusion of the all-day retreat, I was able to share a great deal about the concept of excellence with my participants. They walked away knowing that God deserves our very best, not only in our work in the church, but in our relationships as well. I could see that the participants were starting to think differently, and I pray that their thinking will influence change in their work in the church. Participants shared the following major takeaways from the retreat: excellence begins in the heart; we must do everything in love; and excellence is a journey.⁹

My retreat was intended to show participants that God deserves our best through a demonstration of biblical, historical, and theological truths. I also wanted to show them that, as leaders, they have the opportunity to demonstrate lives of excellence to those with whom they work. As a result, those around them will start to influence a change toward excellence in the greater life of the church and the world.

The next chapter examines in detail the findings of my various forms of assessment. We see how the participants grew in their understanding of the concept of excellence and how their thoughts changed on issues related to excellence in worship. Specifically, the next chapter assess what participants know about excellence in Christian ministry, whether or not participants see a relation between their work in the church and their personal relationship with God, and how a move toward excellence in worship could

⁹ See Appendix F for Data Results.

contribute to the overall life of the church. Finally, the chapter explores how the material conveyed in the retreat could aid in solving some of the particular issues related to excellence at St. John's that were discussed in Chapter 1.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

In order to assess the knowledge and growth of participants around the concept of giving our best to God, I used three means of assessment. First, I used pre-session and post-session surveys. The pre-session and post-session surveys were quantitative in nature.¹ The surveys, which were sent electronically one week before and one week after the all-day retreat, consisted of thirty questions with a mix of Likert scale responses. I used Google Forms, which helped to organize and evaluate the data from the surveys. The second means of assessment was a combination of pre-session and post-session interviews.² The interviews were more qualitative in nature, offering support and greater insight for the quantitative data. The interviews were accomplished in four small group sessions so that individuals could have the time and freedom to elaborate on their thoughts. The final means of assessment consisted of qualitative anecdotal notes from the class through which I was able to document questions that were raised and developments or struggles that I noticed among participants.³

¹ See Appendix B for Pre/Post-Session Survey Questions.

² See Appendix C for Pre/Post-Session Interview Questions.

³ See Appendix D for Class Notes.

The questions on all three means of assessment were formulated to gauge growth by means of the three overarching questions for my project.

1. What do the participants need to know about excellence in Christian ministry?
2. Do the participants see a relation between their work in the church and their personal relationship with God?
3. How might a move towards excellence in the area of worship contribute to the overall life of the church?

The first overarching question dealt with participants' knowledge of biblical, historical, and theological concepts related to excellence. The second overarching question dealt with excellence in the participants' personal faith life. The third overarching question centered around the participants' understanding of and involvement in the corporate practices of the church.

Data Analysis

First Overarching Question

The first of my three overarching questions focused on knowledge, ensuring that all participants gained an understanding of the biblical, historical, and theological foundations for excellence in Christian worship. The pre-session survey indicated that most participants held a fairly substantial understanding of the excellence assessed at creation and the ethos of loving God with all of ourselves as expressed in the Greatest Commandment.⁴ The participants' understanding was most likely due to the fact that the two Scripture references in question were among the most familiar foundations covered in my teachings. The majority of participants had already heard these passages at some point in time and were at least fairly familiar with the overall themes of each reference.

⁴ See Appendix for F Data Results.

Most participants, however, scored below the fiftieth percentile on the questions pertaining to sacrifice in the Old Testament, John Wesley's views on Christian Perfection, and the example of worship in the early church.⁵ The latter items were not as familiar to the majority of the class, ministers excluded, and represented some of the most substantial growth within the post-session interviews and surveys.⁶

As shown in Table 1, the pre-session survey indicated an average point value of 5.28 on knowledge-based questions.⁷ The post-session survey indicated an 8-point average on knowledge-based questions.⁸ Together, the two figures demonstrate a 2.72-point increase in the participants' knowledge of biblical, historical, and theological foundations.⁹ The quantitative data of the pre- and post-session surveys is supported by the findings of the pre- and post-session interviews, as well as the class notes.

⁵ See Appendix F for Data Results.

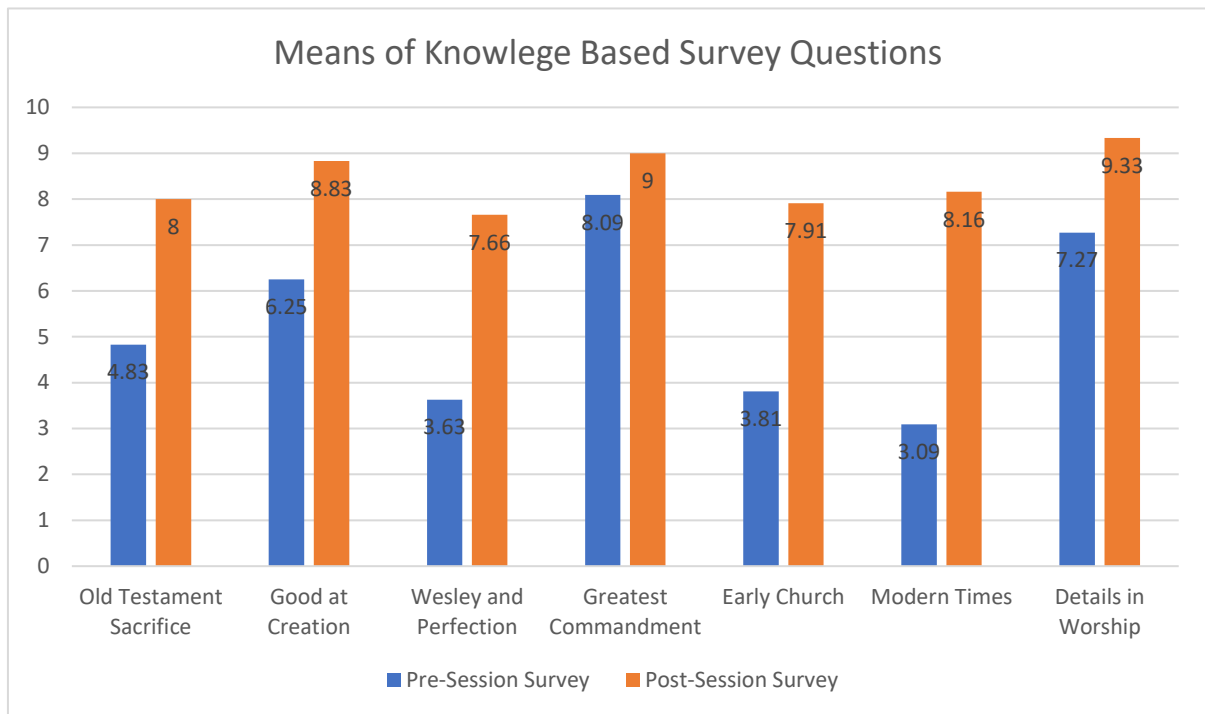
⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Table 1



When asked in the pre-session interviews about the biblical precedents for excellence in worship, most participants gave good general answers, but were unable to offer concrete examples. Three participants referenced the Psalms, two referenced the worship of the early church, one referenced sacrifices, and one referenced the life of Christ.¹⁰ In the post-session survey, seven out of the twelve answers were grounded in the three Scripture lessons taught at the retreat.¹¹ There were also some answers that referenced John Wesley's teachings and the use of the lectionary in worship.¹² Even though these answers support my overall teachings, they were not biblical references.

¹⁰ See Appendix F for Data Results.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

Such a discrepancy means that participants either did not understand the question or did not fully grasp what I was trying to convey in my teaching.

When asked to define excellence in the pre-session interviews, only half of the participants made a reference to God in their answers.¹³ In the post-session interviews, participants remarked on excellence being a journey, which supported my teachings on the doctrines of John Wesley.¹⁴ There were also several references to faith and worship in the answers about excellence, indicating a growth in understanding regarding excellence in worship.¹⁵ On the post-session survey, only one answer did not reference the teachings of the retreat in some way.¹⁶

My class notes also indicate that as the all-day retreat progressed, participants' answers about excellence shifted to include more references to God and their faith.¹⁷ The findings in the class notes indicate that most people understand in some way the concept of excellence as it pertains to faith and worship. The teachings were not necessarily new to the participants, but participants need to be reminded of the truths found in the biblical, historical, and theological foundations. Such results indicate a strong need for constantly keeping the ideals of excellence before our congregations.

¹³ See Appendix F for Data Results.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

On the pre-session survey more than half of the participants indicated that they did not understand the diminishing trends regarding excellence in our modern culture.¹⁸ In an effort to gauge the participants' understanding of excellence as it pertains to worship, I asked several questions on the surveys and in interviews where class members were encouraged to identify the best aspects of worship at St. John's, as well as areas which needed improving.¹⁹ Seventy-five percent of the class indicated in pre-session interviews that music is the strongest area of worship at our church.²⁰ The post-session interviews confirmed the findings; however, the post-session answers were accompanied by references to how music supports and uplifts other aspects of the worship service.²¹ Such developments indicate a growth in understanding regarding both excellence and the true role of music in worship.

There was consensus in the post-session interviews, which at times even developed into group discussions, regarding the areas of worship at St. John's which needed improving. The following areas were identified: the need for fellowship between our contrasting services, the need for increased hospitality on behalf of our ushers and greeters, and a need for more congregational education regarding our worship practices and how they influence our faith lives.²² When asked how the problems above developed, participants indicated that the most likely factors were complacency and a fear of

¹⁸ See Appendix F for Data Results.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

change.²³ The participants also noted in pre-session interviews that financial restraints had caused some of the current problems.²⁴ However, by the time of the post-session interviews, over half of the class had come to a place where they understood excellence as a matter of faith, and that excellence did not necessarily require money.²⁵

Second Overarching Question

The second of my overarching questions focused on excellence in the life of faith. Through my teachings I hoped to convey the need for excellence in our lives of prayer and study if excellence were to be achieved within the worship of the church. Through a mix of surveys, interviews, and class notes, I hoped to gauge the participants' growth in the area of faith and in their understanding of how their lives can inform and affect the quality of work we do in the name of Christ.

During the pre-session interviews, I asked all participants to consider a Scripture verse that was meaningful to them in their work in the church, was inspiring to them as they served, or that best embodied the spirit they hoped to achieve in their work. The Scripture verses were then shared with the class as part of our introductions at the all-day retreat. It was my hope that the sharing of meaningful Scripture verses would be a good indicator of the group's initial perception of faith as it pertained to excellence in the church. Not only did the information give me insight into their existing understanding and devotion, but the examples given also allowed me to see deeper into the participants'

²³ See Appendix F for Data Results.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

faith lives. The examples also provided me with the opportunity to get to know them on a personal level.

Some of the Scripture verses shared in the introductions were common favorites, such as Ps 23 and I Cor 13. There were, however, some examples that conveyed the unique spirit of a person's work and gave insight into their struggles along life's journey.²⁶ For example, a woman in the group who was recently widowed offered Eccl 4:9-12, stating that the verse not only comforted her during her grief, but also modeled for her the way church members are to engage with each other in the body of Christ.²⁷ Interestingly, one participant offered the Greatest Commandment from Matt 22:36-39, which was another Gospel writer's account of one of my main Scriptural foundations.²⁸ One participant did not offer a Scripture at all, but rather offered the words of a beloved hymn.²⁹ While the hymn text was meaningful, it was interesting to me that the participant did not offer a Scripture text. The unique answer could represent a lack of comfort with the Scriptures or a desire to be unique from the rest of the class. Either way, the participants' responses were reflective of the differing personalities and levels of understanding leaders encounter in the church, all of which play into the church's journey toward excellence.

The pre- and post-session surveys offered great insight into the faith lives of the participants and allowed me to see the various ways in which participants approached

²⁶ See Appendix F for Data Results.

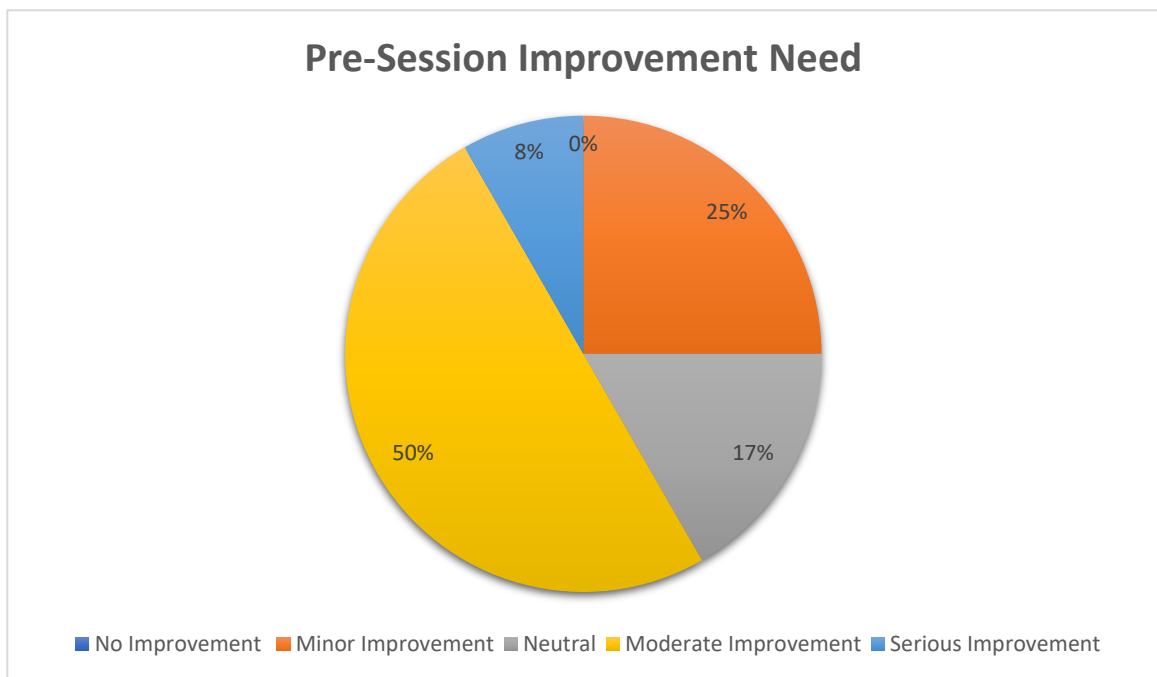
²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

their work in the church. On both the pre- and post-session surveys one hundred percent of the class said that they saw their role in the church as a means of serving God. As demonstrated in Table 2, fifty percent of the class felt before the session that there was only a moderate need for improvement in the way they approached their work in the church.³⁰ On the post-session survey, however, and as demonstrated in Table 3, the number increased to seventy-seven percent of the class feeling that there was a moderate need for improvement.³¹ The post-session survey results also demonstrate growth in the importance participants place on their work in the church in their lives.³²

Table 2

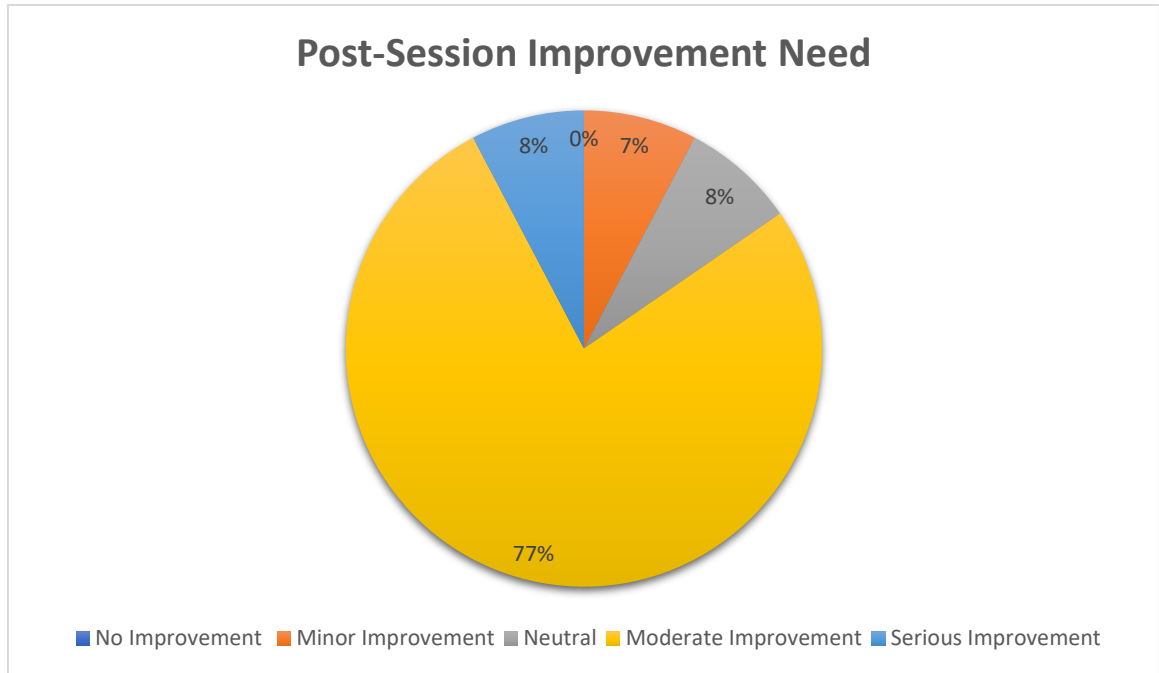


³⁰ See Appendix F for Data Results.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

Table 3



In a similar manner, the numbers surrounding the amount of time offered and sacrifices made for service in the church also increased.³³ On the pre-session survey fifty percent of the class noted that they sometimes made sacrifices for their work.³⁴ The post-session survey indicated that fifty-three percent of the class felt that they needed to make sacrifices more often for their work in the church.³⁵ On the pre-session survey the majority of participants only spent an hour per week in preparation for their work and only occasionally included study and prayer.³⁶ The post-session results show that the

³³ See Appendix F for Data Results.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid.

majority of the class would now spend an hour a day in preparation for their work, with forty-six percent of the participants saying that they would always incorporate study and prayer.³⁷ The post-session interviews also indicated that intentional study and prayer would be an important part of the participants' work moving forward.³⁸

The pre- and post-session interviews showed that most participants saw their role in the church as that of a servant.³⁹ There was also an increase in the ways in which work in the church affected how participants related to and would lead others.⁴⁰ The post-session interviews, however, indicated that participants saw the need for those who serve in the church to set an example for the rest of the congregation in how to go about achieving excellence in the life of faith and in service to the church.⁴¹ The progress from the pre-session interviews to the post-session interviews also indicated a growth in understanding regarding the similarities between work and worship.⁴² One participant coined the phrase "the work of worship," about our service in the church, and made the connection between our call to serve God and the definition of liturgy being the work of the people.⁴³ The class notes also demonstrate a growth in understanding of sacrifice as it

³⁷ See Appendix F for Data Results.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

pertained to time given and work accomplished in the church.⁴⁴ One class member even referenced a need for those who serve in the church to live into their membership vows of prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.⁴⁵

The class notes indicate that the most substantial revelation of the all-day retreat regarding faith was the need for members of the body of Christ to work with each other in a spirit of love.⁴⁶ The concept of loving others as a part of our work in the church came out of our discussion about the Greatest Commandment. One class member commented, “If we do not love the people we are working with as we strive to give our best to God, then we are not living out both parts of Jesus’s commandment.”⁴⁷ The data clearly indicates that participants grew in their understanding of how excellence in the personal life of faith can influence excellence in other areas of the church.

Third Overarching Question

The third of my overarching questions focused on how excellence could influence the life of the greater church community. During the all-day retreat I shared ways in which excellence in the worship life of the church and in the private faith lives of individual members could affect a move toward excellence in the greater life and ministry of the local church. Through a combination of data sources and observations, I

⁴⁴ See Appendix F for Data Results.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

was able to see if my teaching was effective, as well as gain a sense for participants' awareness for current issues within the church.

The pre-session survey indicated that ninety-one percent of the class saw corporate worship as being very important to the overall life of the church.⁴⁸ The number only increased to ninety-two after the retreat, demonstrating that the group held and sustained a solid understanding of the importance of worship in the life of the church.⁴⁹ The disconnect for participants, however, was seeing how worship could actually affect other areas of the church. For example, the pre-session survey indicated that fifty percent of the class felt that worship had a major influence on the committees on which they served.⁵⁰ The post-session survey indicated that sixty-nine percent of the class felt that worship had a major influence on the committees on which they served.⁵¹

During the all-day retreat, I addressed and saw progress in participants' understanding regarding how excellence in their personal lives and in their worship could in turn positively influence the life of the church. As shown in Table 4, the pre-session survey indicated that fifty-nine percent of the class thought that worship had a major influence on other areas of the church.⁵² The post-session survey, as shown in Table 5, indicated that ninety-two percent of participants believed that worship influenced other

⁴⁸ See Appendix F for Data Results.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

areas of the church.⁵³ The results of the question represent the largest increase in the data for the third overarching question.

Table 4

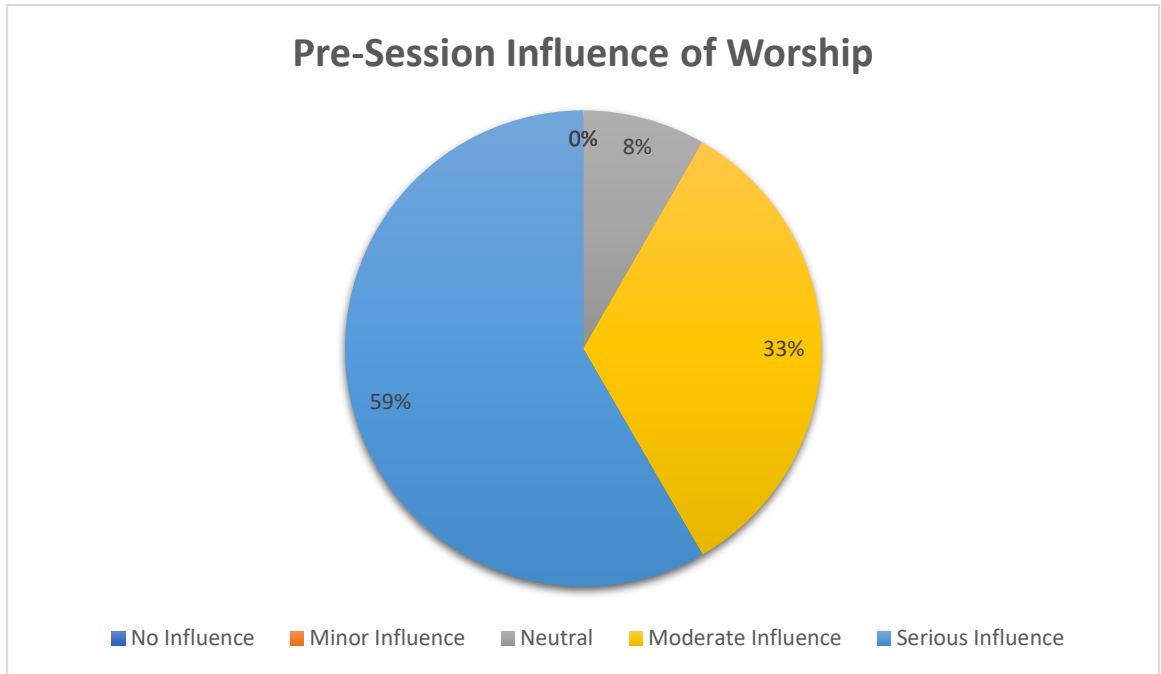
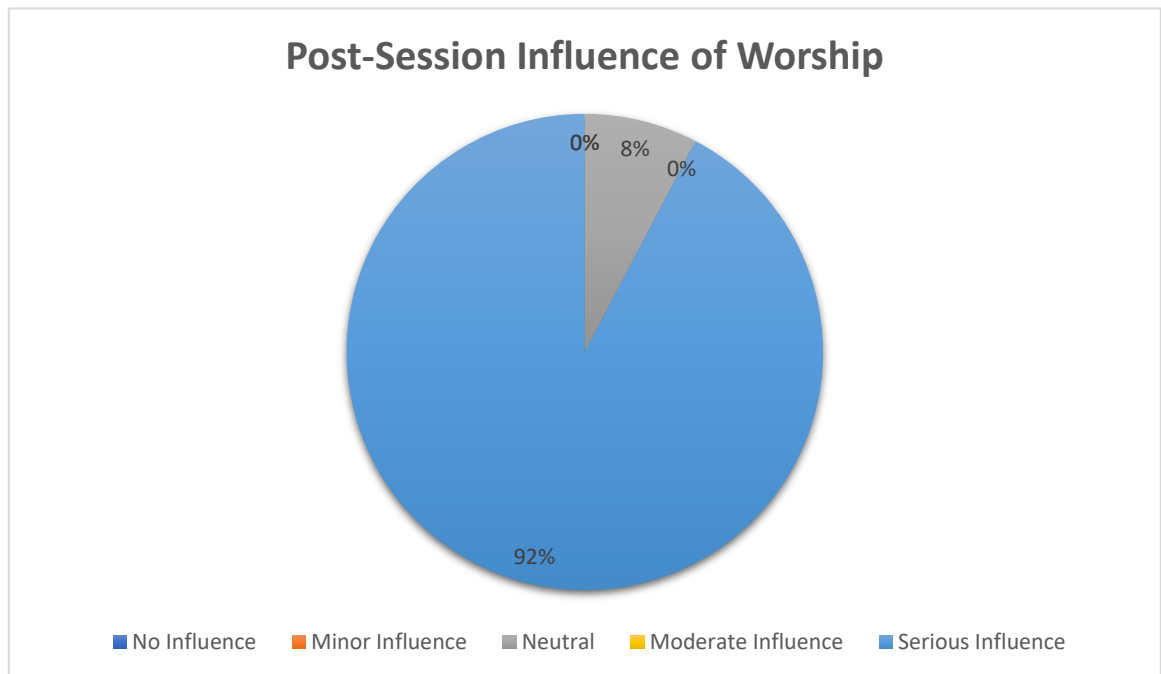


Table 5



⁵³ See Appendix F for Data Results.

On the pre-session survey, fifty percent of the class strongly agreed that the Sacrament of Holy Communion was a reflection of the Christian community.⁵⁴ The post-session survey result increased to sixty-nine percent.⁵⁵ The growth indicated through the survey demonstrates a growth in understanding among participants for how worship, especially excellent personal and corporate worship, informs the life of the congregation.

After learning the foundations of excellence at the all-day retreat and hearing how mediocrity has influenced the church today, participants were able to see more clearly and more objectively the reality of the current situation at St. John's. The pre-session survey indicated that fifty percent of the class felt that there were moderate problems in the church.⁵⁶ That number increased to sixty-nine percent on the post-session survey.⁵⁷ The growth indicated through the surveys demonstrates a growth in understanding among participants about the current state of the church.

The pre-session interviews asked participants to consider how a return to excellence in the area of worship could change the overall life of the church. The most encouraging answers suggested that church members should carry worship into everyday life, that the mindset of church members should be changed from one of self to about God, and that the church should become more loving and inclusive.⁵⁸ The answer about

⁵⁴ See Appendix F for Data Results.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

being more loving and inclusive supports the findings about excellence in the personal faith lives of church members, as well as the biblical examples of love within the body of Christ from Chapter 2. The most common answer, however, about how excellence could change the entire church was that excellence in worship would cause people to be more active in their involvement in the church.⁵⁹ Five out of the twelve responses included some type of reference to increased involvement in the church, which supports the teaching that giving of ourselves is a reflection of the Greatest Commandment.⁶⁰

The post-session interviews challenged participants to consider how they would approach their work in the church differently moving forward, having considered the teachings of the all-day retreat. One question assessed participants' faith lives by asking how they would lead their respective teams differently moving forward.⁶¹ Though the answers varied, there was a constant theme of growing in personal faith and setting a better example of service for others to follow.⁶² Such answers demonstrate a clear understanding of the need for excellence in the personal life of faith if change is ever to be accomplished in the life of the church. A similar question asked how the work of participants in the church might inspire others moving forward.⁶³ The answers included a consensus of setting a good example for others and sharing the work with others as a

⁵⁹ See Appendix F for Data Results.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

means of affirming and using church members' spiritual gifts and talents.⁶⁴ Again, answers for the question at hand included references to inclusion and love. The results affirm not only the teachings from the retreat on the excellence of love, but also speak to the current divisions in the United Methodist Church regarding human sexuality and inclusivity.

The class notes also reflect the common theme of love as we work with others toward excellence in worship, personal faith, and church life.⁶⁵ When participants in the class were asked what changes they would make in the ways they lead and serve, all answers had to do with the concept of love.⁶⁶ One participant stated, "As members of the body of Christ we are to love all . . . even the unlovable."⁶⁷ Another participant noted, "The most excellent we can be is in the way we love others."⁶⁸ The greatest growth among participants indicated by the class notes, however, was seeing the class realize how much the church has changed and how much room there is for growth.⁶⁹

Conclusion

The class members were most appreciative of the opportunity to be a part of this thesis project. Many commented on how much they learned and how excited they were to

⁶⁴ See Appendix F for Data Results.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

witness their knowledge put into practice for the greater good of the church. Growth could clearly be seen in the understanding as a group, but it was also obvious how some individuals progressed in their thinking. One individual in particular has been difficult to work with because she does not like change. The participant's thinking changed as she came to learn that change is sometimes a move toward excellence and making all things new.

The findings of the data clearly show that participants in the class grew in their knowledge of how giving our best to God can influence not only our personal lives, but the worship of our church, and the overall life of the church. The growth shown through the data is important because it demonstrates the initial lack of understanding among most members of the church, and the benefit that can come from education. The topic of excellence could have a greater impact on the church worldwide if local congregations were intentional about fostering environments of excellence for worship and formation. Such a trend could be a catalyst for helping the church to change the world from the inside out.

All of the data collected can be summarized by the takeaways from the retreat. At the end of the all-day retreat, participants were asked what their one takeaway from the day would be. Answers included: God is the Audience! Do everything in love!! Excellence is a journey. Execution is different than intention. Always show grace and acceptance. Excellence of self must be a priority first.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ See Appendix F for Data Results.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

In Chapter 1 we explored the history of St. John's United Methodist Church, specifically elements of the church's history which over time led to a culture of mediocrity in the congregation's worship life. In Chapter 2 we examined the biblical, historical, and theological foundations for excellence, and found support for why we should always give our best to God. In Chapter 3 we surveyed the structure and contents of the all-day retreat, paying close attention to the ways the participants engaged with the material. In Chapter 4 we analyzed the data collected from before, during, and after the all-day retreat in an effort to gauge participants' growth and understanding. In this chapter we will summarize our findings and look ahead to what our findings could mean for the congregation of St. John's, as well as the greater Church.

God deserves our very best, and our best should be exemplified in the excellence of our personal faith lives, the quality of intention surrounding our corporate worship, and the perfection of love shown forth in the overall lives and ministries of our churches. Excellence, however, does not simply happen by chance. Excellence, as we learned from the results of the data in Chapter 4, must be intentionally cultivated through loving relationships and constant education. Individuals and congregations also must not become discouraged when excellence does not happen right away, or when setbacks

occur within the life of faith or the ministries of the church. Excellence is a journey, a constant moving of ourselves toward the image of Christ and back to the beauty and perfect relationship with the Divine that existed at the dawn of creation.

Reflections on the Project

Overall, I was very pleased with the project. The class was enthusiastic and receptive. The class members were also eager to do whatever they could to help me succeed. I truly think the participants found the material interesting, and I believe that I presented the information in a way that was varied and enjoyable.¹ After the all-day retreat, I received many cards and emails from members of the class expressing thanks for the opportunity to be a part of the project. I can already see more intentionality regarding how some members of the group are going about their work.

When the all-day retreat started, participants indicated that they were nervous about the class. They thought that their knowledge and participation might negatively influence my grade. I assured them that their honesty and even vulnerability would only strengthen the results of my study. Once the retreat was underway and the participants started to get a feel for what the day would be like, they opened up and started actively participating in the discussion. For the most part, everyone was very receptive to the material I presented, and I could actually see the moments when participants began to grasp the material as the day progressed. One significant moment for many in the class was the time when they realized that worship was not for our approval or entertainment. After I presented the idea of worship being more about fellowship, Word, and Table, they all admitted that deep

¹ See Teaching Outline in Appendix E.

down they knew that, but because of our modern desire for personal gratification in worship, they needed to be reminded of that truth. Similar moments occurred throughout the day² and such moments helped me to understand that constant education would be necessary on the congregational level if true change were ever to occur.

As I examine the structure of my teachings following the all-day retreat, I wish that I would have had the opportunity to stretch the material out over several weeks. Such a structure would have allowed me time to assess growth and effectiveness of teaching before moving forward. Unfortunately, my timeline did not allow for an extended schedule, and I do believe that it had a slightly negative result on the amount of material I was able to cover. I ended up having to rush through the last bit of my lecture before lunch. I now know I should have saved the examination of mediocrity in modern times for after lunch. I did spend some time reviewing and going into more detail following the lunch break, but I wish I had known in advance so that I could have mapped out the day's schedule in a more productive manner.

I was very pleased with the growth of participants' understanding expressed through the data. I believe that all participants wanted to learn, and that they approached the material with open minds and open hearts. As I look back on the retreat and the collection of data, there are a few things I would have done differently. In hindsight, I would have taken the pastors out of the data because I believe, based on their vast knowledge, they skewed the results slightly. I should have considered them outliers and

² See Class Notes in Appendix D.

assessed the data of the other ten participants.³ I also wish that I would have given myself more time between the pre-session survey/interviews and the actual retreat. I think it would have been helpful if I had been able to use the findings from the pre-session materials to dictate the information that was conveyed in the all-day session.

As I look back on the all-day retreat, two findings offered by the class stick out in my mind for how the group intends to move forward. The first consensus of the class is that education is absolutely necessary for improvement in the church.⁴ The congregation must have the opportunity to learn more about our worship practices if they are ever to come to appreciate the practices and see them as integral parts of the congregation's spiritual journey. The second consensus was that excellence begins in the heart.⁵ I must admit that when I started this project, I was hoping that the process would allow me to find support and fixes for tangible and logistical elements. The research and the findings of the retreat, however, showed me that true excellence is a spiritual matter that affects and influences all other aspects of life and work in Christ's name.

The writing of this document took much longer than I anticipated. The extra time, however, gave me the unique opportunity to see how the teachings of my retreat were lived out and carried over into the worship life of the church. Since the all-day retreat, the Worship Committee of St. John's has established a Creative Altar Design Team for our

³ The clergy were included because of their role in worship. It was my hope that they would be able to offer insight and assistance during the class. The clergy, like all participants, participated in assessment, even though their understanding was not really being measured for growth. Interestingly enough, there was some growth among the clergy, although not as much as other participants. See Appendix F for data results.

⁴ See Class Notes in Appendix D.

⁵ Ibid.

Contemporary Service in hopes of using symbols to help worshipers connect with the lessons of the day. The Worship Committee has also established a Flower Guild in hopes of elevating the standard of the flowers used in the worship services, and providing an outlet for talented church members to use their abilities. In regard to facilities, the congregation has been made aware of the deteriorating state of the historic Sanctuary, and plans are underway to address some of the major issues. The pipe organ is being restored, the stained-glass windows are being renovated, and the church has recently hired a full-time Facilities Manager to help with the maintenance of the building. Finally, the church leaders have recently assessed the value of our current worship schedule, and through the results of a congregational survey, have decided to combine two of our worship services so that our resources and personnel can be used more effectively.

Reflections on the Goals

As stated in Chapter 1, I believe that our work in the church is a type of worship in and of itself, and that our work should be treated with the utmost care and devotion. When I started this intervention, there was a noticeable disconnect between the worship of God and the quality of work being offered by those who are responsible for the congregation's weekly worship services. As I found through observations and interviews, the disconnect was due to a lack of energy, a culture of complacency, and a sense of fear. Throughout the course of this project, it was my desire for the Worship Committee of St. John's to come to see worship as an important aspect of their spiritual lives, and come to understand the significance of their roles in worship leadership. Through the foundations of education offered in my teachings from Chapter 2, I wanted the class to approach their service in the church, especially in their efforts to execute and prepare for corporate

worship, as a type of sacrifice or gift to God. My goal was for the leaders on the Worship Committee to then impart their knowledge to those who serve under them. I also desired for the participants' approach to worship and work to inspire others in the church to give of their best in their service to God in worship.

As I taught the all-day retreat, I could tell that most of the participants had an earnest desire to always do their best. The participants, however, lacked understanding for how to live out that desire in relation to their work in the church. The leaders of the church represented in the class are good people, but not all of them would claim to have a strong personal faith life. I did my best to teach them that growth in the faith life was necessary for there to be improvement in the larger church. Throughout the day it became clear to all of the participants that excellence in our work begins with excellence in the heart. The answers of the participants shifted throughout the day from tangible fixes to matters of the soul.⁶ The class members gradually came to understand that personal prayer and study were necessary for there to be progress in anything relating to worship and the church. In other words, leaders in the church must first take care of themselves before they can effectively minister to the needs of others.

My main goal throughout this process was to provide scriptural and theological support for my convictions. I wanted more than anything to be able to speak with authority on the subjects of excellence and giving our best. I wanted to inspire others through solid teachings and examples, and help them to know that my desires were more than just annoying idiosyncrasies, but rather matters of holy conviction and divine instruction. For me, I needed to come to a place where I could articulate and understand

⁶ See Class Notes in Appendix D.

more fully the strong beliefs I possessed. It was also my desire that the process of study and exploration would draw me closer in relationship with God so that I could most effectively minister in God's name.

I grew tremendously throughout the process of researching and implementing my all-day retreat. Not only did I come to a place where I more fully understood and could articulate the call for excellence from biblical, historical, and theological perspectives, but I also came to see new ways in which the call for excellence could be lived out in my life. In a manner similar to the participants at the retreat, I eventually came to see the move toward excellence as being a matter of the heart. For me, however, the matter had more to do with the way I treat others, rather than the attention given to my already active life of prayer and study. I came to understand that I needed to treat people with kindness and be more aware of their feelings. Sometimes in my effort to achieve excellence, I inadvertently hurt people's feelings. Whether it be by correcting a good-hearted individual, or by not involving the talents of one who wanted to serve because I would rather do a project myself, I came to realize that I too must exhibit the love that we explored in Chapter 2. Through the process of my project, I came to realize that if worship is to reflect the body of Christ, it must be planned and implemented by more than one person, and that worship should be executed in a manner that exemplifies the diversity of gifts within the church.

The success of this project can best be exemplified through the desires of the class for how they wanted to move forward.⁷ In an effort to provide more education for the congregation on the matters of worship, they requested that the church institute weekly

⁷ See Class Notes in Appendix D.

notes in the bulletin explaining the significance of the day in the Christian Year, the symbols used in the service, the music used in the service, as well as information that would make the worship service more user-friendly for visitors and worshipers with disabilities. The class also requested a monthly column in the church newsletter where a topic related to worship could be unpacked in more detail. The class even offered the idea of doing periodic classes on worship or talk-back sessions after the service once a month so that the congregation could ask questions and become more invested in the worship life of the church. The ideas were well received and will be taken under consideration by the ministers moving forward. The class members also requested that the Worship Committee embark upon a book study together each year as a way to help them grow in their faith and in their knowledge of corporate worship. Several books by Robert Webber will be considered, especially those with questions for group discussion.

Implications for Worship Studies

Giving our best to God is a central theme that can be applied to all areas of life and ministry, not just worship. I think the findings of my research could prove useful to any and all people who are seeking to improve various areas of life and ministry. The biblical, historical, and theological foundations are universal, but speak specifically to the United Methodist context. I would like to investigate the ways through which my research could be useful to the greater denomination and beyond. I think that a series of classes or retreats offered to pastors and worship leaders on the subject of excellence could be beneficial to clergy and lay people alike. I also think that some of the topics and activities that I developed for my retreat could be published into materials that could be used by others who are seeking a move toward excellence.

I think that the most profound aspect of my research and data that would prove beneficial to those in the greater church is the way in which my findings took an unexpected turn. I was looking for answers that could solve individual problems related to excellence in worship. Instead, I found solutions related to excellence of the soul that could then inform the excellence of worship. I was looking for the wrong answers. Sometimes in life and in ministry we spend all of our time and energy in the minutia without seeing the big picture. The life of faith is the big picture. Our relationship with God, and the best of ourselves that we offer in that regard, inform all other aspects of our life and even our ministry and worship in the church. One of the greatest pieces of advice I can give to church leaders who are seeking to fix problems in their context is to look at yourself first. Spend time in prayer and study, and strive to love others the way Christ loved us. Love is the key to excellence.

Conclusion

The worship of St. John's United Methodist Church suffered from a lack of excellence. There were logistical problems, facilities problems, and a notable lack of effort when it came to worship planning and implementation. The absence of excellence spoke to a deeper spiritual void in the leadership of the church. God calls us to give our best, and giving our best certainly applies to the quality of our corporate worship. It was my hope to use the concept of giving our best to bring about positive change in the worship of St. John's.

When examining the concept of giving our very best to God, the worship leaders of St. John's had the opportunity to survey the ways in which giving our best applies to our lives, our worship, and the overall church. Giving our best can apply to the energy of our

effort, but more importantly, giving our best speaks to the intent of our hearts. As we read in Chapter 2, the biblical, historical, and theological foundations clearly show us that giving of our best is an effort to return to the beauty of creation, a way of modeling the sacrifices of the Old Testament, a means of living out the example of the early church, and a way of following the call of Christ in the Greatest Commandment. Chapter 2 also showed us that the move toward excellence is a journey, and that love must be an integral part of the journey. Love is excellence exemplified, and love will show forth in the quality of all work and relationships entered into in the name of Christ.

Through the teachings of an all-day retreat, I aimed to teach the biblical, historical, and theological findings of my research to select members of the Worship Committee of St. John's. It was my hope that the participants would come to see the concept of giving their best to God as a clear directive from Scripture, and the ways in which the call had been lived out in history. The data clearly show that progress was made in the academic areas. The class, however, came to learn so much more. Participants in the all-day retreat learned that our personal faith life matters when it comes to the good of the church. Participants learned that we are to love those we work with in the church, even when there is trouble and conflict. Loving others is the greatest demonstration of excellence because it is the best way that we can mirror the life of Christ. Since the retreat, I have noticed a difference in the way the team members interact with one another. Their work in the church seems to have a new purpose and a new direction, and team members seem intent on giving their best for the glory of God and for the good of the church.

The growth among my participants could and should be representative of the larger congregation and even the Church. I believe that when we give our best, even if only in

small ways at first, we have the opportunity to affect large change for the better in the world around us. A move toward excellence in the church begins with a look inward and an intentional desire to journey into recreation. The entire world could benefit from a journey of recreation. Embarking on such a journey calls us to be the Church, and fully live into who God has called us to be and into the work God calls us to do.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF CONCERNS

The list below is an account of the occurrences related to worship that first made me realize that there was a need to examine the standard of excellence associated with our worship. The items were documented from the summer of 2017 through the fall of 2017 and only reflect the logistical issues that were observed. Concerns related to the spiritual health of the congregation and individuals were yet not apparent at the time.

1. On September 3rd, the call to worship printed in the bulletin differed from the script the liturgist was using, which caused confusion at the start of the service.
2. On September 10th, an additional element was added to the order of worship right before the children's sermon. However, because there were no special instructions to the congregation about this change, the children came forward as normal and had to be told to go back to their seats.
3. On numerous occasions I have noticed that the routes for communion are confusing. People are constantly running into each other and no clear traffic directions are given verbally or in print. The flow of traffic needs to be reexamined, but folks say that it would be too much trouble to change it.
4. The worship service is planned as a "template" in which you just simply plug elements in. Such planning makes the service stale.
5. People use money as an excuse for being lazy. Often people will say that we can't fix a problem because there is not money to do it, when in reality, all it would require is a little extra work on the part of the laity and/or leaders.

6. On the first Sunday in October there was a wheelchair in the center aisle. There are no designated handicap spaces in the sanctuary, even though there are better areas than the center aisle. This was a communion Sunday and the wheelchair greatly confused the flow of traffic for the sacrament, as well as the opening procession. The ushers did nothing, and most did not even see it as an issue.
7. On Children's Sabbath there was to be a liturgy of recognition for Sunday School teachers. However, the ministers forgot to add it to the service. So, it was added to the service the next week; a Sunday on which nothing in the service had to do with children or Christian Education.
8. As of November 1, there are four lights in the sanctuary that have been out for over three months.
9. The three Sundays leading up to Stewardship Sunday were to have special speakers during the announcement time to talk about what the church means to them. The addition to the service was to inspire giving among the members. However, because the people in charge of planning the schedule of speakers were out of town, the idea never came to fruition.
10. There was a Sunday on which the 9:00 am service was cancelled. However, no one on the staff relayed the change to the ushers. They showed up for a full service and had to be told to go home.
11. On Christmas Eve the ushers did not clean up the sanctuary between the two services.
12. At Lessons and Carols, the bulletins left entire lines out of the congregational carols.

APPENDIX B

PRE AND POST-SESSION SURVEY

Overarching Question No. 1 (Likert Scale: 1-10)

1. How comfortable do you feel explaining the sacrificial system of the Old Testament?
2. How comfortable do you feel explaining God's original assessment of creation?
3. How comfortable do you feel explaining John Wesley's doctrine of Christian Perfection?
4. How comfortable do you feel explaining the Greatest Commandment as it applies to Christian Ministry?
5. How comfortable do you feel explaining the model of excellence displayed by the early church?
6. How comfortable do you feel explaining the modern trends related to excellence in ministry?
7. How important do you feel details are in the worship of God?
8. How comfortable do you feel explaining the role of worship in the Christian community?
9. How comfortable do you feel explaining the role of communion in the Christian community?

10. How comfortable do you feel articulating the connection between Solomon's temple and our church?

Overarching Question No. 2 (Sliding Scale – Appropriate for Each Question)

1. Do you feel that there is room for improvement in the way you approach your service to the church?
2. How often do you pray for the work you do in the church?
3. How much time do you spend in preparation for your ministry work?
4. How often do you make sacrifices in order to complete your ministry work?
5. How often do you study and read Scripture in preparation for your work?
6. Do you see your role in the church as a means of serving God and others?
7. How important is your work in the church when compared to the other priorities in your life?
8. Does your work in the church change the way you relate to God?
9. Does your work in the church change the way you see others?
10. Are you open to changes in worship, including your role?

Overarching Question No. 3 (Sliding Scale)

1. How important do you feel corporate worship is to the overall life of the church?
2. How much do you feel that worship influences the other activities of the church?
3. How much does our worship affect the other committees on which you serve?
4. How closely should our worship act as a preview of life eternal?

5. Do you feel that the observance of the sacrament of holy communion is a reflection of the Christian community?
6. Do you see a connection between lifelong learning and improvement?
7. Do some areas of worship at St. John's need improving?
8. Do some areas of the overall life of our church need improving?
9. Do you view your service on other committees in the church as a type of worship?
10. In your opinion, what are some deterrents to cultivating excellence in worship?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Parenthesis after some question indicate overarching question pairings.

Before Class

1. What are some of the best aspects of worship at our church?
2. What are the areas that need improving?
3. If there are problems, how did they develop?
4. What was worship like at our church 20 years ago?
5. How might a return to excellence in worship change our church?
(Question 3)
6. How do you see your role in the church? (Question 2)
7. What is excellence to you? (Question 1)
8. How can we pursue excellence without money in the budget? (Question 2)
9. Tell me what you know about the biblical precedent for our worship?
(Question 1)
10. What are the similarities between work and worship? (Questions 2 and 3)

After Class

11. What are some of the best aspects of worship at our church?
12. What are the areas that need improving?
13. How do you see your role in the church? (Question 2)

14. What is excellence to you? (Question 1)
15. How will you do things differently moving forward? (Question 2)
16. How might you lead your team differently moving forward? (Question 2)
17. How might your work inspire others moving forward? (Question 3)
18. Tell me what you know about the biblical precedent for our worship?
(Question 1)
19. How can we pursue excellence without money in the budget? (Question 2)
20. What are the similarities between work and worship? (Questions 2 and 3)

APPENDIX D

NOTES FROM CLASS AND GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Note: People were worried to be here

Note: How to evaluate excellence...

- Is it the best we can do?
- Is there something that could distract or cause one to stumble?
- Have others before us labored to move it forward?
- Is there a biblical precedent?
- What are the experts saying?
- Has this been a problem before?
- What are other churches doing?
- Is it costing us something?
- Has it served its purpose?
- Is it contributing productively to the live of the church? (opposite?)

Question: What is Worship?

Answers: Coming together to hear a message, praise, adoration, serving, glorifying God, actively or inactively honoring God, gathering in God's name, fellowship, nurturing at the table.

Question: Asked to tell me what they knew about worship in the Bible and early church.

Answers: I was able to tell that there were people of different knowledge levels.

Question: What is worship like today. How has it changed?

Answers: Mega churches and televangelists, corruption is back, returned to reformation era participation, options for worship are like a buffet.

Question: Who is the audience in worship? Who are the performers?

Answer: Congregation and Staff...rather than God and people.

Question: When discussing the four-fold order...what is the gathering?

Answer: The welcome and announcements...not part of worship.

Note: Realized that St. John's does not follow the four-fold order.

Question: Do you think we throw things together in worship at St. John's?

Answer: No...but it could be better. Thematic worship contributes greatly to the worship of our church.

Note: Worship notes in the bulletin really help people to connect themes in worship.

Question: How do we bring people through the story of God in worship?

Answer: The Christian Calendar, multiple Scripture lessons.

Question: What is the difference between worship and praise?

Answer: Praise comes out of worship

Note: Stop equating bad worship with contemporary music. Contemporary music is not the problem...dumbing down the liturgy is the problem.

Note: I see light bulbs going off in people's heads as I guide them through this...but they needed help getting there. Education is key here!

Quote: "Worship is the people coming together to be nurtured at the table of the lord, people coming together to fellowship in the community of believers, and being fed through the reading of Scriptures and proclamation. Praise is a byproduct of worship."

Question: What is excellence?

Answers: Exceeds expectation, do your best, for the glory of God, put faith and effort into it, repeatedly performing well, consistently striving, maximizing the value of what you have, it is not perfection.

Question: What is excellence as it pertains to worship?

Answers: Creates a striving, you take what you have received in worship and naturally want to use it in a good way, all of our work should involve the best of ourselves.

Note: Sometimes it is more about just getting it done on time than getting it done well.

Question: Does God dwell in excellence?

Answer: God is in everything...did not really understand what I was asking.

Note: Ida said that God is like a parent...sees us do our best even if it is not up to other's standards...our best gives God pleasure.

Question: Does God show up in excellence?

Answer: No...God is there.

Note: Pastor said that modern day models of worship like Well Worship are based on works righteousness...another pre-reformation teaching. When we ask God's presence in worship, we are asking God to reveal himself to us. If God dwells in us, our excellence, works as a witness. God doesn't dwell in excellence as much as he dwells in us. The

more holy we become, the more excellently we do faith and bear witness to the image of God and the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives...Good lead into Christian Perfection.

Note: The entire point of today is to help us understand that excellence begins in the heart.

Scripture Verses: These were given as verses that are meaningful to participants in their work in the church...Maureen (Isaiah 41:10-13), Laura (Surely the Presence), Hilary (Matthew 22:36-39) Pete (Isaiah 40:28-29), Kathy (Romans 8:28) Mel (I Corinthians 13), Ida (Jeremiah and Ecclesiastes 4:9-12) Vicki (Jeremiah 29:11-13) Jan (Psalm 23), Debra (Psalm 84), Rett (Jeremiah 1:4-10), Justin (Psalm 27).

Note: I NEEDED MORE TIME BEFORE LUNCH!

Note: They loved funny stories and comics!

Question: Are the creation accounts true?

Answer: Yes...but God's time is different.

Note: Pastor said that there are differences between truth and fact. We make them synonyms today but that is not the case. It is easier to deal with facts than truth. The creation story can be true without all of the facts being accurate.

Note: God is in the details...look at creation. The more we dwell in the complexities of the work of God and seek to grow into his image and learn...God is in those details, too.

Note: We talked about beauty in worship and how it reflects creation. Also talked about how worship can be interrupted for some people when attention is not given to those details. It is similar to the different learning styles. We should think about that in our planning.

Note: If we do not love the people we are working with as we strive to give our best to God, we are not fulfilling both parts of the Greatest Commandment.

Note: The letter to the Colossians was written to oppose some teachers who were telling people that the Christian faith was incomplete.

Note: Pastor said...Paul shifts the narrative...all require us to relinquish control of how things will go over to God. We have to let God do things rather than us doing them ourselves. It changes the performance and excellence of man-made rules to our witness not being clouded by the problem. Be careful that excellence does not become the end instead of a means. Same way with folks who worship the liturgy more than God.

Notes: Concept of First Fruits – Give the best to God first...not what is leftover.

Activity: I assigned Scripture examples of sacrifice and asked class members to identify the references to Christ.

Question: How do we Sacrifice today?

Answers: Time, doing what God wants, membership vows (prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.)

Note: Pastor said...Sacrifice was life and death to them. But it was also joy! This is radically different today...it is negative...but does not have to be. We find joy in our work in the church...but we have to inspire others to do the same.

Question: What can we learn from the example of the temple?

Answers: It can be destroyed, details matter.

Note: Pastor said...Details were a means through which people moved closer to God. The details for the building of the temple in Kings are different from Chronicles and even different when it is rebuilt by Nehemiah and Ezra because the resources of the people changed. The extravagance of Solomon's temple was not around in the second temple because they were poor. The details were still there but they changed.

Note: Do we still teach the children about the holiness of the sanctuary anymore? How can we maintain holiness for the space while still being hospitable to newcomers? We want people to be reverent not because of the space, but because of the presence of God.

Note: Pastors helped us understand what justification and sanctification mean. They also explained the connection to the un-Methodist "once saved always saved" doctrine. Finally, they described the Methodist doctrines of Prevenient grace, Justifying Grace, and Sanctifying Grace. Wesley summarized it as perfection in love...not so much our performance of life. Again, its more about LOVE!

Note: Had to adjust my schedule. Only got through Methodism at lunch. Had to wait until after lunch to delve into Modern Times.

Note: Folks are surprised the Rules for Singing are still in the hymnal. Education!!!

Question: What can we learn from Wesley?

Answers: Look for ways that we can improve, also not grow weary or complacent, everything should have a purpose, the Christian community is important. LOVE!! Do not just go to worship to feel good, but it takes effort...participation and work...we are not always going to want to praise...but we do it anyway.

Quote: "The work of worship"

Note: Social media is changing everything...especially the way we relate to one another.

LUNCH BREAK

Review Questions:

Question: How has your thinking on worship changed during our time together?

Answer: "I know that I am there to praise God, but I also thought I was supposed to be entertained in some way. I put no effort in to it." "We should think of worship in everything we do in the church...not just when we are in the sanctuary." "I should not have to get things out of worship...God is the audience."

Question: How has your understanding of excellence as related to ministry in the church changed during our time together?

Answers: See it as a journey. The foundation of it is never going to change...getting it done may need to change. Details bring us closer to God. The move toward excellence is a means of moving closer to God. When our work has a new purpose...it can be more meaningful.

Question: Name specific things St. John's does on a level of excellence.

Answers: Music, missions, message, thematic planning, Children's Ministry, Stephen Ministry, Equipping Team.

Note: Following the Lectionary is important. It puts Gods story in front of us at all times and allows us to enter into the life of Christ.

Note: Much of what we do is done well...but it has people who care and are in charge. There is a true lack of involvement and leadership among the laity in getting involved to help and lead.

Question: Name specific ways in which you feel that mediocrity has infiltrated St. John's. Use the categories from the previous lecture as a guide.

Answers: Children are being pulled in too many directions, church is having to change the way it does things to accommodate, communication is a problem, hospitality is a problem, our building is not well maintained, the three worship services have created three congregations and has spread the resources of the staff thin, the fellowship opportunities have also decreased. The Security Team has fallen by the way side.

Note: The people who are not involved in the church leadership may not know the details of what's involved. EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION! Example of man showing up on a day a service was cancelled. Committee communication and groups in the church app would be helpful.

Note: More education is needed about worship practices and the Christian Year.
Possibly a fifth Sunday School Class.

Note: Excellence is a balance of performance and heart.

Note: We have to strike a balance between raising our standards and still ministering to the hearts and needs of our people.

Note: Even when you plan and work hard...you have to deal with folks in grace and kindness. Also, things will always go wrong.

Note: The new minister coming will provide an opportunity to implement positive change. Are we doing things to honor God or for convenience?

Summary Questions:

Question: How can we apply what we have learned?

Answer: More prayer, more assessment, change our attitude to one of joy

Question: What changes might you make in the way you lead?

Answers: Love all...even the unlovable. Those who lead and who attended the class will hopefully influence and inspire folks to change as well.

Question: What changes might you make in the way you serve?

Answers: The most excellence we can be is in the way we love others. We must also show appreciation for what they have done and support them to go further. We need to ask people personally to do things We must lead by example in all ways.

Question: How can we fix the problems?

Answers: Must make folks aware of them first...then plan for how to fix. Don't complain!

Question: What are our next steps?

Answers: Sacrifice more on our part for more study and prayer.

Question: What is your one take away?

Answers: God is the Audience! Do everything in love!! Excellence is a journey.

Execution is different than intention. Always show grace and acceptance. Excellence of self must be a priority first.

APPENDIX E

TEACHING OUTLINE

Hour 1 – Introduction and Biblical Foundations

1. Introduction
 - a. What is Worship?
 - b. What is Excellence?
2. Biblical Foundations
 - a. Genesis 1
 - b. Mark 12:28-34
 - c. Colossians 3:1-17

Hour 2 – Historical/Theological Foundations (Part One)

1. The Sacrificial System of the Old Testament
 - a. The Rules of the Law
 - b. The Concept of First Fruits
 - c. Other Examples of Sacrifice (Isaac etc.)
 - d. Christ as Sacrifice
 - e. Sacrifice Today (What can we give the Lord?)
2. Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem
 - a. The Instructions from God
 - b. The Materials and Artisans
 - c. The Building Plan in Comparison to Today
 - d. The Purpose of the Building
 - e. Christ in the Temple
 - f. The Temple in Jerusalem Today
 - g. What Can We Learn from the Building of the Temple?

Hour 3 – Historical/Theological Foundations (Part Two)

1. John Wesley and Christian Perfection
 - a. The Life of John Wesley
 - b. The Methodist Movement
 - c. The Doctrine of Christian Perfection
 - d. Worship in Light of Perfection
 - i. Rules for Singing
 - ii. Wesley Order of Common Prayer
 - e. What Can We Learn from Wesley?

Hour 4 – The Problem – Mediocrity in the 21st Century

1. How Did This Happen?
 - a. Sacred vs. Secular
 - b. Consumer Driven Society
 - c. Electronics
2. How Does Mediocrity Influence the Church?
 - a. Leadership
 - b. Planning
 - c. Communication
 - d. Hospitality
 - e. Maintenance
 - f. Education
3. Has Mediocrity Specifically Affected St. John's?

Hour 5 – Lunch with Group Discussion

1. Lunch
2. Group Discussions with Focus Questions
 - a. How has your thinking on worship changed during our time together?
 - b. How has your understanding of excellence as related to ministry in the church changed during our time together?
 - c. Name specific things St. John's does on a level of excellence.
 - d. Name specific ways in which you feel that mediocrity has infiltrated St. John's. Use the categories from the previous lecture as a guide
3. Talk Back Session in which we share findings.
4. I share my own observations
 - a. Pictures from around the building
 - b. Video example from our worship
 - c. How can we fix these problems?

Hour 6 – The Pursuit of Excellence (Part One)

1. Excellence in Leadership
2. Excellence in Planning
3. Excellence in Communication

Hour 7 – The Pursuit of Excellence (Part Two)

1. Excellence in Hospitality
2. Excellence in Maintenance
3. Excellence in Education

Hour 8 – Conclusion with Communion Service

1. What is worship?
2. What is excellence (based on your new understanding)?
3. Review Game
 - a. Biblical Foundations
 - b. Historical/Theological Foundations
 - c. The Problem

4. Moving Forward
 - a. How can we apply what we have learned?
 - b. Changes in the way we lead
 - c. Changes in the way we serve
5. Communion Service
 - a. Including a liturgy of dedication based off John Wesley's Covenant Renewal Service.

APPENDIX F

DATA

PRE- AND POST-SESSION SURVEY

	How comfortable do you feel explaining the sacrificial system of the Old Testament?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	3	3
Participant B	8	10
Participant C	2	9
Participant D	4	9
Participant E	4	9
Participant F	3	6
Participant G	3	8
Participant H	7	8
Participant I	8	8
Participant J	3	8
Participant K	10	8
Participant L	3	10

	How comfortable do you feel explaining God's original assessment of creation?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	4	5
Participant B	10	10
Participant C	2	9
Participant D	8	10
Participant E	4	10
Participant F	7	8
Participant G	5	8
Participant H	7	9
Participant I	7	8
Participant J	8	10
Participant K	10	9
Participant L	3	10

	How comfortable do you feel explaining John Wesley's doctrine of Christian Perfection?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	3	5
Participant B	10	10
Participant C	1	9
Participant D	2	7
Participant E	4	9
Participant F	1	4
Participant G	1	6
Participant H	5	8
Participant I	1	7
Participant J	4	9
Participant K	10	8
Participant L	1	10

	How comfortable do you feel explaining the Greatest Commandment as it applies to Christian Ministry?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	5	5
Participant B	10	10
Participant C	7	10
Participant D	7	10
Participant E	8	9
Participant F	9	9
Participant G	10	10
Participant H	8	9
Participant I	5	7
Participant J	9	9
Participant K	10	10
Participant L	6	10

	How comfortable do you feel explaining the model of excellence displayed by the early church?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	3	3
Participant B	10	10
Participant C	2	9
Participant D	3	8
Participant E	4	9
Participant F	1	6
Participant G	1	7
Participant H	5	8
Participant I	8	8
Participant J	3	9
Participant K	4	8
Participant L	1	10

	How comfortable do you feel explaining the modern trends related to excellence in ministry?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	3	4
Participant B	6	10
Participant C	2	9
Participant D	2	7
Participant E	4	9
Participant F	2	8
Participant G	1	10
Participant H	5	8
Participant I	1	8
Participant J	3	8
Participant K	7	7
Participant L	1	10

	How important do you feel details are in the worship of God?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	5	5
Participant B	7	10
Participant C	9	10
Participant D	5	10
Participant E	10	10
Participant F	9	10
Participant G	3	10
Participant H	7	8
Participant I	7	10
Participant J	6	10
Participant K	10	9
Participant L	7	10

	How comfortable do you feel explaining the role of worship in the Christian community?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	3	5
Participant B	10	10
Participant C	7	10
Participant D	5	8
Participant E	8	10
Participant F	8	9
Participant G	8	10
Participant H	8	9
Participant I	7	10
Participant J	8	10
Participant K	10	9
Participant L	5	10

	How comfortable do you feel explaining the role of communion in the Christian community?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	5	5
Participant B	10	10
Participant C	8	10
Participant D	5	10
Participant E	8	10
Participant F	9	9
Participant G	10	10
Participant H	8	9
Participant I	8	9
Participant J	10	10
Participant K	10	10
Participant L	8	10

	Do you feel that there is room for improvement in the way you approach your service to the church?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	Neutral	Moderate improvement needed
Participant B	Moderate improvement needed	Minor improvement needed
Participant C	Moderate improvement needed	Moderate improvement needed
Participant D	Moderate improvement needed	Moderate improvement needed
Participant E	Serious improvement needed	Serious improvement needed
Participant F	Minor improvement needed	Moderate improvement needed
Participant G	Moderate improvement needed	Moderate improvement needed
Participant H	Minor improvement needed	Moderate improvement needed
Participant I	Moderate improvement needed	Moderate improvement needed
Participant J	Minor improvement needed	Moderate improvement needed
Participant K	Moderate improvement needed	Moderate improvement needed
Participant L	Neutral	Moderate improvement needed

	How often do/will you pray for the work you do in the church?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	Sometimes	Always
Participant B	Always	Always
Participant C	Always	Always
Participant D	Often	Often
Participant E	Always	Always
Participant F	Sometimes	Sometimes
Participant G	Always	Always
Participant H	Often	Often
Participant I	Often	Often
Participant J	Often	Often
Participant K	Always	Often
Participant L	Often	Always

	How much time do/will you spend in preparation for your ministry work?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	I spend an hour a week	I spend an hour a week
Participant B	I spend an hour a day	I spend an hour a day
Participant C	I spend an hour a week	I spend an hour a day
Participant D	I spend an hour a week	I spend an hour a day
Participant E	I spend an hour a day	I spend an hour a day
Participant F	I spend an hour a month	I spend an hour a month
Participant G	I spend an hour a day	I spend an hour a day
Participant H	I spend an hour a week	I spend an hour a day
Participant I	I spend an hour a week	I spend an hour a week
Participant J	I spend an hour a day	I spend an hour a day
Participant K	I spend an hour a day	I spend an hour a week
Participant L	I spend an hour a week	I spend an hour a day

	How often do/will you make sacrifices in order to complete your ministry work?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	Sometimes	Sometimes
Participant B	Always	Always
Participant C	Sometimes	Always
Participant D	Sometimes	Often
Participant E	Sometimes	Always
Participant F	Often	Often
Participant G	Sometimes	Often
Participant H	Often	Often
Participant I	Often	Often
Participant J	Often	Often
Participant K	Always	Often
Participant L	Sometimes	Always

	How often do/will you study and read Scripture in preparation for your work?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	Often	Often
Participant B	Always	Always
Participant C	Often	Always
Participant D	Sometimes	Often
Participant E	Often	Always
Participant F	Sometimes	Sometimes
Participant G	Sometimes	Always
Participant H	Often	Often
Participant I	Always	Always
Participant J	Sometimes	Often
Participant K	Always	Often
Participant L	Sometimes	Always

	Do you see your role in the church as a means of serving God and others?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	Very much	Very much
Participant B	Very much	Very much
Participant C	Very much	Very much
Participant D	Very much	Very much
Participant E	Very much	Very much
Participant F	Very much	Very much
Participant G	Very much	Very much
Participant H	Very much	Very much
Participant I	Very much	Very much
Participant J	Very much	Very much
Participant K	Very much	Very much
Participant L	Very much	Very much

	How important is your work in the church when compared to the other priorities in your life?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	Very Important	Very Important
Participant B	Very Important	Very Important
Participant C	Moderately Important	Very Important
Participant D	Moderately Important	Very Important
Participant E	Moderately Important	Very Important
Participant F	Very Important	Very Important
Participant G	Very Important	Very Important
Participant H	Very Important	Very Important
Participant I	Very Important	Very Important
Participant J	Very Important	Very Important
Participant K	Very Important	Very Important
Participant L	Very Important	Very Important

	Does/will your work in the church change the way you relate to God?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	Always	Always
Participant B	Always	Always
Participant C	Usually	Always
Participant D	Usually	Always
Participant E	Usually	Always
Participant F	Usually	Always
Participant G	Always	Always
Participant H	Usually	Always
Participant I	Usually	Usually
Participant J	Always	Always
Participant K	Always	Usually
Participant L	Usually	Always

	Does/will your work in the church change the way you see others?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	Always	Sometimes
Participant B	Always	Always
Participant C	Sometimes	Always
Participant D	Usually	Always
Participant E	Usually	Always
Participant F	Sometimes	Usually
Participant G	Always	Always
Participant H	Usually	Always
Participant I	Usually	Usually
Participant J	Usually	Usually
Participant K	Always	Usually
Participant L	Sometimes	Always

	Are you open to changes in worship, including your role?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	Open	Open
Participant B	Very Open	Open
Participant C	Open	Open
Participant D	Neutral	Open
Participant E	Open	Very Open
Participant F	Open	Very Open
Participant G	Open	Very Open
Participant H	Open	Open
Participant I	Very Open	Very Open
Participant J	Open	Very Open
Participant K	Very Open	Open
Participant L	Open	Very Open

	How important do you feel corporate worship is to the overall life of the church?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	Very Important	Very Important
Participant B	Very Important	Very Important
Participant C	Very Important	Very Important
Participant D	Moderately important	Very Important
Participant E	Very Important	Very Important
Participant F	Very Important	Very Important
Participant G	Very Important	Very Important
Participant H	Very Important	Very Important
Participant I	Very Important	Very Important
Participant J	Very Important	Very Important
Participant K	Very Important	Very Important
Participant L	Very Important	Very Important

	How much do you feel that worship influences the other activities of the church?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	Moderate influence	Neutral
Participant B	Major influence	Major influence
Participant C	Major influence	Major influence
Participant D	Moderate influence	Major influence
Participant E	Major influence	Major influence
Participant F	Major influence	Major influence
Participant G	Moderate influence	Major influence
Participant H	Moderate influence	Major influence
Participant I	Neutral	Major influence
Participant J	Major influence	Major influence
Participant K	Major influence	Major influence
Participant L	Major influence	Major influence

	How much does our worship affect the other committees on which you serve?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	Neutral	Moderate affect
Participant B	Major affect	Major affect
Participant C	Moderate affect	Major affect
Participant D	Moderate affect	Major affect
Participant E	Major affect	Major affect
Participant F	Moderate affect	Moderate affect
Participant G	Major affect	Major affect
Participant H	Moderate affect	Major affect
Participant I	Moderate affect	Moderate affect
Participant J	Major affect	Moderate affect
Participant K	Major affect	Major affect
Participant L	Major affect	Major affect

	Does our worship act as a preview of life eternal?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	Often	Often
Participant B	Never	Often
Participant C	Often	Often
Participant D	Occasionally	Often
Participant E	Always	Always
Participant F	Often	Often
Participant G	Always	Always
Participant H	Often	Often
Participant I	Occasionally	Often
Participant J	Always	Always
Participant K	Always	Often
Participant L	Often	Always

	Do you feel that the observance of the sacrament of holy communion is a reflection of the Christian community?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	Agree	Agree
Participant B	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
Participant C	Agree	Agree
Participant D	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
Participant E	Agree	Strongly agree
Participant F	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
Participant G	Agree	Agree
Participant H	Neutral	Strongly agree
Participant I	Agree	Strongly agree
Participant J	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
Participant K	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
Participant L	Strongly agree	Strongly agree

	Do you see a connection between lifelong learning and improvement?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	Somewhat connected	Very connected
Participant B	Very connected	Very connected
Participant C	Very connected	Very connected
Participant D	Very connected	Very connected
Participant E	Very connected	Very connected
Participant F	Very connected	Very connected
Participant G	Very connected	Very connected
Participant H	Very connected	Very connected
Participant I	Very connected	Very connected
Participant J	Very connected	Very connected
Participant K	Very connected	Very connected
Participant L	Very connected	Very connected

	Do some areas of worship at St. John's need improving?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	Neutral	There are moderate problems
Participant B	There are moderate problems	There are moderate problems
Participant C	There are moderate problems	There are moderate problems
Participant D	There are moderate problems	There are moderate problems
Participant E	There are moderate problems	There are moderate problems
Participant F	There are minor problems	There are moderate problems
Participant G	There are minor problems	There are moderate problems
Participant H	There are moderate problems	There are moderate problems
Participant I	There are moderate problems	There are moderate problems
Participant J	There are moderate problems	There are moderate problems
Participant K	There are moderate problems	There are minor problems
Participant L	Neutral	There are moderate problems

	Do some areas of the overall life of our church need improving?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	Neutral	Neutral
Participant B	There are major problems	There are moderate problems
Participant C	There are minor problems	There are moderate problems
Participant D	There are moderate problems	There are moderate problems
Participant E	There are moderate problems	There are moderate problems
Participant F	There are minor problems	There are minor problems
Participant G	There are moderate problems	There are moderate problems
Participant H	There are moderate problems	There are moderate problems
Participant I	There are major problems	There are moderate problems
Participant J	There are moderate problems	There are moderate problems
Participant K	There are moderate problems	There are minor problems
Participant L	Neutral	There are moderate problems

	Do you view your service on other committees in the church as a type of worship?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	Very much	Very much
Participant B	Somewhat	Somewhat
Participant C	Somewhat	Very much
Participant D	Somewhat	Very much
Participant E	Very much	Very much
Participant F	Somewhat	Very much
Participant G	Somewhat	Very much
Participant H	Neutral	Very much
Participant I	Somewhat	Very much
Participant J	Very much	Very much
Participant K	Very much	Very much
Participant L	Very much	Very much

	In your opinion, what are some deterrents to cultivating excellence in worship?	
	Pre-Session	Post-Session
Participant A	Our attitudes of the heart need to seek the love of God	Unity, involvement, more volunteers and not having the attitude of “we have always done it this way” and of course for all of us to show God’s love in all that we say and do.
Participant B	The fear that worship will become sterile and inflexible of excellence becomes the end instead of the means.	Budget, Mercenary attitudes about the staff’s role.
Participant C	Trying to accommodate many different styles of worship is difficult.	Participation.
Participant D	There is a lack of reverence when entering the sanctuary for services. I’d like to start services with a period of reflection and it’s hard to do most times.	Lack of reverence in approaching/preparing for worshipping services.
Participant E	Dedication and holy team work.	Lack of knowledge of worship definitions & meanings among members. Unintentionally “being comfortable” with where we are in our aspects of worship
Participant F	In my opinion having 3 services gives options for attending worship at various times it also serves to separate our congregation.	Having always done a facet of worship a certain way.

Participant G	Personal preferences of members of a congregation and their unwillingness to change or even consider other options.	Narrow mindedness, unwillingness to change, social culture of our time.
Participant H	Members dislike change, we have at times put too many different “special” additions to the worship service, members do not understand that they must prepare for worship.	Having the congregation’s acceptance of changing how we do things - for example, the order of worship
Participant I	Participation level of the congregation, inward focus	Knowledge of what true worship is
Participant J	We need more people actively participating in in the “work” of worship.	Need for more participation by members
Participant K	Only people’s fear of change or loss of power/previous role	Unwillingness to try something new (to look at the overall good as opposed to personal preferences)
Participant L	The fact that we continue to do things “the way we’ve always done them”. We must be willing to accept other ways and ideas is they are beneficial to the entire body.	The “busy-ness” of life - worship excellence must be prioritized

PRE-SESSION INTERVIEWS

	<i>What are some of the best aspects of worship at our church?</i>
Participant A	Message and music
Participant B	Order and tradition
Participant C	Themes of the service, the work that goes in behind the scenes
Participant D	Music, Fellowship
Participant E	It instills a love for the church
Participant F	Facilities suited to different styles of worship
Participant G	Diversity, worship being carried outside of the church into our lives
Participant H	Music
Participant I	Prelude, postlude and Jenifer's part at the beginning. Also the sermons and the sincerity of the ministers.
Participant J	Volunteers that do the work of worship, a rebirth in children's music
Participant K	Music, notes in bulletin, Rett's preaching, beautiful worship space
Participant L	Different styles

	<i>What are some areas that need improving?</i>
Participant A	N/A
Participant B	Sabbath observance (it should be work for the Lord, not rest
Participant C	Education about worship, hospitality, commitment
Participant D	Lack of reverence (put something in bulletin), food in sanctuary, ushers
Participant E	Communication and broadcast
Participant F	Fellowship between the difference services
Participant G	Need more active attendance in the summer
Participant H	Fellowship between participants of different services, would like more "high church"
Participant I	I don't think 3 services are needed. I also think that the church could be more outwardly focused and welcoming of new members. Not sure this has anything to do with worship.
Participant J	Growing volunteer group
Participant K	Ushers and greeters
Participant L	Living out of membership vows, hospitality towards those with disabilities (hearing assistance etc.)

	<i>If there are problems, how did they develop?</i>
Participant A	Does First Light need to go away?
Participant B	Forget why we do things, sometimes we don't even know where to start fixing things
Participant C	"Pay someone else to do it" mentality
Participant D	less formal services are to blame, wearing casual clothes changes atmosphere
Participant E	Complacency, generation changes, busy times. priorities
Participant F	Fear of change
Participant G	Habit, culture change
Participant H	Split services, no more Wednesday suppers
Participant I	I don't have an answer for this
Participant J	Not living into membership vows (times and talents)
Participant K	Reliance on self
Participant L	"Always done it that way," The adjustments that have been made for the three services

	<i>What was worship like at St. John's when you first joined and how has it changed?</i>
Participant A	One full service, sat with family, dinners afterwards
Participant B	We started every week contemporary, became more consistent, 11 am became more formal, procession added, offering brought back to altar
Participant C	No spiritual dimension to choir/music, worship is less formal now, it was more reverent then
Participant D	Children sat for entire service, they behaved, it was family oriented, always had good music, preacher would call children down from pulpit, had Sunday night services then
Participant E	Ralph Cannon was pastor, old people - not many young folks, less awareness of tools used in worship
Participant F	Very formal, move towards more emotional services
Participant G	Only been here 6 years
Participant H	There was no movement in service (in and out), friendly, great organ and music
Participant I	About the same except the music is much better.
Participant J	No one made contact with us when we joined, there was no outreach, First Light service is a family now
Participant K	Disconnected themes on Sundays with music, no inclusion of children, flowers were on the altar
Participant L	Only been here 2 years

	<i>How might a return to excellence in the area of worship change the overall life of the church?</i>
Participant A	More volunteers mean more is done
Participant B	It would make people have more ownership in the life of the church, be more invested
Participant C	More loving and inclusive
Participant D	Benefit families and world, carry worship and learning into everyday life
Participant E	Growth, on fire
Participant F	Less passive and more active
Participant G	Mindset would change from "me" to "God"
Participant H	Add lectionary texts for the NEXT week to the bulletin, more scripture being read in entire life of church will change the life of the church, must put something into something to get something out, don't just "do" motions
Participant I	More members, increased giving, more a feeling of a family as described in Acts.
Participant J	More vibrant
Participant K	People would grow in Christ, be excited to come to church
Participant L	Be more of a church "family"

	<i>How do you see your role in the church?</i>
Participant A	Worker not a leader
Participant B	I am adaptable, a utility player like in baseball, go where needed
Participant C	Helper and comforter, work is a blessing
Participant D	Talking to people more about the church more than used to...especially in the community
Participant E	Helper and servant, comforter, be humble, it is an honor
Participant F	Marketer for the church
Participant G	Fulfilment of God's request for work
Participant H	my role changed, used to say yes to everything, now I am a mentor and an encourager so that others can serve, that takes spiritual maturity
Participant I	Leadership in Missions and Outreach, and participation in small group studies. Being involved in other activities where I can help out. Also choir.
Participant J	Servant worker, instigator of change
Participant K	Discerner (seeking deep facets of God's will, I now listen and wait
Participant L	Be an example for others

	<i>What is excellence to you?</i>
Participant A	All about God
Participant B	Repeatedly performing at or above expectation
Participant C	Putting forth effort and knowing God will use it
Participant D	Agree with Ida, excellence is different for different people, all are different-that makes the church, can't be something for everyone...you lose focus that way
Participant E	Do your best, can't leave faithfulness out of excellence
Participant F	Taking what you have and maximizing their value
Participant G	Constant striving, not perfection
Participant H	Striving to be the best (not perfect), can't do that without God, need to be diverse to reflect Jonsie's point of "excellence is different to different people."
Participant I	More participation by the congregation. More involvement of the membership.
Participant J	Do your best based on your ability
Participant K	Everything is to glorify God not ourselves
Participant L	Pleasing God, doing things for God's glory

	<i>How can we pursue excellence when budgetary constraints are a concern?</i>
Participant A	More volunteering
Participant B	Set higher expectations
Participant C	Must have faith, making people fall in love with the church
Participant D	Why does it matter?
Participant E	Tithe with your labor
Participant F	Not everything requires money
Participant G	Above and beyond giving
Participant H	Spiritual growth will solve that problem
Participant I	I don't think lack of money is a hindrance to excellent worship.
Participant J	Prioritize, time and talents working together, unites the church
Participant K	Must inspire people
Participant L	Give more of ourselves but don't burn out folks, people need to know how to help, also be asked

	<i>What do you know about the biblical precedents for our worship?</i>
Participant A	Psalm 100
Participant B	End of Acts 2, picture of community
Participant C	Sacrifices
Participant D	People miss out when they don't have a church family, Jesus always had others with him
Participant E	Servant hood from Peter and Colossians, Jesus came to serve
Participant F	Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy
Participant G	Mary and Martha
Participant H	The Bible tells us that corporate worship is important, we can't be isolated, I could have left the church family after my husband died...but I needed them, we must remember when tithing that the Old Testament teaches that all comes from God
Participant I	I know our services are based on the lectionary.
Participant J	"I was glad when they said unto me"
Participant K	Psalms and Leviticus, Jesus went to church each week
Participant L	Romans 12, different gifts

	<i>What are the similarities between work and worship?</i>
Participant A	Responsibility, both are joyful, working together
Participant B	They are aimed at the Great Commandments, "Make disciples" and "Love one another."
Participant C	Worship is an effort, both are positive
Participant D	Carry worship over into other parts of the church, It is hard when working with others, a worship mentality helps you work with and learn from others
Participant E	Both for glory of God, gratitude and thankfulness
Participant F	Both require effort and commitment
Participant G	Diligence, spiritual rewards
Participant H	Measure what you get out of it by what you put into it, you have passion for it
Participant I	Both take a commitment and surrender of self.
Participant J	"The work of worship," "Play is a child's work," our play/work should give us joy
Participant K	Work is part of the holiness of one's life....do it with joy and hope, "bless thou the work of our hands"
Participant L	Both are action verbs

POST-SESSION INTERVIEWS

	<i>What are some of the best aspects of worship at our church?</i>
Participant A	Music
Participant B	It's diversity of style, format and formality.
Participant C	Music
Participant D	Music
Participant E	Music's connection with scripture texts, themes of service, preparation by staff
Participant F	Diversity of worship styles, attention to detail
Participant G	Missions - Worship outside the walls of the church
Participant H	Service theme
Participant I	The inclusion of the Affirmation of Faith each week
Participant J	Continuity
Participant K	N/A
Participant L	Diversity of styles in worship

	<i>What are some areas that need improving?</i>
Participant A	Passing of the Peace
Participant B	Advanced planning beginning with worship leaders and incorporating the Worship Team, Altar Guild and volunteers.
Participant C	Communication and education
Participant D	Need to move toward a 4-fold order, lack of reverence
Participant E	Need to be more reverent about worship, need to put in bulletin to be silent, we have become complacent
Participant F	People don't understand why we are there
Participant G	Fellowship of different services, we are one body, we need to remember our purpose
Participant H	Order of Worship
Participant I	Lack of education, we need newsletter articles, shorten the announcements
Participant J	Put in bulletin to enter in silence
Participant K	N/A
Participant L	Change order or ask people to prepare so that there is silence for the prelude

	<i>How do you see your role in the church?</i>
Participant A	Strive to do better to honor God
Participant B	My role is to make sure details and logistics are carried out, new ministries are carried out, and current ministries continue as long as they are viable.
Participant C	Worship begins in the heart, choir as worship leaders
Participant D	Are the things I do necessary?
Participant E	Sacrificing, doing better, I see room for improvement in myself
Participant F	I have to be an active participant and keep an open mind
Participant G	Letting people know what we do and let them know they can ask questions, set an example
Participant H	Now look at other work as worship
Participant I	Same as all the others, but how I approach my role has changed
Participant J	Becoming more focused
Participant K	N/A
Participant L	Worker bee...do what I am asked, don't want to be a leader

	<i>What is excellence to you?</i>
Participant A	Honoring, praising, and glorifying God
Participant B	That which strives toward perfection in love over time and in all things
Participant C	Details, give our best
Participant D	Ends in something that is better, something that makes a difference
Participant E	Doing the best of your ability with the talents and gifts you have been given
Participant F	Continuous improvement
Participant G	Doing your best...must be striving
Participant H	Preparation! Give thought to your work
Participant I	100% focus...no mind wandering in worship
Participant J	Do work for the glory of God
Participant K	N/A
Participant L	Always striving to do better, best can always be better

	<i>How will you do things differently moving forward?</i>
Participant A	Spiritual development
Participant B	I will be more attentive to the difference between perfect performance and perfect love in worship, mission and ministry
Participant C	Learn more about worship and the Bible, personal growth
Participant D	Prayer journal, offer praise and thanks first
Participant E	Improve communication
Participant F	Finding a way to address our problems
Participant G	I will focus and prepare for worship
Participant H	Conscious decision to include God in all decisions
Participant I	N/A
Participant J	Remember to pray before and after work
Participant K	N/A
Participant L	Focus more, remember the sermon during the week, worship vs work as a leader

	<i>How might you lead your team differently moving forward?</i>
Participant A	Strive to work harder and do more (never say no), show empathy for those you work with
Participant B	I will play devil's advocate more in discussion to broaden understanding and effectiveness
Participant C	Try to stay humble
Participant D	Spend personal time with people
Participant E	Be a better witness
Participant F	Have higher expectations of ourselves, strive for better
Participant G	Helping others focus on God, set an example
Participant H	Remind others that it is not about us but about God, Greet and smile at everyone
Participant I	Verbally remind people that we do things for God
Participant J	Family promise preparation, help others carry burdens
Participant K	N/A
Participant L	N/A

	<i>How might your work inspire others moving forward?</i>
Participant A	Example will peak the interest of others
Participant B	By being more inclusive and patient with differing opinions
Participant C	Set good example, joyful service
Participant D	Hope others will find their talents, get out of comfort zone
Participant E	Inspire others to be leaders
Participant F	N/A
Participant G	Be a better delegator and recruiter
Participant H	Ask for forgiveness, ask people to participate
Participant I	More inclusive, spread the wealth with who is involved, turn nos into yeses
Participant J	Build relationships with each other
Participant K	Learn to say sorry, take more ownership and involvement in the life of the church
Participant L	Visibility of leadership will inspire participation

	<i>What do you know about the biblical precedent for our worship?</i>
Participant A	Live by Wesley's rule
Participant B	In worship we strive to include the spirit and truth of Biblical worship practices in our modern worship practices by constantly evaluating the medium and method of our worship to better contextualize our worship so that the gathered congregation can appropriately approach the Divine
Participant C	Love our neighbors
Participant D	The great commandment
Participant E	Serve the Lord with all
Participant F	Building of the temple, details and quality suggest our best
Participant G	Reverence in OT, sacrifices
Participant H	Spiritually prepare ourselves for worship (read Lectionary texts)
Participant I	Acts where they describe the early church, fellowship and growing daily, it is a way of life...not just what you do on Sundays
Participant J	Use resources you have
Participant K	All for God's glory
Participant L	Lectionary ties OT and NT together

	<i>How can we pursue excellence without money in the budget?</i>
Participant A	Use what you have got
Participant B	Equip the saints for the work of ministry, mobilize those with gifts and talents that can be utilized in worship, and get comfortable with asking people to give more.
Participant C	Be creative
Participant D	Worship doesn't cost anything, environment does, work to improve is a type of worship
Participant E	More volunteers, money can't buy time, recreate the childlike excitement about church
Participant F	Not buying excellence, do your best
Participant G	Human resources (time and talents)
Participant H	Positivity, love, and inclusion are free
Participant I	Have a purpose, remind others that worship is active not passive
Participant J	Use resources you have
Participant K	Agree with others, take better care of what we have
Participant L	Tell people what needs to be done

	<i>What are the similarities between work and worship?</i>
Participant A	Think I need to worship like I need to work...God is the boss
Participant B	Worship is intended to be work. The idea that it is not is relatively modern in our liturgical and ecclesial conception. Worship is the work of bringing praise, glory, honor, sacrifice and service to God. When, as Christians, we conflated the Sabbath with The Lord's Day for our convenience, capitalistic greed, and consumption, we robbed both of their intended purposed and practice.
Participant C	Get paid for a job, we are rewarded for worship
Participant D	Need a presence in the present
Participant E	They go hand in hand
Participant F	N/A
Participant G	Purpose
Participant H	Everything we do as Christians should be as worship, can't separate the two, be more worshipful in all aspects of life
Participant I	Both take effort
Participant J	Work is our gift to God
Participant K	Parable of Vineyard (different work but same reward) the work is the reward; the worship is the work
Participant L	Look for worship in our work

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adam, Peter. *The Message of Malachi*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013.
- Adkins, Imogen. "Anglican Theological Review." *Anglican Theological Review* 97, no. 4 (Sept. 2015): 697-699.
- Auld, A. Graeme, and Jennifer K. Cox. *I & II Samuel: A Commentary*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.
- Banning, David, and Warren Berkley. *Do Things Well*. Summitville, IN: Spiritbuilding Publishing, 2014.
- Barram, Michael D. "Colossians 3:1-17." *Interpretation* 59, no. 2 (Apr. 2005): 188–190.
- Bartholomew, Craig G., and Michael W. Goheen. *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014.
- Benson, Bruce Ellis. *Liturgy as a Way of Life: Embodying the Arts in Christian Worship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013.
- Best, Harold M. *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1994.
- . *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- Block, Daniel Isaac. *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014.
- Brendlinger, Irv, and Eric E. Mueller. "Psychological Implications of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection with Special Reference to John Wesley's View." *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 60, no. 3 (Sept. 2006): 275-286.
- Brown, Frank Burch. *Inclusive Yet Discerning: Navigating Worship Artfully*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2009.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Genesis*. Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2010.

- . *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.
- . *Worship in Ancient Israel: An Essential Guide*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005.
- Cannon, William Ragsdale Bp. “John Wesley’s Doctrine of Sanctification and Perfection.” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 35, no. 2 (Apr. 1961): 91–95.
- Coleran, James E. “Origins of Old Testament Sacrifice.” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (Apr. 1940): 131–144.
- Conner, Kevin J. *The Temple of Solomon*. Blackburn South, Victoria, Australia: Conner Publications, 1988.
- Cooke, Bernard J., and Gary Macy. *Christian Symbol and Ritual: An Introduction*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Cueni, R Robert. “Sending Forth This Servant of God: Colossians 3:12-17.” *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 37, no. 1-2 (2002): 85–91.
- Culpepper, R. Alan. *Mark*. Grand Rapids, MI: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2007.
- Cunningham, Joseph W. “The Methodist Doctrine of Christian Perfection: Charles Wesley’s Contribution Contextualized.” *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 2 (2010): 25–44.
- Davidson, Richard M. “Earth’s First Sanctuary: Genesis 1-3 and Parallel Creation Accounts.” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 53, no. 1 (2015): 65–89.
- Dawn, Marva J. *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for This Urgent Time*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.
- Epp, Elton J. *The New Interpreter’s Bible: General Articles on the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Mark*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995.
- Edersheim, Alfred. *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995.
- Fretheim, Terence E. “Genesis,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*. Vol. 1. *Genesis to Leviticus*. Edited by Leander Keck. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007.
- Gandel, Kenneth O. “Leadership Reflection: Excellence in Christian Leadership.” *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 2, no 1 (Winter 2008) 64–72.

- Gordon, T. David. *Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns: How Pop Culture Rewrote the Hymnal*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2010.
- Greener, Shawn, Dr. *Excellence Killed the Church! How Mediocrity is Destroying America*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2012.
- Guinness, Os. *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993.
- Hamilton, Victor P. *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011.
- Häring, Bernhard. "Liturgical Piety and Christian Perfection." *Worship* 4, no. 9 (Oct. 1960): 523–535. Accessed September 1, 2017.
- Hendel, Kurt K. "Faithfulness: Luther's Vision of Excellence in Ministry." *Currents in Theology and Mission* 36, no. 3 (June 2009): 170–198.
- Hickman, Hoyt T. *Worshipping with United Methodists*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007.
- Hoyer, George W Rev. Prof. "Mark 12:28-34." *Interpretation* 33, no. 3 (July 1979): 293–298.
- Hustad, Donald P. *True Worship: Reclaiming the Wonder and Majesty*. Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers and Hope Publishing, 1998.
- Jarvis, Cynthia A. "Between Text and Sermon: Mark 12:28-34." *Interpretation* 70, no. 2 (Apr. 2016): 197–199.
- Jasper, David. *The Sacred Community: Art, Sacrament, and the People of God*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012.
- Jones, L. Gregory, and Kevin R. Armstrong. *Resurrecting excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006.
- Joslin, Barry Clyde. "Raising the Worship Standard: The Translation and Meaning of Colossians 3:16 and Implications for Our Corporate Worship." *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 17, no. 3 (2013): 50–59.
- Kozar, Joseph Vlcek. "Complementary Insight: A Scribe's Approval of the 'Most Important' Commandment in Mark 12:28-34." *Proceedings* 22 (2002): 35–45. Accessed August 12, 2017.
- Kroeker, Charlotte. *The Sounds of Our Offerings*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2011.

- Lane, Belden C. "Excellence in Teaching and a Spirituality of Desire." *Horizons* 27, no. 2 (Sept. 2000): 311–321. Accessed August 13, 2017.
- Lim, Swee-Hong, and Lester Ruth. *Lovin' on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2017.
- Lincoln, Andrew T. "Colossians." *The New Interpreter's Bible*. Vol 11, *Second Corinthians to Philemon*. Edited by Leander Keck. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007.
- Lovelace, Austin, and William C. Rice. *Music and Worship in the Church*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1960.
- Marley Jr. MD, David E. *Genesis Code: Moses & Modern Science Agree*. Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2016.
- Mills, Watson E. "Sacrifice in the Old Testament: Its Theory and Practice." *Theology Today* 30, no. 3 (Oct. 1973): 318–321. Accessed September 8, 2017.
- Mitman, Russell F. *Worship in the Shape of Scripture*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2001.
- Moule, C. F. D. (Charles Francis Digby). "New Life in Colossians 3:1-17." *Review & Expositor* 70, no. 4 (Sept. 1973): 481–493. Accessed August 11, 2017.
- Navarro, Kevin J. *The Complete Worship Service: Creating a Taste of Heaven on Earth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005.
- Nelson, J Robert (John Robert). "What Methodists Think of Eucharistic Theology." *Worship* 52, no. 5 (Sept. 1978): 409–424. Accessed September 3, 2017.
- Neuhaus, Richard J. "The Extreme of Excellence." *First Things* (November 2000): 72–73.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard. *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry*. New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1956.
- Norfleet, Agnes W. "Mark 12:28-34." *Interpretation* 51, no. 4 (Oct. 1997) 403–406. Accessed August 12, 2017.
- Paulson, Brian R. "Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry." *Theology Today* 64, no. 3 (Oct. 2007): 398–400. Accessed August 13, 2017.
- Perkins, Pheme. "Mark." *The New Interpreter's Bible*. Vol. 8. *Matthew to Mark*. Edited by Leander Keck. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007.

- Radner, Ephraim. *Leviticus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008.
- Richie, Cristina S. "God's Good World: Reclaiming the Doctrine of Creation." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57, no. 1 (Mar. 2014): 223–227. Accessed August 11, 2017.
- Ruff, Anthony. "Monks, Megachurches, and Mediocrity." *Worship* 92 (March 2018): 100–106.
- Runyon, Theodore. *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998.
- Schaeffer, F. *Addicted to Mediocrity*. Westchester IL: Good News Pub., 1981.
- Seitz, Christopher R. *Colossians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014.
- Sklar, Jay. *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: IVP Academic, 2014.
- Smith, James K. A. *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016.
- Snaith, Norman Henry. "Sacrifice in the Old Testament." *Vetus Testamentum* 7, no. 3 (July 1957): 308–317.
- Steffen, Patrick. "Perfectionism and Life Aspirations in Intrinsically and Extrinsically Religious Individuals." *Journal of Religion and Health* 53, no. 4 (Aug. 2014): 945–958.
- Stein, Robert H. *Mark*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Stone, Howard W., and James O. Duke. *How to Think Theologically*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013.
- Sumney, Jerry L., and Jennifer K. Cox. *Colossians: A Commentary*. Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2008.
- Surburg, Mark P. "Good Stuff!: The Material Creation and the Christian Faith." *Concordia Journal* 36, no. 3 (2010): 245–262. Accessed August 11, 2017.
- Tankersley, Lee. "A Portrait of the Glorious Community of Faith (Colossians 3:12–17)." *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 17, no. 3 (2013): 68–73. Accessed August 12, 2017.
- Taylor, W. David O., ed. *For the Beauty of the Church: Casting a Vision for the Arts*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2010.

- Thompson, Robb. *Excellence in Ministry*. Tinley Park, IL: Family Harvest Church, 2002.
- Toler, Stan and Alan Nelson. *The Five Star Church: Serving God and His People with Excellence*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1999.
- Tompkins, Stephen. *John Wesley: A Biography*. Oxford, UK: Lion Publishing Inc., 2003.
- Vine, W. E. *Concise Dictionary of the Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson. Inc., 2005.
- Vosko, Richard S. *Through the Eye of a Rose Window: A Perspective on the Environment of Worship*. Saratoga, CA: Resource Publications, 1981.
- Webber, Robert E. *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting Gods Narrative*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008.
- . *Who Gets to Narrate the World?: Contending for the Christian Story in an Age of Rivals*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008.
- Wesley, John. *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*. 1738. Reprint, Columbia: Pantianos Classics, 2017.
- . *Notes on the New Testament*. Reprint, Oxford, UK: Benediction Classics, 2010.
- . *Notes on the Old Testament: Historical Books, Genesis Through II Chronicles*. Reprint, Oxford, UK: Benediction Classics, 2010.
- . *Notes on the Old Testament: Prophecy and Poetry Books: Ezra Through Malachi*, Reprint, Oxford, UK: Benediction Classics, 2010.
- . “Sermon 76.” *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 5-6. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2002.
- . “Sermon 89.” *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 7-8. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2002.
- . *The Journal of John Wesley*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1952.
- . *The Wesley Orders of Common Prayer*. Reprint. Nashville, TN: The Board of Education of the Methodist Church, 1957.
- White, James F. *A Brief History of Christian Worship*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997.

- . *Documents of Christian Worship: Descriptive and Interpretive Sources*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1992.
- . *Introduction to Christian Worship*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001.
- . *John Wesley's Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*. Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1984.
- Williams, Kevin F. "'To Be Capable of God...': John Wesley's Understanding of 'Christian Perfection' as the Link Between His Theology and His Spirituality." *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 23, no. 1-2 (1997).
- Wilson, Jonathan R. *God's Good World: Reclaiming the Doctrine of Creation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013.
- Wright, Walter C. *The Sacrificial System of the Old Testament*. Cleveland, OH: Union Gospel Press, 1942.
- Young, Carlton R., ed, *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship*. Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989.