

PLAYING OUR PRAYERS:
TOWARD MORE EMBODIED, PARTICIPATORY WORSHIP

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To Jerry
whose unwavering encouragement, love, and faith in me
has seen me through this and so much more

and

To Greg and Justin
whose confidence and pride in their mom
keeps me stepping when I'd sometimes sooner not

ABSTRACT

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Mennonite worship in North America is thick with words and can easily stay in a very cerebral mode. As a serious-minded people shaped by a practical and service-oriented understanding of faith, accustomed to a style of worship that relies heavily on the voices of a few speakers, Mennonites tend to practice body-stiff and movement-scarce worship. Worship patterns involve lots of sitting and listening on the part of most attenders, with little (other than singing) that asks for other kinds of engagement.

Experience in theater and movement, observations of explorations I led in other worship settings, and theological understandings have convinced me physical movement and emotional engagement in worship can yield further openness to God and thus play a significant role in spiritual formation. With the incarnation itself as foundational, other proponents of this view include theologians Samuel Laeuchli and Walter Wink, who have done significant work with non-cerebral interaction with scripture. The purpose of this project was to introduce more whole-self—that is, body, mind, and spirit—participation in the Sunday morning worship experience at Salford Mennonite Church, with particular attention to the emotional and physical engagement of worshippers. Through forms based in principles of theater and movement, worshippers were offered greater freedom to inhabit the wide range of spiritual responses of which we are capable.

A small group of congregational members learned basic forms of InterPlay, a system of improvisational expression and interaction. During worship services throughout Lent 2013 and on Easter Sunday morning, they and a number of other participants presented theater- or movement-based forms which related to the scripture of the morning or to the congregational prayer. Forms included choral reading, shape and stillness sculptures, free-form movement to music, bibliodrama, tableaux, and interpretative memorization. Additionally, I led the whole congregation (participation optional) in simple movement preceding the weekly period of silence.

These worship experiences met with a high degree of receptivity and responsiveness. Resistance was also evident and reflected caution about change, attitudes about worship, and discomfort around the body.

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INTRODUCTION

Early in his book *Provoking the Gospel* religion and philosophy professor Richard Swanson exhorts, “... make sure you remember the unrepentant physicality of real life and real death.”¹ Much in the worship style I know best seems to ignore, or even seek to deny, the unflinching physicality of our lives. With little physical movement built in to the flow of worship, and much of the content carried out by single figures standing in a nearly fixed spot, those present are perhaps inadvertently encouraged to slip into a rather passive, mostly cerebral state of being for the hour or so of gathered worship each Sunday morning. Christian faith, however, is profoundly incarnational, with the message and call of salvation resting squarely on the understandings that the Word was made Flesh and that following the Incarnate One will shape our own lives to encounter and embrace, as he did, the real world in all its muck, mire, and mystery. My hope for the “Playing Our Prayers” project was to create worship space that more clearly welcomes the “unrepentant physicality” of life and of Christian faith.

The concept of “poor theatre,” developed by Polish dramatist Jerzy Grotowski, offers much encouragement to those wishing to incorporate elements of theater into congregational worship. Grotowski’s approach calls for lightly defined space, no costumes or makeup or lighting, and the most minimal use of props. In such forms as

¹ Richard W. Swanson, *Provoking the Gospel: Methods to Embody Biblical Storytelling through Drama* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 23.

choric readings, bibliodrama, and tableaux the power of what comes through without many of the more usual trappings of theater productions is apparent and real. Much can be expressed and shaped by sheer placement of participants, by pacing and volume shifts and emphasis, by the most basic of gestures. One of Grotowski's own comments points to one of the essential strengths of "poor theatre" for use in worship. He writes, "By gradually eliminating whatever proved superfluous, we found that theatre can exist without make-up, lighting, and sound effects. It cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship or perceptual, direct, live communion."²

My work in the congregation through this project has validated that the "poor theatre" approach enhances that direct, live communion. Costumes and make-up and developed set-pieces bring with them an extra measure of artifice, even artificiality, and perhaps unintentionally invite the on-lookers to view what unfolds before them as something other-than-real and something set quite apart from themselves. "Poor theatre" helps to underscore, in worship, that this is any and all of us interacting with the scripture. I believe the understatement and the bare-bones approach serves to help draw in the witnessing congregation, serves to help them own whatever unfolds as part of their own experience, too, not just that of those who happen to be presenting it in the moment. What we created together in these weeks was not polished theater or aesthetically refined movement. It was, however, real people interacting in more fully involved ways with scripture.

My highest hope for the use of drama and movement in worship has been that it would help to create space which allows for the inner stirring within those present that

²Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, 1st Routledge ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 19.

ultimately leads to transformation. It is a bold hope, one echoed in similar language by Jana Childers in *Performing the Word*. What Childers says about preaching (“lively preaching” she calls it), I would say of the use of theater and movement forms in worship: “... the purpose [of using these forms] might be described as facilitating openness: creating a space where the listeners can be open to change, shaping a moment when the congregation can say a yes or a no that comes from more than the cerebrum... They [lively sermons, theater or movement pieces used in worship] open, draw, and hold people, creating a moment for God to move in.”³ Of course, there is no way to document whether and when transformation has occurred, or even to be sure that it does. For most of us the effects of worship services on our lives is gradual, on-going, and difficult to identify. Nevertheless, we can observe moments of impact, of “deep calling to deep” as the Psalmist says (Psalm 42:7). Though times of heightened emotion cannot be presumed to necessarily be transformative moments, there is a sense in which the soul is stirred, moved, during such times; one may surmise that such deep stirring contributes to transformation. Childers also makes this connection. “Where is the potential for transformation located in the person who listens to a sermon [watches and listens to a theater or movement piece]? ... In the unconscious. In preaching, as in theatre, ‘deep calls to deep.’”⁴

I was gratified to witness numerous moments of deep calling to deep during the weeks of “playing our prayers” in congregational worship. The process felt throughout like an invitation to that possibility, never an assurance. We began with four training

³ Jana Childers, *Performing the Word: Preaching as Theatre* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1998), 34-35.

⁴ Childers, 103.

sessions of a fourteen-person group willing to learn some of the basic forms offered by InterPlay, an improvisatory approach to self-expression, community-building, and spiritual exploration. During the weeks of Lent and on Easter morning these fourteen people were among the core participants in a variety of theater and movement forms presented, one each Sunday: choric reading (twice), shape and stillness sculpture, free movement to music, bibliodrama, tableaux, interpretive recitation of scripture. Additionally, each of the first five weeks of Lent I led a short period of guided meditation with simple movement as a lead-in to the congregation's weekly practice of a period of silence during worship.

In order to gather some indications of impact of these forms five individuals assisted me in interviewing both the fourteen-member InterPlay group and thirty randomly selected individuals from the congregation. The random selection followed, as best we could the age distribution, within the congregation. In addition to these interviews, these same forty-four people completed a numbered questionnaire prior to the start of the weeks of Lent, as well as a comparably numbered post-project questionnaire after Easter. In referring to responses on questionnaires from this group, I will be citing by number. At the urging of the Lay Advisory Committee, we also invited the whole congregation to complete the questionnaires, both before the project began and after it was complete. In recording these anonymous "open call" responses I differentiated between those who filled out both questionnaires and those who filled out only the post-project questionnaire. In citation these responses will be identified as "Salford Mennonite Church member, (pre- or post-) questionnaire open call."

Though it is difficult to document or measure the impact of what occurred during these weeks, from observation and from the spoken and written responses of many individuals I trust that for a significant number in the congregation these forms and practices did create space where something could stir and where God could enter in a new way. I remain convinced that finding ways to include and involve the “unrepentant physicality” of our lives is a good and essential direction for planning and leading worship. I am deeply grateful to the worshippers at Salford Mennonite Church for the opportunity to give flesh to that conviction for this season.

CHAPTER ONE
LET MY PEOPLE MOVE

A cheerful buzz of conversation hums in the foyer, echoed by an only slightly quieter version of it in the pews, on any given Sunday morning in the time just before worship begins at Salford Mennonite Church. The chatter attests to a comfortable and relaxed environment, a climate of warmth and friendliness, easy-going intermingling and moving amongst each other for greetings and preliminary conversations. While many are seated and ready for worship to begin, some casually find their way to their seats during the first “Gathering Hymn,” and a few stragglers more inconspicuously take seats five or ten minutes into the service, as the welcome and call to worship are given. Once worship is underway, however, a more formal, almost stiff posture settles in as individuals move from an easy, interactive way of being with each other into a more passive state, becoming primarily observers.

The physical structure of the worship space reinforces the shift into passivity. A room longer than it is wide, the sanctuary is filled with straight wooden pews; a slight bend in the pews was introduced in one renovation project, creating a little more of an amphitheater effect and physically orienting people toward each other a bit more. An aisle at each side of the room and a somewhat wider one down the center allow for entering and exiting the space but do not invite movement beyond the straightforward acts of coming and going. The pews are securely fastened to the floor, further limiting

flexibility. At the front a raised platform accommodates a substantial pulpit, two short benches for those with leadership roles in the worship service, and a few artificial plants to soften the somewhat stern décor. A massive floor-to-ceiling stone wall rises up at the back of the platform, lending a solid, earthy beauty to the front of the worship room. To some the wall conveys a solid foundation, evoking a sense of history and community, for in fact the stones were taken from a centuries-old neighborhood mill which itself served for decades as a community gathering place. To others the wall conveys a feeling of immovability, even intractability, and silently symbolizes a spirit in our Mennonite faith tradition that seems likewise stolid, hard to budge, perhaps intractable. I personally find aspects of all of this in the wall, and it serves as one apt metaphor for the complex relationship I hold with my faith heritage.

The stone wall mirrors a weight or heaviness, a constricting quality that seems to be a legacy from Mennonite faith tradition. As a serious-minded people, shaped by a practical and service-oriented understanding of faith, accustomed to a style of worship that relies heavily on the voices of a few speakers (though rich with the many voices of four-part-harmony singing), Mennonites tend to practice body-stiff and movement-scarce worship. Thick with words, the worship can easily stay in a very cerebral mode. Though Mennonite tradition is in many ways non-hierarchical and egalitarian, worship patterns cast the majority of attenders into a role that calls for lots of sitting and listening, with little apart from the singing that asks for other kinds of involvement. Some have learned to fully engage their minds and do not expect or desire anything different. Others would acknowledge that their attention slips in and out during worship, as they wait for something to captivate their particular interests and style of learning and participation.

Still others create their own distractions, surreptitiously reading outside material or checking email—or texting—on their smart phones.

The general passivity of the worshippers at Salford Mennonite Church during the time of worship does not, however, seem like an accurate reflection of the character, or the narrative, of the congregation. Many attenders have remarked on the spirit of warmth and hospitality in the congregation, a spirit that moves toward the stranger, the visitor, the one who is less comfortable or known in the gathering. New growth in membership in the last five or six years, particularly among families with young children, has enlivened and encouraged the congregation as a whole. Salford's clarity in commitment to Anabaptist identity and values is attractive to many who choose to join. With the strong theme of following Jesus and living out the gospel in tangible, recognizable ways, Anabaptist identity and values inherently suggest an active mode of being. In the broader local Mennonite community the congregation is seen as one with a strong witness to the call of justice and peace, a witness that involves action and advocacy. Twenty-five years ago the congregation wrestled and discerned together and took the risk of opening a child-care center as one aspect of its ministry to the local community. The center remains vibrant and growing, and a second location was added fifteen years after the first. The generally passive mode of the congregation's worship is somehow not fully congruent with who the congregation is. I have wondered what might be done to shift the worship experience into a mode that more faithfully expresses the congregation's journey of seeking, risking, investing, and doing.

My individual spiritual journey has led me to chafe at worship or faith expressions that remain primarily cerebral. I desire a firm intellectual and scholarship-

informed foundation for my Christian beliefs and have engaged in seminary studies at various times in my life. That said, I have also grown wary of faith formulations that seemed to be first and foremost a matter of assenting to propositions. Long drawn to theater and movement, I hungered to bring the emotional and imaginative aspects of my being, as well, into encounter with scripture and into worship. In my own devotional life entering imaginatively into a text, perhaps as one of the participants in a given pericope, opened my eyes to dimensions of Jesus' presence that I had not seen before. I found my faith and trust in God expanding, particularly as I allowed my sensory self and my emotional being to be more fully involved in my faith inquiry and in my prayer. In settings mostly outside the church I recognized that for me physical movement, especially in ritual action or in expressive gesture or dance, released something within that seemed to open and deepen the stream of my response to God. Sometimes it was a response of praise or lament, sometimes supplication or anger. What I entered into physically and emotionally seemed to stay with me longer and to have more forming power than did ideas I simply read or listened to. As I grew into leadership within the church, my own hungers and experiences shaped what I sought for others in the worship life of a congregation.

As a volunteer leader of worship in a different congregation, my own creative processes and hungers shaped the work I was doing with the worship life there. My love of drama and theater and movement led to a variety of forms in worship: solo recitation and dramatization of the passion narrative in Luke; a white-faced, miming, dancing Jesus on Easter morning; human sculpture "walls" of Jericho; the remembered and enacted observation of "the apostle Peter's wife" as she watched a (hypothetical) daughter follow

Jesus. As I moved into a pastoral role in that small congregation, I continued to explore use of short dramatic pieces in worship. Often they were an embodying or extrapolation of scripture itself, and I became even more convinced of the significant role such forms can play in a community's worship experience. When a handful of congregants stood and shouted out, "Crucify him!" in the course of the passion narrative recitation, we felt the power and the threat and the relentless foreboding. When all the women and girls sat in the back half of the sanctuary during a dramatic monologue about Jesus' counter-cultural way of interacting with women, a young schoolgirl expressed the consternation she felt. "Who is that lady who made us sit in the back?" she hissed to her mother afterward. Well over a decade after a particular story-based worship service, I learned one woman had for years carried with her the small piece of blue fabric that worshippers were invited to take that day as we retold and reflected on the story of the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' robe in search of healing. The hollow, rattling sound of bamboo wood chimes which accompanied my sermon on the valley of dry bones stayed with a number of people for weeks, they later said.

I have wondered how universal this responsiveness to fuller use of the senses and the body in worship might be. Echoes of the theme surfaced in interviews with some Salford members about what they remembered over the years from worship services, in any context, that had seemed especially meaningful to them (see Appendix A). Things involving physical movement or the senses featured high: candle-light, people coming forward to light candles, someone carrying a cross, the thud of the cross being placed, foot-washing, anointing, the feel of the oil on one's forehead, baptism, communion, the physical presence of everyone gathered together. One person commented about her

experience of being anointed with oil, saying, “Any time you participate in that kind of ritual, it makes it meaningful because it is a physical experience.”¹

Another theme named was the experience of emotional openness or vulnerability evidenced on the part of both leaders and participants. Comments included such things as “pastors and others allowed themselves to be vulnerable,” “listening to people’s stories because the telling is sincere and real,” “people sharing their journeys ... emotion tied with it,” “[seeing and hearing] connections with what is happening in real life,” “when people are vulnerable in sharing their journey / situation.”² One person described a worship service that allowed him to “relate on a more real level”; another remembered when a young speaker’s remarks seemed especially “real, genuine, spontaneous ... people lined up at the microphone to respond.”³ Still another person recalled two newer members telling the congregation within a sermon that they “felt they did not have to be perfect at Salford.”⁴ These comments reinforced my sense of the importance and value of engaging as much of the whole person in worship as possible.

Some of what I hoped to bring to worship at Salford was not new to the congregation. Short pieces of drama had been used over the years, and as already indicated, ritual acts of worship had at times been incorporated, as well. My observation as a worshipper there before joining the new pastoral team was, however, that such

¹ Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by Tom Nolan, February 14, 2013.

² Salford Mennonite Church members, interviews by Julie Wimmer, February 12, 2013; by author, February 6, 2013; by author, February 7, 2013; by author, February 20, 2013; by author, February 8, 2013.

³ Salford Mennonite Church members, interviews by Doug McInnes, February 10, 2013; by Tom Nolan, January 22, 2013.

⁴ Salford Mennonite Church members, interviews by Carolyn Nolan, January 28, 2013.

elements were quite occasional and did not inform or shape the worship life in an ongoing way. I recognized that there was something more than drama and ritual that I was also reaching toward. Although I was not seeking to introduce dance, as such, into the worship life there, I realized that it was in dance and dance-like movement that I found some of my own spiritual out-pouring and connection to God, and I hoped to bring some of that greater freedom and expressiveness into the gathered community, as well.

I grew up in the Mennonite church amidst the assumption that “Mennonites do not dance,” though I realized fairly early on that I loved any version of it that I happened into (the Mexican Hat Dance in a cousin’s tool shed, square-dancing in high school physical education classes). An article about dance in the *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* briefly updates the reader on changes in attitude in the more recent past regarding what had been a taboo for many years. “In 1990 dance continued to be a controversial subject in the Mennonite churches. Social dancing involving the physical contact of men and women is the type of dancing that has caused the most concern. The reasons most frequently cited for this concern include the potential for sexual stimulation, creating an image that weakens the Christian witness, and breaking down the spiritual life of the members of the church.”⁵ I had always understood the first reason given here to be the primary concern. Though I suspect the joke is used in and of other traditions, as well, a common one among Mennonites goes, “Why don’t Mennonites have sex standing up? It may lead to dancing.” At my Mennonite college in the early 1970s the one physical education class I really enjoyed was called “Creative Rhythms”—an acceptable name

⁵ Ann Weber Becker, “Dance,” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1990, <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/D252ME.html>. Accessed July 25, 2013.

given to a still nearly unacceptable activity, dance. Twenty years later, by the early 1990s, “a growing number of Mennonites are reclaiming sacred dance as an expression of worship, in the tradition of the Israelites and the early church. In some North American congregations creative movement or liturgical dance groups offer accompaniment to congregational singing or special music during the Sunday morning service.”⁶

There was no precedent for dance as part of Sunday morning worship services at Salford Mennonite, though members spoke appreciatively of two memories from prior years that involved significant expressive movement. For a period of time a young woman named Melanie Clemmer had offered American Sign Language interpretation up front along with the singing of some hymns. One member described it as “gracefulness, beauty of movement, like a bird in flight in slow motion” and had found it very meaningful.⁷ “Hands can dance,” he said, “and start getting the body into it.”⁸ Others shared the memory and the sense of it as very worshipful. Additionally, members recalled a danced prayer done by one of the developmentally challenged members of the congregation at the afternoon ordination service of chaplain and congregational member Dawn Ruth Nelson. Dance had been a natural expression for B.J. Diehl, and her participation in this way in Dawn’s ordination was moving for many; B. J. called the dance “Butterfly Prayer.”

I wondered what the non-dancing Mennonite heritage might yield in the way of openness to including dance or dance-like movement in worship. There was more

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by author, February 7, 2013.

⁸ Ibid.

expressed openness to it than I anticipated. Of the forty-two congregational members who were interviewed prior to the implementation of the project, almost all of them expressed openness to having some form of dance or dance-like movement introduced into worship services, though some with more hesitation than others. Some expressed primarily curiosity, but many indicated a willingness to try, even welcoming a new element in worship. One member thought “we all only use our heads in worship [and he] would be very happy to have some new things tried.”⁹

Concern that any introduced movement be worshipful was expressed repeatedly. One person commented, “I don’t think it is for church worship. Church is sacred. We don’t go to worship to show what we can do. I prefer there be no dancing... Maybe if it is worshipful it would be okay.”¹⁰ Another person commented, “I feel bizarre about it in church. In Sunday school it’s okay, but not in worship. Outside or in a casual setting [is okay]. When I’m in church I expect things to be reverent, and I don’t think of movement as reverent.”¹¹ A similar expectation, or stipulation, was that added elements would help to convey or reinforce a message. One man expressed what many seemed to imply, that he was “not so sure about dance ... [but] movement would be okay if it has relevance to the theme or service.”¹²

⁹ Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by Linda Martin, February 8, 2013.

¹⁰ Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by Carolyn Nolan, January 28, 2013.

¹¹ Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by Sandy Drescher Lehman, February 11, 2013.

¹² Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by Sandy Drescher Lehman, February 6, 2013.

As people considered the possibility of our incorporating some elements of dance or movement into worship services at Salford, many acknowledged a measure of discomfort or awkwardness that they themselves felt, even while they were open to the idea of it. One person gave words to what many hinted at: “Dance and movement still make me uncomfortable, because it is not something I am used to doing.”¹³ Some made a clear distinction between their readiness to have it be part of the worship experience and their readiness to participate themselves. Numerous responses were along the lines of, “I think it’s good as long as I don’t have to be doing it” and “it would take a lot for [me] to be involved in movement.”¹⁴ One person who was sure she would not participate herself said, “I might enjoy watching.”¹⁵ Another said, “I feel awkward, but I don’t have a problem watching; [it would be] fun to watch.”¹⁶

I was touched to discover this spirit of curiosity and willingness to try, an openness to consider and to explore something unfamiliar and somewhat uncomfortable. In the midst of the general openness and even intrigue, there were also concerns expressed for those who would not find it easy to accept, along with recommendations that it be introduced gradually and with care. One person suggested that we would “need

¹³ Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by Doug McInnes, February 16, 2013.

¹⁴ Salford Mennonite Church member, interviews by Tom Nolan, January 22, 2013; by Julie Wimmer, February 15, 2013.

¹⁵ Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by Carolyn Nolan, January 24, 2013.

¹⁶ Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by Sandy Drescher Lehman, February 13, 2013.

to ease it in”; another observed, “It is something we would have to learn because it is something new that we are not used to doing—it would take a long time to learn”; and yet another thought, “If we’d do it every once in a while, it would be fine. Maybe if it’d be explained, it would be fine.”¹⁷ A man who did not anticipate getting involved in any movement himself, nevertheless, said that he “believes we need to open up to dance and movement [and] that there will be lots of dance and movement in heaven and we can certainly open up to it now, here on earth. It might help us open up in other aspects. It could be a good thing. We need to ‘get out of the boat’—put ourselves out there and look to God.”¹⁸ His comment that dance/movement might help us open up in other aspects echoed some of my own greatest hopes and dreams and expressed some of the very purpose I had in mind for the project.

Among the older members of the congregation there were some signals of resistance early on. As the Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) and I worked to select a random ten percent of the congregation to participate in interviews and tracked questionnaires (see Appendix B), there were more responses of “no” in the eighty-year-old-plus category than any other. One woman expressed her clear opinion that older people in the congregation would not like what I was planning to do, and she was not willing to be one of the people interviewed. One of the older men whom I called to invite to participate in the interview/questionnaire process said, “I was thinking about talking to

¹⁷ Salford Mennonite Church members, interviews by Tom Nolan, January 31, 2013; by Doug McInnes, February 10, 2013; and by Sandy Drescher Lehman, February 8, 2013.

¹⁸ Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by Julie Wimmer, February 15, 2013.

you. Some in our age group find this kind of threatening.”¹⁹ He was not available to be interviewed, though he was willing to talk to me further at a later date.

While I was somewhat surprised to discover the general spirit of willingness to try something new, I was not surprised to hear the level of acknowledged discomfort. Nearly half of those interviewed before the project was launched said they had no, or very little, experience with dance and movement. More than half recalled, from their growing up, direct teachings from their churches against dance. “The church always taught against dancing. It was wrong.”²⁰ “I remember Sunday school teachers that talked about the evils of dance.”²¹ “No dancing was allowed; it was frowned on.”²² These memories were especially prominent in the responders who grew up Mennonite. Of those interviewed about 80 percent had grown up within the Mennonite church, while 20 percent had grown up within other Christian traditions. Of those who recalled strong teaching within their churches against dance, however, more than 90 percent had grown up Mennonite. One or two of those who grew up with admonitions against dancing had grown up within the Baptist church. A quick look at the ages of responders with Mennonite background traced the change that has been developing in the Mennonite

¹⁹ Salford Mennonite Church member, phone conversation with author, January 24, 2013.

²⁰ Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by Tom Nolan, January 25, 2013.

²¹ Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by Sandy Drescher Lehman, February 11, 2013.

²² Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by Julie Wimmer, February 6, 2013.

church. Those older than fifty nearly all recalled clear messages from the church against dancing. Those younger than fifty tended to recall the church as silent on the subject.

Some participants offered rationale for these messages of the church and two themes emerged clearly. A younger man reflected on his experience as a student in the local Mennonite high school about twenty-five years ago. “Dancing, especially close dancing with females, was discouraged, probably because of the Mennonite idea of not being proud, or not showing off. Close dancing with females was discouraged because of the sexual nature.”²³ Others reflected these same themes. A woman in her eighties recalled that dancing was looked at as “not proper” and she wondered if it had to do with “drawing attention to yourself—and maybe because it was too sexual, too stimulating.”²⁴ A younger man suggested, “The attitude [of the church] is ‘dance will lead to sex and then sex will lead to dance.’”²⁵ Still another, from one of the older generations, reflected, “We were taught that dancing was of the devil and it could lead to more intimate engagement.”²⁶

This culture of restrictiveness regarding dance brought with it internalized messages about the body and movement, perhaps especially for females. One woman in her mid-fifties said, “I was never allowed to dance because it was wrong. Somewhere I

²³ Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by Doug McInnes, February 11, 2013.

²⁴ Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by author, February 8, 2013.

²⁵ Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by Julie Wimmer, February 12, 2013.

²⁶ Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by Tom Nolan, January 22, 2013.

got the message that moving my body was wrong.”²⁷ Another woman recalled, “Growing up, the church and my parents forbid dancing. . . . There was to be no red clothing, no twisting or overly moving my backside.”²⁸ A woman recounted her experience of forty years ago leading a children’s song in a local Mennonite-operated day care center and how she was criticized for moving too much.²⁹ A particularly memorable story came from a woman of one of the older generations, who had loved to dance as a young girl; though it was forbidden by the church, she had enjoyed the informal dancing that took place every day during the lunch hour in her public high school. Once when her family was on an outing, her father took a picture of her, swimsuit-clad and “frolicking” on the beach. When the young Mennonite man she was then dating saw the picture, he put an end to their relationship for a time (though they later married).³⁰

With an awareness of some of the complexities of experience and desire, of learned inhibitions, and of impulses toward worship, my hope was to help foster an increasingly freer, wider range of expression and engagement in the gathered community as we worshiped together at Salford Mennonite Church. In order to counter some of the inherited constricted-ness and passivity, I hoped to develop aspects of worship that were more embodied and participatory, so as to support, free, and cooperate with the movement of God’s Spirit in corporate worship. Firmly committed to anchoring all

²⁷ Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by Linda Martin, February 10, 2013.

²⁸ Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by Carolyn Nolan, February 1, 2013.

²⁹ Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by author, February 6, 2013.

³⁰ Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by author, February 20, 2013.

aspects of worship in scripture and in understandings which arise from it, I intended to use principles and forms of theater, movement, and ritual with the hopes of evoking a more full-dimensional worship experience.

The project would operate in two spheres of the congregation's life: one would involve a small group of about fifteen people who would begin to develop a language of movement and interaction, using forms originating in the InterPlay organization; the other sphere would involve the Sunday morning gathering of the total congregation for worship. During the 2013 season of Lent and Easter Sunday, elements of worship involving movement, dramatization, or ritual would be incorporated into each Sunday morning service. The small group would serve as a core group of participants who would present those elements. Additionally, I hoped to include more direct involvement of the whole congregation each Sunday and planned to develop a repertoire of simple movement sequences, participatory elements, and ritual actions that everyone would be invited to enter in to, as appropriate for each worship service.

It remained to be seen whether my own joy in movement and expressiveness, my own experience of opening more fully to God through such forms, would find an answering resonance in this community. What were the limits and possibilities for a community shaped (as was I) by restrictive messages about our physical selves—a community nevertheless leaning forward in some anticipation and hope for something yet to be explored and tasted?

CHAPTER TWO

THE WORD BECAME FLESH

I have been a believer in fuller-dimensional worship and proclamation for a long time. My schoolteacher mother primed me to learn and recite humorous poems at extended family gatherings when I was just seven or eight years old, which provided the early beginnings of my comfort “on-stage” and my love of communicating things through story, poetry, image, and non-linear thought. My first attempt at letting the use of drama interweave with scripture in the worship setting was a one-act play based on Psalm 8, which I wrote as a sophomore in high school for performance in my home congregation. In college the “Religious Drama Workshop” course further fed my dream of letting love of theater comingle with my love of worship and commitment to the faith community. A college friend and fellow drama student created an extraordinary, stark, yet compelling monologue presentation of the book of *Revelation*; I was awe-struck and moved and inspired to continue the interweaving pursuit. Once I was situated in a congregation as a young adult and English/drama teacher myself, it was a natural next step to begin dramatizing short pieces of scripture, writing litanies for choric readings, and memorizing and enacting biblical passages as there was opportunity in our worship.

At some point I felt compelled to reflect theologically on this draw toward shaping proclamation and worship using the principles and gifts of theater. I would not have thought to call this compulsion a need for theological reflection. At the time it felt

more like a need to defend something that was being given a rather grudging and cautious welcome in our Mennonite circles. While by then I was a member of a congregation that was open to innovation and welcomed variety in its modes of worship, I had been shaped by a tradition that retained a strong suspicion of theater and film. Acting was seen as dissembling or out-right lying; to portray someone other than oneself was to be dishonest and not genuine. I did not agree with the objections, but they were a voice in my head with which I needed to dialogue.

For me the starting place for reflecting theologically about use of theater for proclamation and worship was always the incarnation itself—the Word become flesh. The very nature of God’s work in the world was incarnational. God’s own mode of communication with us employed the full range of human capacity for perception and expression; Jesus was born and lived among us to reveal the nature and presence of God. The incarnation, Word made flesh, was not a primarily didactic or propositional or mental activity of God toward us. This was full embodiment: physical corporeality, fully active emotionality, immersion in the *stuff* of life, relationship, and interaction. The incarnation engaged the whole self of the One who came, and it engaged the whole selves of the people who witnessed and experienced this presence among them. God created us as body-mind-spirit beings, and God communicated to us by entering our world as a body-mind-spirit being; thus, it seemed to me all of a piece that we, too, would communicate with each other—and back to God—with the fullness of our beings and not split off one element of ourselves to carry the whole weight of communication.

Similarly, it made sense to me that in our efforts to understand, interpret, and convey the meaning of our sacred texts, we would need the whole arsenal of who we are.

Samuel Laeuchli, Swiss theologian with scholarly interests in religion, arts, and comparative mythology, writes, “If we assign the purely cognitive transposition [of a biblical text] a determining role [in our search for understanding and interpretation], we cause great damage, not merely to the text, but to us the hearers and to the society that must live with the questions. For if we miss the complementary emotional and somatic particles, we miss the whole.”¹ I have been drawn again and again to exploring and experimenting with visual, aural, and enacted elements that might move people beyond a primarily cerebral reception of the proclaimed word. I have sought to open a space for emotional involvement as well as intellectual, and I have believed that a wide range of engagement is a necessary component for the spiritual formation that can and should happen in worship. It is startling and sobering to think that, as Laeuchli says, we “cause great damage” if we do not include more than the cerebral elements of interpretation and proclamation.

In later years the discipline of spiritual direction, so directly concerned with spiritual formation, informed my theological reflection about embodiment and emotional engagement in worship. The principles of “theology by heart” as discussed by Graham, Walton, and Ward aptly point to ways in which spiritual direction can shape theology.² In the spiritual direction context one learns to ask whether a particular activity (or behavior or habit or relationship) moves one closer to or further away from God and the fullness of life and love God intends for us. One attends to the nature of disquiet in

¹ Samuel Laeuchli, “The Expulsion from the Garden and the Hermeneutics of Play” in *Body and Bible: Interpreting and Experiencing Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 35.

² Elaine Graham, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 18.

oneself, to inner harmony or peacefulness, to the experience of being bound or free. I came to believe that the freedom and fullness of expression, the joy in movement and in giving voice to a wide variety of human experience, which happens in theater forms, was part of the glad reception and activation of who I/we were created to be. From within (my own experience), the testimony was to greater wholeness and fullness of life. From without (feedback from others), the testimonies to having been moved or affected, to having been given something that stayed clearly in memory, also seemed to point to the theater vehicle as one to be trusted and received gratefully. This strand of my call, to allow the forms and principles of theater and movement to shape my leadership of proclamation and worship, seemed to be confirmed by multiple witnesses and voices.

Some seven to ten years into my first pastoral assignment, one of the men in the congregation called me aside one Sunday after the morning service to ask how I was doing. In the course of the conversation he said, “It seems like what we called you for is being choked out and you don’t have time to do the very thing we wanted you to do.” I was astonished on several levels. While there had been affirmation for the creativity I brought to worship, I had never heard it put so boldly—that this is what the congregation had called me to do. It was both refreshing and startling to have someone speak such a clear word about this aspect of my ministry. The remark touched on an ongoing tension within myself, as well. For much of my time in ministry in that congregation I was in a part-time role, which intensified my sense of there being many, many more things to do in the ministry there than I could possibly accomplish in the number of hours for which I was hired. Often the pressure to get things done as they always had been done squeezed out the time that it took to develop and execute the ideas for drama or movement that

emerged as I prepared to preach or to lead worship. The words of this parishioner were an accurate reflection of the interior experience I often felt as I went about my work as pastor.

The push and pull of time demands was not, however, the only front where I struggled. Apart from music the Mennonite church has been slow to embrace the arts in the context of worship. Even in the area of music the rich tradition of unaccompanied four-part-harmony congregational singing stood alone for decades as the only sanctioned musical mode for worship. The congregation I was part of moved somewhat ahead of its sister Mennonite churches in the area, but a congregational history reflects the milieu from which we were emerging. “In 1924 Perkasio Mennonite sponsored an ecumenical Bible school involving the congregation and its neighboring Baptist and ‘New Mennonite’ churches. Overflowing crowds listened to *small group musical performances* and recitations by women at Young People’s Bible meetings at Perkasio Mennonite *when those practices were taboo* in other local Mennonite settings.³ Gradually men’s quartets and women’s trios and even small choirs became acceptable musical expressions during worship, but it would be nearly another half-century before it was acceptable to have a piano in the church or to use other instruments during worship. In the early part of the twentieth century, one young man, for instance, was “talented on the violin” and “faced with the life-changing call to be a simple Mennonite minister. The church . . . required him to choose between its fellowship and the development of his aesthetic and commercial gifts. Though it cost them agony, he and his ambitious young wife obeyed

³ S. Duane Kauffman, *A Vision Pursued: A History of the First Hundred Years of Perkasio Mennonite Church* (Morgantown, PA: Masthof Press, 2009), vii; italics mine.

the church in its narrow concept of the right fellowship...⁴ Of the arts, music has had the easier entry into the worship life of the Mennonite church, with visual arts and drama slowly following along behind. Dance or movement remained, and remains, the art form least readily embraced in our tradition.

The still somewhat awkward relationship of Mennonites to the arts continues. “Mennonites desperately need to rethink how we view the arts. For most of us art sounds ‘frivolous’—an elitist distraction—or dangerous: sensual depravity bent on destroying faith,” reflects one commentator in the Mennonite church.⁵ He goes on to say, “But whether we like it or not (and whether we are aware of it or not), faith speaks in the language of the arts.”⁶ Brown observes, “... [W]e fail to recognize that, beginning with Creation itself, creative expression brings richness to every facet of our otherwise monochrome lives. This is true even for a tradition that values simplicity and practicality.”⁷ In my own personal journey this theme of the creativity of the Creator has been a significant part of my thinking and processing. The inventive, imaginative, whimsical, and dramatic elements in the natural world and in the wide array of humanity bespeak a central force capable of—and delighting in, it would seem—a tremendous range of expression and form-making. Formed in the Creator’s image, we must, I concluded, surely be intended to exercise creativity ourselves.

⁴ John Ruth, *Maintaining the Right Fellowship* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984), 536.

⁵ Lowell Brown, “Mennonites and the Arts,” *The Mennonite.org*. April 6, 2010, http://www.themennonite.org/issues/13-4/articles/Mennonites_and_the_arts [accessed August 13, 2013].

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Mennonite historian John Ruth has suggested that some of the distance Mennonites have kept from the arts is tied up in certain “scruples.”⁸ Rooted in religious allegiance, scruples may be said to be that which “we feel inwardly bound to resist.”⁹ Recognizing an affinity between Mennonite attitudes and the mindset of English Puritans, who were also motivated by a religious seriousness and sober-mindedness, Ruth lists seven scruples—would-be inhibitors for potential Mennonite makers of art: idolatry, worldly sophistication, individualism, asceticism, art as artifice, practicality, and concern for edification.¹⁰ The list rings true, though I imagine others could be named as well, or instead. As a young adult I found myself chafing under the cumulative effect of generations of such scruples. The net effect was suppressive and repressive, and I yearned to be free from their long reach. For quite a few years I balked at the prospect of having to articulate a footing from which to talk back to them, and even now I am uncertain how much patience I have for the dialogue. Yet I find myself, in my own way, listening for what in the inherited caution and suspicion may still be sound spiritual guides I do not want to disregard. Ruth’s approach is for the artists and the would-be artists among us to “transfigure rather than merely debunk the scruples which make up the integrity of the soul of [our] tradition, to test them and see what they point to, and to separate the real scruples from . . . moral cowardice or class prejudice.”¹¹ I believe my

⁸ John Ruth, *Mennonite Identity and Literary Art* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978), 26.

⁹ Ruth, *Mennonite Identity*, 27.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 33-41.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 44.

way of testing the scruples over the years has primarily come in the form of the experiments and explorations I have made in worship—and my efforts to listen for the community’s response.

While an inherited set of scruples and learned inhibitions, most of them rooted in my religious tradition, reached out to restrain and subdue and still me and my people, my own longing and need and snatches of freedom and joy kept me pressing on toward incorporating principles and forms of movement and theater into worship. Significantly, there is also abundant material in scripture to encourage the pursuit. Worship, prayer, and devotion are often depicted as markedly embodied acts in the biblical texts. “Scripture is replete with references to worshipers using their bodies in approaching God. Moses removed his shoes, Abraham bowed low when his indescribable visitors approached, David danced before the ark and Daniel faced Jerusalem to pray.”¹² A man lame from birth entered the temple walking and leaping and praising God (Acts 3:8); a woman knelt at Jesus’ feet, wiping them with her tears, drying them with her hair (Luke 7:38); a man healed of leprosy prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet, thanking him (Luke 17:16).

Coming myself from a tradition that seems markedly uncomfortable with “body”—especially in church—I find it helpful to remember that “from the beginning, Christian worship has been an embodied event.”¹³ Even in the often body-stiff,

¹² Jeffrey A. Mackey, “Seeing God: The Human Body as a Vehicle of Worship,” *The Living Pulpit*, 15:2 (April-June 2006): 26-27, quoted in Kimberly Bracken Long, *The Worshiping Body: The Art of Leading Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 32.

¹³ Kimberly Bracken Long, *The Worshiping Body: The Art of Leading Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 32.

movement-scarce Mennonite worship tradition, we physically enter in to the rites of baptism and communion. For a period of time in many North American Mennonite churches, worshippers turned in their pews and knelt to pray. In some Mennonite churches the practice of foot-washing continues yet today—with its very intimate and earthy ritual of kneeling before another person, holding the person’s feet one foot at a time, splashing water over each, and cradling the foot in a towel for drying. Though we are unlikely to think of moving in and out of benches or walking up and down aisles as an act of worship, entering the worship space—and also leaving it—are both part of embodying our worship of God.

Nathan Mitchell comments that we “write the history of [our] relationship with God on [our] bodies.”¹⁴ I might add that occasionally we discover, or recognize, our relationship with God in our bodies, as well. The sound of water being poured from a pitcher into a large bowl gave me a sense of the out-pouring of God’s love and grace that I did not get with the spoken word alone. The sight of red grape juice being poured into the cup that I would receive—and on another occasion, my own act of pouring the communion wine into the cup to be offered to all—seared my heart with a sober and deepened understanding of the costly gift of Jesus’ poured-out life-blood. What comes through the body is held and kept by the body. “We remember things in our bodies; we are shaped by what our bodies do in worship, made disciples of the One who put his body in our midst—and allowed his body to be broken, for our sakes.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Nathan Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery: Liturgy, Worship, Sacraments* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006): 174-175, quoted in Long, 32.

¹⁵ Long, 33.

Theologian Walter Wink speaks movingly of his realization at age nineteen of a disconnect, almost a dissociation, between his body and his mind. Through experiences at a camp retreat on prayer, he realized that he was “split [such that] my hand somehow knew what my conscious mind had no inkling of: that I was in the thick of a spiritual crisis ... also ... that my mind’s rational deliberations about God had in no sense become incarnate.”¹⁶ Wink became convinced of the poverty of solely rational approaches to scripture and of the value, even necessity, of bringing another part of his being to bear.¹⁷ In the retreat he experienced drawing to music with pastels, expressing prayer through his body to a musical rendition of the Lord’s Prayer, mime, walking recitation, fashioning things with clay—all related directly to specific scripture texts. A half dozen years before he became aware of brain research showing the distinctly differing functions of the two sides of the brain, Wink had discovered for himself the rich and life-bringing contribution of the right side of the brain.¹⁸

Wink changed his approach to teaching New Testament classes at Union Theological Seminary and incorporated the more holistic approaches he had begun to learn. He observed in a first class session drawing assignment about the baptism of Jesus, as told in the book of Mark, that “students collectively scored every significant exegetical

¹⁶ Walter Wink, “Bible Study and Movement for Human Transformation” in *Body and Bible: Interpreting and Experiencing Biblical Narratives*, edited by Bjorn Krondorfer (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 120.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

point it had taken [him] four months in the library to discover!”¹⁹ His approaches were perceived as a challenge, and perhaps a threat, to the academic disciplines in seminary education, though he was clear within himself, and presumably communicated to others, that he was not in any way dismissing the value and usefulness of historical-critical method. “I was not trumpeting the demise of a critical approach to Scripture in the least, but only its getting ‘stuck’ in alienated distance [from the communities which should be able to benefit from such scholarship.] I wanted to see the text rebound on the exegete and call the exegete’s life into question.”²⁰

For Wink it was costly to embrace a somatic approach to scripture and to choose to keep living out his conviction that movement and music and artistic expression needed to be part of engaging with scripture in ways that would bring transformation. He writes, “It does not require much effort from either side of the brain to figure out what kind of a reception this approach received from my academic colleagues,” and, in fact, in short time he was denied tenure at Union.²¹ That was nearly forty years ago and times and the church have changed significantly, yet as I designed the project and began to put it in place at Salford, I was aware of a certain risk factor. I felt apprehension at many points along the way and anticipated a certain level of resistance. During the final evaluation session with the LAC, one member commented, “It took guts to do this project here.”

Some theological reflection on the congregation itself reveals roots of both openness and resistance to something as unfamiliar as more deliberate inclusion of the body and of artistic symbol in worship. For one thing, from nearly the beginning of its

¹⁹ Wink in *Body and Bible*, 123.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

almost three-hundred-year history, the congregation has had a strong strand within it attentive to and valuing of education. Established in 1717, by 1728 the congregation had built a dual-purpose meetinghouse-schoolhouse, where the noted colonial schoolmaster Christopher Dock served as teacher.²² With the education of young people in mind the congregation's earliest minister, Dielman Kolb, Jr., urged translation and publication of *The Martyrs' Mirror*, a collection of accounts of early Anabaptists.²³ He was also a link in the creation of Dock's book on pedagogy.²⁴ In a recent congregational visioning process one potential goal that received a lot of support was that of becoming a "teaching church," the idea being to serve as one locus in the community for bringing in well-trained outside resource speakers and teachers, and also to learn and model effective ways of being church. The congregational mission statement itself points to a learning mindset as it declares a desire to be "*a joyful learning community, eager to live and share the peaceable way of Jesus.*"²⁵

Another congregational theme that leads toward a spirit of openness is that of hospitality, a theme that in recent years had been deliberately lifted up and embraced as a commitment the congregation wanted to take seriously. Many newer members or more recent attenders have been quick to say they find a spirit of warmth and friendliness and interest taken in newcomers, as they begin to enter the life of the congregation.

²² Salford Mennonite Church, "Detailed History," About Us, <http://www.salfordmc.org/about-us/history/111-detailed-history> [accessed August 30, 2012].

²³ John Ruth, e-mail message to author, August 16, 2013

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Salford Mennonite Church, "Core Values," About Us, <http://www.salfordmc.org/about-us/core-values> [accessed August 30, 2012], italics mine.

A spirit of hopefulness and good will is also prominent in the congregation at this time, following a difficult period of conflict and disagreement within the last seven or eight years that centered on pastoral leadership and questions of structure. Though memories and sensitivities from that time of conflict remain, there has been a grateful readiness to move on. The welcome of an all-new pastoral team two and a half years ago was joyful and energizing for both the congregation and the new team.

These characteristics of openness to newness and to learning, of warmth and hospitality, of a current hopefulness and trust in the present, still rather new, leadership team all contribute to an environment that can accept some stretching, some teasing at the edges of people's comfort zones. A more inflexible, more resistant strain is also present in the congregation, however, sometimes occurring in the same people who evidence this hopeful openness. Some in the congregation would not particularly value higher education, feeling a distance or an aloofness from it. There is enough sensitivity about this that the LAC counseled against my asking on surveys for an indication of a responder's level of education.

Some of the lesser elasticity, particularly in regards to our body-selves and the arts, may well be corollary to the premium placed on practicality and, especially, service in Mennonite ethos. Mennonites have a long history of understanding the life of discipleship as being a lived-out commitment to following Jesus, to living as he lived. Core to what we are about as Christians are such things as simplicity of lifestyle, mutual care and aid in times of distress, concerns for social justice and peace-making. A method of theological reflection—*theology in action* or *praxis*—that sees knowledge as inseparable from doing, what might be called 'performative knowledge' is an accessible

one for Mennonites to use and understand.²⁶ As with much of the Quaker tradition, Mennonites have tended to “eschew creedal orthodoxy in favor of radical discipleship in which the testimony of one’s life is the essence of one’s profession of faith.”²⁷ There is deep-rooted familiarity with *praxis*, practice, with practicality and the doing of the gospel. Poet Julia Kasdorf writes of Mennonites,

We hoe thistles along fence rows for fear
we may not be perfect as our Heavenly Father.
We clean up his disasters. No one has to
call; we just show up in the wake of tornadoes
with hammers, after floods with buckets.²⁸

Such reflexes seem to be hard-wired into us as an ethnic, religious people, and we have no difficulty speaking theologically about them. The life of the physical body for purposes of service and work is familiar to us. The life of the physical body for purposes of praise and prayer and play (except for sports) is not.

In an unexpected twist, perhaps this Mennonite-friendly method of *praxis* theological reflection, with its firm rooting in social justice and its high valuing of *doing*, may also have something to suggest about worship that is more embodied, more participatory, more shaped by music and movement and art and silence. “We ... find that this method of theological reflection invites the recasting of theology itself as a transformative and practical discipline. Thus the criterion of theological adequacy within

²⁶ Graham, Walton, and Ward, 170.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

²⁸ Julia Kasdorf, *The Body and the Book: Writing from a Mennonite Life*, Center Books in Anabaptist Studies (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 64.

the praxis method is to be found in the simple question, ‘Will it liberate?’²⁹ That was my hope for this project, that in some small way doses of dramatization, of expressive movement observed or participated in, would bring a measure of further freedom. I hoped they would counter some of the “stuckness” that Walter Wink talked about and bring a greater freedom for worshippers to inhabit the wide range of spiritual responses that we are capable of: joy, sorrow, penitence, rage, solidarity, petition, lament, gratitude, search (to name a few). Wink said of his own work, “We are not interested in using body movement to understand the Bible better [though I, personally, welcomed that aim in my own efforts]. The goal is rather to use both Bible and body movement as means of facilitating the transformation of participants.”³⁰

I hoped the concrete offerings of embodiment and participation in the course of the project would deepen the experience of worship, at least for some in the congregation. My belief that what comes through the body is held and kept in the body underlay my belief that our bodies have a significant role to play in our spiritual formation and transformation.

²⁹ Graham, Walton, and Ward, 172.

³⁰ Wink in *Body and Bible*, 127.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PLAY GROUP

Among all the experiences that informed my dreams for embodied, physically expressive worship, some of the most compelling were my experiences with an approach known as InterPlay. A system of playful, improvisatory theater- and dance-based forms, InterPlay allows individuals at all levels of comfort and capacity to enter into expressive movement, stillness, story, and song. I imagined training a small group of individuals in the congregation, teaching them some of the InterPlay forms, and then together finding ways to bring these experiments into the worship life of the congregation. I imagined this core group of “players” at times would function as performers, leading worship by letting the sound and shape of what they did become the means of inviting worshippers into a particular spiritual interchange or space. I imagined these players at other times would help to lead simple bits of movement or improvised sound or brief story-telling that the whole congregation would do. The possibilities for either mode (performing/presenting or leading all-congregation engagement) seemed very rich: prayerful movement to music, done “on behalf of” prayer requests made in the congregation; improvised re-telling of scripture stories; free-flowing toning or chant offered in praise and celebration; thirty-second paired sharing by people in their seats in response to a simple question related to the worship direction of the morning. The specific improvisatory forms that InterPlay is based on suggested these possibilities and more.

Though I vacillated sharply between hope and despair regarding actually bringing any of this about in the congregation, I had confidence that the principles underlying InterPlay and its forms were spiritually sound and appropriate for use in a faith community. InterPlay was developed in the early 1980s by Phil Porter and Cynthia Winton-Henry, each an artist, dancer, theologian, teacher, and minister in his/her own right. InterPlay is built on an understanding that most of us live with a mind-body split, an alienation between the linear rationality of our minds and the more fluid and subconscious-driven spirit-self which imprints itself on and in our bodies. The alienation keeps us confined to living out of one half or the other of our complex selves. Identifying eight “body wisdom” principles, InterPlay lends itself beautifully to the spiritual journey toward integration and wholeness.

Three of those eight principles seemed especially pertinent for my work with the congregation: “easy focus,” “incrementality,” and “affirmation.”¹ “Easy focus” has primarily to do with releasing the constantly chirping critical inner voice of judgment that constricts many of us and makes us self-conscious and less willing to take risks. This “easy focus” release of the judger is an apt metaphor for the theological transition from a God of judgment and angry vigilance to a God who offers unconditional and redeeming love. “Incrementality” is about accepting whatever is your current level of ability or freedom or attitudinal state, and understanding that what is invited or requested is nothing more than one small next step. This principle has always seemed to me a good metaphor for Christian discipleship and the chosen journey of being transformed into the likeness of Christ. For some there are dramatic conversions; for most of us there is

¹ Phil Porter and Cynthia Winton-Henry, *Leading Your Own Life: Secrets One* (Oakland, CA: Body Wisdom, Inc., 2003), 15.

incrementality—one small step forward from where we are now, often nothing very rash or big. “Affirmation” is the principle of looking for the good, and encouraging oneself and others for the effort and the participation. It works with the assumption that “anybody can create authentic, believable work,” and thereby it frees all manner of expression and exploration and experimentation that otherwise may well stay locked up in the rhythms and postures of our everyday habits of thinking and doing.² Many of the fruits of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) resemble the practice of affirmation: gentleness, kindness, generosity, patience, love, and joy.

Aware that I was stepping gingerly into this project, I also realized I had never really allowed myself to believe that a multi-generational, mixed-gender group willing to learn and practice something as unfamiliar and unconventional as InterPlay could come about in a fairly traditional Mennonite congregation. The calling together of fourteen people in the Salford congregation who were game to try, in itself, exceeded anything I had allowed myself to dream. Seven men and seven women, ranging in age from twenty-three to eighty-six, said “yes” to the experiment and exploration. We would meet four Wednesday evenings between the beginning of January and the beginning of Lent (February 17) for an hour and a half at a time. Apart from one woman who had participated in (all-female) InterPlay groups I had led elsewhere, none of the fourteen had much of an idea about what to expect. Members of the Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) did most of the inviting, with the following as the gist of what they were to include in the invitation:

For Lent and Easter this year we will be seeking to enrich our worship experience by using some simple movement and theater forms that Beth

² Porter and Winton-Henry, 16.

Yoder will be teaching/leading. We are putting together a small group of about 12-15 people who will meet somewhat regularly beginning in January to learn and experience some of these forms, and to reflect on how they do or don't lend themselves to the experience of prayer and worship. The forms have been developed with the idea that they are something "any body can do" – it's a do-it-in-your-own-way/from-whenever-you-are" kind of thing. We're hoping to get a group that is fairly intergenerational.³

Attendance at the group gatherings was somewhat erratic; there was no evening with all fourteen individuals present, and only two of the group were able to attend all four sessions. In a similar vein, the degree of familiarity with forms that could be developed in four sessions was quite limited. Nevertheless, the spirit in the group remained open, congenial, both light-hearted and willing to be reflective—even adventuresome—throughout, and the quality of interaction and responsiveness to what we did together more than fulfilled my hopes.

A typical group session included opportunity to talk about experiences or ideas pertaining to movement in worship, participation in a series of InterPlay forms, and short periods of reflecting aloud about what individuals noticed as we did the forms. Fairly early in each session we did a sequence of stretching and moving, which served as a warm-up, and then followed it with the InterPlay form "Walk, Stop, Run." Both the warm-up and Walk, Stop, Run gave people simple ways to loosen up physically—and in their interaction with each other—and to move to music, primed to do so as free from self-judgment (or other-judgment) as possible. Other InterPlay forms that were included over the course of the four weeks were "One Hand Dance," "One Hand Dance – on behalf of," "Hand to Hand Contact," "Babbling," "Group Hand Dance," and "Playing with Patterns and Space" (see appendix C).

³ Author, e-mail message to identified members of Lay Advisory Committee, December 7, 2012.

Evidence of both the unfamiliarity and the inherently hospitable nature of InterPlay quickly appeared. We met in a large room Sunday school classroom, empty except for a half-circle of chairs I placed at one end of the space (the chairs served as transition space, which we used for conversation and instructions at the beginning of each session and then removed for the actual movement). The LAC observer for the first group gathering commented about group members' entrance into the space, "Several members entered hesitantly, seemingly intimidated by the set-up. [One] made a laugh and pretended to leave. A few took off their shoes and got comfortable."⁴ A climate of relaxed ease and comfortableness developed fairly quickly in the evening, as people entered in with various levels of involvement, then loosened up, and eventually found themselves having fun with some of the movement, which at times bordered on silliness: pretending to throw big globs of paint in any and all directions; experimenting with how short or long one's walking steps can be; scrunching one's face up as tight as can be, then opening it as wide as possible; finding ways to lean on each other; doing "fake tap dancing" and "fake Tai Chi." At one point a group member commented to his nearby movement partners, "And she gets [academic] credit for this?!"

My hope was to provide structures and space, through the InterPlay forms, for participants to again experience natural, un-self-conscious, and spontaneous movement, and if possible, to experience it also as a mode of spiritual expression. One activity involved free-form movement with just one hand and arm, done from a sitting position or lying on one's back on the floor. As it came to an end, I told participants to just remain where they were a bit longer, and afterwards one man commented, "I realized that I

⁴ Cindy Moyer, written notes from observation of InterPlay group, January 2, 2013.

seldom just rest. It was good to experience it.” At the end of the second group session—her first—a busy (and new) foster mom, said, “I could just be and really have a break, for the first time [since the children had arrived two weeks ago].” Seminary professor and spiritual director Jane Vennard writes,

We want time with God, but we spend our time in other ways... God is found (and God finds us) in the spacious moments of life when we are willing to cease our activities, to stop our relentless doing and simply be. Because we do not know how to “do” this, we are afraid. The spaciousness of pure being terrifies us. But we must learn to be with the emptiness if we are to meet God.⁵

InterPlay became a channel for some of these participants to have a taste, again, of simply being.

The theme of refreshment emerged clearly in participants’ reflections at the end of the project. One of my co-pastors came to participate for one of the evening sessions, and at the end he commented to the group, “I came to the evening expecting to feel tense, and instead I feel like I’ve taken a deep breath of fresh air.” Asked to write four or five words that characterized how each had experienced the InterPlay activities and evenings, players offered, among other things: freeing, release, relaxing, restful, calm, refreshing, energizing, detoxing, prayerful, reflective, carefree. Several commented, after specific activities, that they felt freedom to be a child again and the activities took them back to fond childhood memories.⁶

Several other themes related to spiritual experience and formation also appeared in group members’ comments as they reflected on their participation. One thread

⁵ Jane E. Vennard, *Praying with Body and Soul* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 1998), 21.

⁶ Moyer, January 2, 2013.

suggested aspects of growth and newness, as indicated by words named in the post-project questionnaires, such as: stretching, promising, potential, change, interesting, intriguing, stimulating, creative, explorative, discovery, inside out, challenging, surprising. One man commented about the group being taken “into new and uncharted spaces”; earlier in the process he had described the InterPlay experience as “a different world, entering a different space—a time to transcend and to vacate the normal thoughts and space we occupy.”⁷ In response to the specific question about what bearing InterPlay activities and experience might have on his on-going spiritual life, this same man wrote, “Being introduced to that little watcha-ma-jiggim ‘switch’ located between our eyes. It allows me to move beyond old patterns.”⁸

Others in the group also identified with the spiritual importance of freedom from judgment. InterPlay grants participants playful access to such freedom through a ritual tossing off (“Wheeee!”) of the resident judge imagined to be situated in that spot between our eyes where brow-furrowing often occurs—“the little watcha-ma-jiggim ‘switch’” of the earlier comment. In response to the post-project question about possible InterPlay implications for on-going spiritual life, one woman named “blowing away judgment, moving freely, not worrying about others’ thoughts.”⁹ A young man responded, “The activity of ‘being church’ might be easier if we could find some way to remove other internal judges and accept people and situations with less prejudice.”¹⁰

⁷ InterPlay group member #10, interview by author, February 7, 2013.

⁸ InterPlay group member #10, post-project questionnaire.

⁹ InterPlay group member #2, post-project questionnaire.

¹⁰ InterPlay group member #5, post-project questionnaire.

Another spiritual formation theme that was named in some way by a number of the group participants was that of building community. Months later, in a setting where various members of the congregation were invited to reflect together on possible forms or groups that might provide a way for people to support each other in their desire for going deeper spiritually, one young man named InterPlay as such a venue. From his experience in the January/February gatherings he offered, “It’s a great way to get to know people better, in ways that don’t often happen.”¹¹ Words group members used to characterize their experience of InterPlay included: community, interactive, connected, fellowship, bonding. One member of the group said, “I felt like I could experience God through the community of the group.”¹² Another said, “It helped me feel like ‘we’re all in this together’... I left feeling good about my body and had a renewed sense of community.”¹³

My fondest hope for the InterPlay group was that they might, as I had over the years, experience participation in some of these forms as prayer. Our times together were too short, too few, and too sporadic in any one individual’s schedule for that to develop very fully. But there were glimpses. “Prayerful” was a word used by one group member to characterize the overall experience; two others said “reflective.” In thinking back over the experience, another woman commented that what could have bearing on her on-going experience of worship, prayer, or spiritual life was the “use of hands to bring heart to God

¹¹ InterPlay group member #1, convened conversation, August 11, 2013.

¹² InterPlay group member #1, post-project questionnaire.

¹³ InterPlay group member #6, post-project questionnaire.

/ Jesus.”¹⁴ She also sensed some impact from her participation in a movement piece during one of the Lenten services: “I am more expressive with my hands in my own prayer. I recognize that I am impacted in my freedom of expression when I am at church.”¹⁵

Though most InterPlay forms are not overtly spiritual, several of them lend themselves readily to direct spiritual expression. “One Hand Dance ‘on behalf of’” especially invites a sense of prayer—intercessory prayer, in particular. After the group has become somewhat familiar with the “One Hand Dance,” participants are invited to bring to mind a person or situation or relationship they would each like to “dance” on behalf of. The evening this was first introduced to the group, the LAC member who was observing noted, “Everyone seemed very absorbed, and after the second dance there was a reverent silence. It felt like there was a spirit of prayer to the activity.”¹⁶ The participants themselves noticed that the experience had felt healing and like prayer without words.¹⁷ The co-pastor who had come to join us that evening entered into each activity. He and his wife had lost a baby in late stages of pregnancy just five months earlier, and the “on behalf of” hand dance took him to a place of connection with the child. “The instruction to paint a picture with our hand for someone made me immediately think of what I want to communicate to baby Madeline. In that space I felt

¹⁴ InterPlay group member #14, post-project questionnaire.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Moyer, notes, January 16, 2013.

¹⁷ Ibid.

myself having a conversation with her... I even felt her say, 'I love you, Daddy,' as we wrapped up the time. It was all I could do to sit up off the floor."¹⁸

Though the time was short and the group experience only a brief initiation, in my estimation members clearly found embodiment—particularly, use of the body in natural but unaccustomed ways—to be a significant channel for multiple aspects of spiritual experience and formation. These included rest and release, freedom from judgment and willingness to take risks, enjoyment of challenge and exploration, community-building, give and take in prayerful communion with God. My hope was that their experience in the small group might become a kernel of energy and vision that could in turn bring some of the same fruits to the whole congregation.

The goal of preparing these fourteen willing and resilient participants to lead some kinds of movement in the larger congregation was ambitious, and I quickly found myself adapting expectations and trying to find the balance between just having them experience the forms as fully as possible, on one hand, and keeping an eye on potential pieces to present to and with the congregation, on the other. Midway in the process I realized that aiming for core group members *to lead* the congregation was more than any of us could achieve in the short time frame we had. The amount and complexity of communication to pull that off was considerable, and the one week when we could have come close, I just did not have enough additional time and energy to coordinate it. Eventually, though, all fourteen members of the core group participated in one or another of the pieces presented during the six weeks of Lenten worship services. Three of those pieces were more in the genre of drama than in that of dance/movement; a fourth could

¹⁸ Ben Wideman, e-mail message to author, January 16, 2013.

be argued as representative of either genre. The other two presentations came more directly out of InterPlay forms, and I was especially humbled by, grateful to, and proud of the group members who were willing to “go public” with what was new to them and would prove to be stretching for some in the congregation.

For the congregation the vast difference between their experience of InterPlay-based presentations and the core group’s experience was, of course, the difference between observing and participating. From my own experience of being “in the audience” and being witness to others’ drama or movement presentations, I believed that even the experience of seeing embodiment happen had power and potential for inviting those watching into a place of deeper spiritual openness and connection. From my experience of InterPlay and its forms, I believed that observers might be moved in some way, even while seated—seeing rather than doing. Though these presentations did not further the level of participation on the part of the whole congregation, they did introduce a greater degree of embodiment into the worship.

The InterPlay-based presentations elicited both resonances of deepened, enriched worship *and* reverberations of resistance and distancing. The first of the two InterPlay-based presentations was a five-person movement sequence (it was going to be six, but the sixth person woke up that morning with a bad case of pink-eye) that accompanied the reading of a scripture medley combining portions of Psalm 27 and verses 16 and 18 from I John 4 (see Appendix D). These passages speak of the fear of the Lord, on one hand, and perfect love as casting out fear, on the other. Using the concepts of shape and stillness from InterPlay, the group moved through various positions expressing, each person in his or her own way: great fearfulness, alternating with openness and freedom

and joy; return to fearfulness; relaxation into free and upright positions; postures of longing and search; and eventual portrayal of freedom and joy and connectedness with each other. In the final analysis of feedback through post-project questionnaires, this piece received the fewest comments generally, and the lowest number of positive comments. There were, however, twice as many positive comments about it as negative, including some of the following: “effective for me in terms of understanding the message that would last in my mind more than if it was just verbal”; “I could feel the emotions being expressed through the movement/stillness”; “helped me focus and prepare for the sermon”; “a powerful way to get me more in touch with my own feelings and humanity as a whole”; “the physical movements helped convey the message”; “meaningful.”¹⁹

The second of the InterPlay-based presentations we did during the weeks of Lent involved four of the InterPlay group, who did free-form movement during the congregational prayer time. I led the prayer that morning and incorporated an all-congregational refrain, “Lord, hear our prayers,” as various prayer requests were brought to the congregation. Acknowledging, then, that we often find words inadequate and do not know how to pray, I invited the congregation to continue in prayer by singing and humming, from our hymnal, the prayer song “Through Our Fragmentary Prayers” (see Appendix E). At the end of each verse of the song, the pianist and congregation paused as I spoke a prayer concern; then, during the humming of the chorus by the congregation the four movers each did their own interpretive expression of prayer on behalf of that concern.

¹⁹ Salford Mennonite Church members, post-project questionnaires #28, 30, and four open call.

For the congregation this piece, of all that we did during Lent, was the closest to dance, as such, and led into the most unfamiliar territory. Comments in the post-project evaluation reflected some of the discomfort: “I experienced it as more distracting than engaging”; “I found it harder to pray or offer prayers when watching others”; “it was silly”; “this didn’t have much meaning for me”; “didn’t like it.”²⁰ There were many people, however, who did find it meaningful. One woman wrote, “Loved this—each person offered a different interpretation and everyone could find which one they connected to.”²¹ Another commented, “I liked the visual feel of our prayers being sent to God.”²² Yet another wrote, “It was very touching ... appreciated the participants’ openness.”²³ One of the four participants reflected about his experience and expressions of feedback he had received:

It was a unique way to share feelings during prayer and helpful to draw us into prayer. Our Sunday school class is less enthusiastic about changes, but [our teacher] said that changes come and we need to be open minded and receptive to new styles that stretch our opinions about ‘how things should be.’ He reviewed some changes that occurred some years ago which made some people uncomfortable. Overall, most classmates are ready to accept newer ideas and said they were glad I was up there and not them. I accept that as an affirmation of love despite different viewpoints.²⁴

One woman thanked me after the service and commented that she had found the experience to be “lovely—very worshipful.”

²⁰ Salford Mennonite Church members, post-project questionnaires #s5, 38, and three open call.

²¹ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire open call.

²² Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire open call.

²³ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire open call.

²⁴ InterPlay group member #3, e-mail message to author, March 7, 2013.

Though neither the core group movers nor I would have called what was done that day liturgical dancing, Jane Vennard's reflections on liturgical dancing pertain to the experience at Salford:

When we watch a liturgical dancer, our own bodies can become involved even though we are not dancing and probably not moving at all. If we are open to the experience something happens in our own bodies when we witness the movements of another. ... As we watch ... we can experience through their bodies a new level of understanding ... If we are willing to open our hearts to the dancer's experience, *our* souls are infused with the spirit, and *our* bodies and souls become one. When this happens, we need not pray, because we have *become* prayer, and we have not moved a muscle.²⁵

Some in the congregation were willing to open their own hearts to what their fellow members, at the front of the worship space, were expressing through their bodies. For them prayer happened, without words and without their own movement. I would submit that the prayer arose from a place within them that is less often accessed through words, but it is not possible to prove that, as far as I know.

At many points in the course of this project I felt humbled, deeply gratified, surprised by joy (to use C. S. Lewis' phrase). My work with the core group of fourteen people who were willing to enter strange new territory by learning, and then sharing with the congregation, some of the forms of InterPlay was prime in that way. They gently, graciously widened my own faith and trust in God and in God's people.

²⁵ Vennard, 23-24.

CHAPTER FOUR

SEVEN MOVING SUNDAYS

To move toward more embodied, more participatory worship, we planned for each of the six Sundays in Lent, plus Easter Sunday morning, to include a theater- or movement-based presentation performed by a small group. Additionally, each Sunday would include an element of movement meant to involve the whole congregation. With the exception of the time members of the InterPlay group led in *prayer* through movement, each piece performed by a small group related closely to some part of the scripture of the morning:

- First Choric reading based on Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13)
- Second Shape and Stillness based on Fear/Love texts (Psalm 27 and I John 4)
- Third Free-form Movement "on behalf of," in congregational prayer
- Fourth Bibliodrama of Prodigal Son story (Luke 15:11-32)
- Fifth Tableaux, three scenes of woman anointing Jesus' feet (John 12:1-8)
- Sixth Original script, readers' theater, "I Heard the Voice of Jesus" (primarily words of Jesus from the gospels)
- Seventh (Easter Sunday) Dramatic monologue/recitation of John 20:1-18

In the course of those presentations about forty different members or attenders of the congregation participated in what we created. A consistent thread of comment afterwards reflected how much people had appreciated and enjoyed seeing such a variety of

individuals involved. Comments noted the breadth of age-range as well as the presence of some who would not customarily be seen up front. Though the majority of the congregation remained in the role of observers for these pieces, there was a sense of it being “more participatory” simply because of the numbers and range of people involved in the actual doing. For the all-congregation movement I sought to be clear each Sunday that it was optional, a choice to be made on the spot each week, and so the level of participation varied from Sunday to Sunday.

For each of the performance pieces and for the all-congregation movement there were those whose response indicated a significant level of engagement, with suggestions that they had been affected spiritually. On the first Sunday of Lent six individuals read and did simple enactment of a script based on Luke’s account of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness (see Appendix F). I had conceived of the “Satan” voice as multiple voices within Jesus, as he sought to discern and test his call. The cacophony of inner voices was very clear as the group enacted the piece, and it became an effective precursor to further development in the sermon regarding the inner spiritual struggle which we all face at times. While numerous people responded with such words as “moving,” “memorable,” “excellent,” I was especially gratified by comments that indicated some in the congregation had discovered new meaning in the text and a new dimension in their understanding of Jesus. “I appreciated seeing the verse in a new light. You could really feel the pressure on Jesus to give in to the temptations.”¹ One said, “It helped me understand and contemplate Jesus’ experience intensely and effectively.”² Still another

¹ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire #27.

² Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire open call.

commented, “I felt connected to Jesus’ humanity in a new way.”³ A thoughtful, seminary-educated young woman in the congregation reflected on the service afterwards and said,

[The] skit was so thought-provoking. The way you portrayed Jesus’ temptations made it real in a way it has never before been for me. I know that scripture says that he can understand our weakness and temptation, but I don’t know that I believed it before, really, deep down. But with the relentless “voices” coming after him, playing on his weakness and possible insecurities, it seemed real and relevant.⁴

The drama-based pieces proved especially accessible to the congregation and on questionnaires filled out after the project, those pieces all received a higher rating than did either of the two pieces that involved more abstract movement. Even so, there were people in the congregation who were very responsive to the movement-related presentations. When persons reflected on the movement that embodied scripture contrasting “fear of God” with the teaching that “perfect love casts out fear,” one person observed, “I could feel the emotions being expressed through the movement/stillness.”⁵ A man wrote, “I thought this was effective for me in terms of understanding the message that would last in my mind more than if it was just verbal.”⁶ In their reflections about their experience two participants in the movement indicated some of the effect it had on them. One said, “The process of preparing for the service and hearing the words repeatedly strengthened their impact.”⁷ A week later before worship, when I met another

³ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire #45.

⁴ Emily Ralph, email to author, February 21, 2013.

⁵ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire #30.

⁶ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire #28.

⁷ InterPlay group member #5, post-project questionnaire.

of the participants in this Fear/Love presentation, she immediately said as she started toward me, “No fear! That has stayed with me all week.”

On the third Sunday, during the time of congregational prayer, four members of the InterPlay group performed wordless movement done “on behalf of” specific prayer requests. The participants themselves were affected by what they did. One said of her involvement, “It was sacred to me.”⁸ Another commented, “I was struck by how much more meaningful the prayer was to me personally when I participated in the movement. I said to myself when I sat down [after the movement] that everyone should have a chance to do that because it is so much more meaningful.”⁹ A member of the congregation spoke of being transported “into presence and stillness” and she observed “a beautiful energy of connection evident between the four [movers].”¹⁰ Yet another of the participants in the movement reported that his wife “saw several people wiping tears after the prayer (she included herself).”¹¹ A sense of the sacred, a deepened sense of prayer, experience of presence and stillness, being moved to tears—all these suggest the prayer form was indeed a significant spiritual experience for some.

The most positive feedback in the course of the weeks came in response to the bibliodrama we presented on the story of the prodigal son (see Appendix G). Bibliodrama is an approach to scripture which invites participants to give voice to characters (or even objects) within a text, exploring imaginatively the thoughts and

⁸ InterPlay group member #9, post-project questionnaire.

⁹ InterPlay group member #7, post-project questionnaire.

¹⁰ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire open call.

¹¹ InterPlay group member #3, e-mail to author, March 7, 2013.

feelings, observations and meanings, that may have been present in the events depicted in a particular scripture passage. Peter Pitzele, originator of the form as I learned it, says of bibliodrama

Our fundamental hypothesis is that the biblical narrative has more life in it, more voice in it than is captured by the words on the page. I, the reader, meet the biblical narrative as if I were meeting a living being. I speak to the images and characters in the bible in an unmediated address. The questions that I ask of the text I ask as if the text could answer me back directly in its own voice. . . . This answering occurs when I, as reader, step into the story; I *become* the character, speaking *as* that character, not *about* him or her. . . . In Bibliodrama, passive readers become active players; we assume roles.¹²

I had directed bibliodrama two or three times before in a worship setting, but it was in a much smaller congregation and in a more intimate space. I had apprehensions about trying it in a congregation of nearly three hundred people. One form of bibliodrama rests primarily on inviting those in the congregation to “give voice” to the characters or objects in the story, with participants remaining in their seats and responding to questions in a completely unrehearsed way. Another mode involves assigning parts ahead of time and even rehearsing, though without developing a script or any written guideline. Rehearsal is more a matter of becoming familiar with the form and exploring what *might* happen in the course of responding to the questions. I chose the second mode, although I also built in a couple of very brief places where anyone from the congregation could call out responses. The power of bibliodrama in large part comes from the authenticity and immediacy of connection that the “players” make between themselves and the biblical story. Therein lies some of the risk, as well, for the process can unwittingly take participants into very vulnerable—and highly personal—territory. I

¹² Peter Pitzele, *Scripture Windows: Toward a Practice of Bibliodrama* (Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 1998), 28.

did not, in any way, want to the players to end up feeling exposed in ways they would not choose. Additionally, I had never directed bibliodrama in quite this way before, which also heightened my apprehension.

The three players were real troupers through our experiment. Two from the InterPlay core group played the father and the aggrieved elder son. While the “elder son” had been a theater major in college, the “father” was self-admittedly finding the weeks of InterPlay to pull him out of his comfort zone. He was, nevertheless, more than willing to take on the bibliodrama role and urged that I ask, to play the part of the profligate younger son, a young man who just weeks before had been expelled from his college campus. A bond of friendship already existed between the “father” and this “younger son,” and I sensed that it could be important to them both to enter into the story in this way. The intensity and precariousness of it all was compounded when, just a week before the drama was scheduled to happen in the service, the “father’s” mother-in-law died within twenty-four hours of a tragic fall down a flight of concrete stairs. I sought to hold plans lightly and worried about whether or not to accept the grieving man’s decision to continue with the role.

For many in the congregation, I believe the story came alive in a new way as these three spoke their responses to the questions I posed to their “characters” at various points in the story (see Appendix H). Their answers came from that nebulous territory that fuses imagination and real life experience. Numerous people spoke to me about how moved they were by what had taken place, several barely able to speak or find words for what had touched them so deeply. One man commented, “That a man would run to greet

me ... reminded me that I don't feel that level of acceptance."¹³ A woman said, "I was very moved and developed a deeper understanding of reconciliation, especially among family members."¹⁴ Another person said she had found it "very moving—I liked that it was not scripted and came from the heart."¹⁵

Many commented on the extraordinarily real and powerful portrayal of the father. By taking a role up front in worship, something unaccustomed for him, the father-player gave an exceptional gift to the congregation that morning. He allowed his own inner being, formed by years of life and family experience, to encounter the father in the story—to feel the shock of affront when the son asked for his inheritance, the loss and longing of the son's absence, the explosion of joy at his hoped-for but not-assumed return, the wistful desire for the older son to be at peace. I believe the congregation felt the risk it was for this man to accept the role, to embody it in the midst of the congregation. In feeling his risk, we came, whether we knew it or not, directly in touch with the vulnerability and risk God, the "father," takes with all his wayward children. As the three players opened themselves up to direct interaction with these biblical characters, they moved us all more fully into the intersection between scripture and our own lives.

In contrast to the spontaneity and unpredictability of bibliodrama, we used the form of tableaux the following week for portraying the John 12 scene of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with oil. Tableaux may be described as "frozen pictures," or arrangements of human sculpture. The arrangements are carefully planned and rehearsed

¹³ InterPlay group member #4, post-project questionnaire.

¹⁴ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire open call.

¹⁵ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire #42.

beforehand, making this a very controlled form. For the actual presentation the congregation is asked to close their eyes while a portion of scripture is read aloud. The pause of silence is their signal to open their eyes, at which time they view a scene created by the actors in the tableau, who remain completely unmoving while the congregation looks on for about ten seconds. The reader's voice continuing on with the passage signals the congregation to again close their eyes, and while everyone is listening to the text with eyes closed, the actors move into a new position to create the next scene. The next pause of silence again signals the congregation to open their eyes and view the new scene. The concept is simple and fairly straightforward (though some people found it confusing to know when to open and close their eyes), and I did not anticipate how powerful and effective many would find it as they watched.

We portrayed three scenes. In the first Mary bent over Jesus' feet to pour the ointment on them, as a curious Martha, two contemplating disciples, and a disapproving Judas watched. The second scene featured Judas sharply complaining to Jesus about the woman's wastefulness, thrusting himself into the gathering as the others watched, intent and somewhat pulled back. In the final scene Jesus extended a reassuring and protective hand to Mary, while turning in challenge to Judas. One person commented, "This one [out of the seven pieces done] was most moving to me."¹⁶ Someone put in words what had especially connected with him: "the love of Christ for Mary ... her giving of herself."¹⁷ "The scripture took on new life today at Salford. The effect was awesome.

¹⁶ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire #32.

¹⁷ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire #16.

Thanks to you and your crew for all the time and effort,” wrote one man.¹⁸ “The time of silence and closed eyes made the surprise of the tableau surprisingly powerful,” wrote another.¹⁹ My husband remarked about these scenes for a number of days afterwards, “I keep seeing them.” Though I would not know how to conclusively measure the effect of these three scenes on people’s spiritual development, I am very sure that more people heard this portion of scripture in a new and fresh way than do typically from the usual reading aloud that happens on a Sunday morning.

On Palm Sunday we did an original chancel drama / readers’ theater presentation that consisted primarily of words of Jesus throughout his ministry and into the passion (see Appendix I). It was full of color and sound, movement and participation. Fifteen people took prescribed roles (some of them non-speaking), and four instrumentalists played musical lines at intervals throughout the piece. Many of the children who come weekly to the front for children’s time participated in laying multi-colored scarves and green palm fronds all down the platform steps and out the center aisle at one point, as we recalled the laying of palm branches and cloaks on the road in front of Jesus as he entered Jerusalem. Later those would be stripped away, as the readers’ theater moved into the Passion part of Jesus’ life and ministry, and six men carried in a cross and its massive base. A drum periodically sounded the foreboding and gathering threat against Jesus, and instruments of different tones and timbres took turns playing a single line from the song “I heard the voice of Jesus say.” The musical phrase served as a prelude to each section of gospel texts recapitulating many of Jesus’ words throughout his ministry. The whole

¹⁸ Salford Mennonite Church member, e-mail to author, March 17, 2013.

¹⁹ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire #31.

space of the auditorium became the playing area, as it had for the bibliodrama two weeks earlier. Though I had directed the Palm Sunday piece two or three times in my previous, smaller congregation and it had been well-received, as I made preparations this time, a familiar and critical voice in my head kept sniffing loudly, “Pageantry. Nothing but pageantry.”

Afterwards many, many people expressed that they had found the morning meaningful and moving. One woman asked later in the day, “Are you getting tired of hearing how powerful the service was? I heard a lot of comments about how meaningful people found it.” The Sunday school teacher for the class of oldest members in the congregation reported that they had all found the service meaningful. A man in his seventies came to me with tears in his eyes and said, “That was very meaningful. Thank you for doing it.” One younger mother of elementary age children wrote a note saying,

“Just wanted to let you know that even though I am not a huge fan of drama, today’s service was particularly moving and I really enjoyed it. I thought it was really well-written—loved the music/reading combo—and well portrayed. And the ‘drop’ of the cross ... WOW ... so symbolic. I’m not sure where you were at that moment, but there was utter silence in the pews after that drop, even from children.”²⁰

She went on to relate that children in her “middler” Sunday school class (ages 9-11) were also all talking about the sound of the cross dropping into its base, how it made them feel and what it could have meant.

Others also reflected on ways the service had touched them and brought them into greater awareness of Jesus’ experience and the significance for us. “Thanks for your efforts for the meaningful service this a.m. I could have cried when the cross came in ...

²⁰ Salford Mennonite Church member, e-mail to author, March 24, 2013.

One doesn't need words at that point."²¹ "This was very powerful. I thought the abstract quality had a stronger impact than an explicit drama would have."²² Another said, "The cross was the most powerful for me. It brought the full weight of the crucifixion right into our sanctuary."²³ One articulation of the worship experience captured what, hopefully, others had experienced as well:

"What a beautiful service! After so many years of Holy Weeks and Palm Sundays, it takes serious effort to create a worship experience where it all feels fresh and meaningful. I was particularly moved when the cross was carried up the center, on the path of cloaks and palms meant to carry the conquering messiah. The imagery of the cross up front, next to the banner, behind the palms and candle was searing. When the helpers began taking away the cloaks and palms—then the banner, I wanted to scream at them to leave them—I wasn't ready for the joy and hope to end. Involving the congregation in that transition from Palm Sunday to Good Friday (something that normally happens during the week when no one is looking) was so powerful. . . . Your drama, too, was powerful. Hearing the ministry of Jesus surveyed, one statement after another—all the healings, teachings, conversations—was amazing. It reinforced the radical nature of his time on earth and why the religious leaders were out to get him. The story transitioned us from the children's palms and worship to the sorrow of the cross."²⁴

Another simply commented, "I heard Jesus in a different way."²⁵

The following Sunday, Easter morning, I stood on the steps up to the platform as the lone presenter and spoke the John 20:1-18 passage as a dramatic monologue. By that time in the course of the weeks I was exhausted, dipping into discouragement about the things that had not developed as I had hoped (primarily the all-congregation movement

²¹ Salford Mennonite Church member, e-mail to author, March 24, 2013.

²² InterPlay group member #5, post-project questionnaire.

²³ InterPlay group member #6, post-project questionnaire.

²⁴ Emily Ralph, e-mail to author, March 24, 2013.

²⁵ InterPlay group member #12, post-project questionnaire.

piece), and feeling yet again—as I have more Easters than not during my time of ministry—the challenge and impossibility of trying to lead and create worship movements that in some way hint at the mystery, miracle, and magnitude of resurrection.

In all ways this was the simplest of the forms presented during these weeks: one performer, the merest hint of performance attire (a colorful shawl), no props, text memorized straight from the scripture. On the post-project questionnaires one person commented that she hadn't connected as much with this one as some of the others; another commented that she was neither moved nor unmoved by the presentation, that she was just as inspired by the normal scripture reading.²⁶ Others found the form helped them enter the story more fully. "I found myself following along very closely to the event in the story."²⁷ "[This] held my attention, made me feel like Mary herself was telling the story."²⁸ A man commented, "[It] helped me understand the 'cognitive dissonance' with the disciples and Mary in trying to come to grips with the 'impossible.'"²⁹ Even a month and a half later, a member of the Lay Advisory Committee recalled that she had felt "right there in the garden. I remember where I was sitting. I thought, 'I need to listen—she (Mary Magdalene) has something to tell me.'"³⁰ Many people told me after the service they had found it very meaningful.

²⁶ Salford Mennonite Church members, post-project questionnaires #s 45 and 35.

²⁷ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire #16.

²⁸ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire #24.

²⁹ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire open call.

³⁰ Linda Martin, site visit with faculty advisor, Harleysville, PA, May 21, 2013.

My belief seemed to be corroborated through the weeks—that embodied presentation of scripture or spiritual expression, when witnessed, opened new channels of feeling and understanding for many people. The presentations drew people in and engaged both mind and heart in new ways, creating more of a sense of participation and—for some—moving them beyond a primarily observing role in worship. My hopes to significantly engage the majority of the congregation in meaningful, physical participation were harder to fulfill.

When I had originally conceived of this project, I had imagined that the element of physical participation on the part of the congregation might encompass a number of things, the primary modes being ritual action (such as lighting candles, being anointed with oil, partaking of food in some way, dipping hands into water—to name a few) or movement to music. I knew, of course, that the physical environment itself would be very challenging with the long, narrow shape of the worship space and the fixed, closely-spaced pews; the sheer fact of numbers—two hundred fifty to three hundred attenders—was another major component to be dealt with. Though I had led ritual action many times before, primarily in other settings, I had little experience with leading movement to music. With vague images in mind and a certain level of confidence in my ability to “wing it,” I entered the weeks of Lent trusting that this part of the project would sort itself out and emerge as we went.

Several inhibitors for trying to introduce a ritual action that involved the whole congregation each week emerged. One was awareness that it would mean yet another significant block of time to be added in. I have always been attentive to the time element in planning for worship, and my efforts with the project sharpened that further. Though

most of the performed drama/movement pieces were not terribly long, they did add a significant block of time to the worship service. Even more important, though, was my intensifying commitment to an organic development of worship. The service for the first Sunday of Lent had felt very unified: I was both the preacher and the writer of the drama, so I knew how each grew out of the scripture text and how each related to the other. Finding ways to encourage that unity of theme and purpose was more challenging when others were preaching, each with their own unique rhythm of preparation and time-line for clarity of direction for the sermon. In order to bridge the creative work of the preacher and the creative development of other worship elements, I created a template for collaborative worship planning, though it was much easier to create than to implement regularly. With my goal of weekly engaging the congregation in some embodied participatory element, I cast about for ritual involvement that would help to express some aspect of worship in some of the services. Too often the ideas that I considered felt “tacked on” or subsidiary, rather than essential, to the direction otherwise developing in the service.

Almost by default what developed as the participatory element for the whole congregation each week was some guided movement paired with the time of silence that we had been observing for well over a year. Again more by default than by design, I led the movement each week. There was already so much time involved in writing/planning, casting, and rehearsing the small group presentation for each service, that it did not feel manageable to also try to train someone else to lead the all-congregation movement. Because I was closely involved in the overall planning of each service, as well as with the

small group drama/movement piece, I could readily shape the participation movement to reflect the direction the service was moving.

Most often the participation movement occurred after the sermon. As I led into it each week, I stated as clearly as I could that participation was entirely optional and that people were welcome to enter in or to refrain, according to what felt best to them. I tried to give other kinds of options as well: you may wish to remain seated rather than stand; you may wish to do part of the movement but not all of it; you may follow my movements or create your own. The movement tended to involve mostly arm and hand movement. This was one of the disappointments to me about how it all evolved; I would have loved to find a way for us to actually, literally, take some steps, as well.

For the most part the movement served as a nonverbal entry into prayer. At times my purpose was primarily to encourage a heightened awareness of one's own being—physical, emotional, spiritual—in the moment. Along with this heightened awareness, the hope was for a fresh awareness of the presence of God in these moments, as well. I sought not so much to give instructions as to lead by speaking words of prayer and doing movement as I spoke, inviting people then to follow. I also sought to let the meditation and movement flow out of the meaning and focus that had been developing in the service up to that point (see Appendix J).

Some in the congregation found it meaningful and prayerful; some found it distracting and annoying. Some participated, and others did not. Of all the pieces of the project, this one garnered the greatest number of responses and received the most mixed response, with positive comments barely outdistancing negative ones in the post-project questionnaires and a significant number of “neutral” responses also registered (see

Appendix G). Those who appreciated it recognized value in participation and in being stretched. “[This] makes me more aware that we should be active participants and not just come to church to be entertained,” said one; another commented, “Participation during the service helped me stay engaged.”³¹ One woman reflected that it was a “stretching experience, [I] liked it.”³² Some responses intimated a kind of spiritual impact and mirrored some of what I had hoped for. “[I] felt community in the movement.”³³ “I became painfully aware during this guided meditation how I hold onto tension and don’t breathe. So I practiced during the guided meditation, it was very calming to my spirit.”³⁴ “I appreciated how this fostered awareness and being present in the moment.”³⁵ Several people reported being rewarded by an openness they don’t always experience. “I embraced this (I usually find myself wondering what everyone else is thinking), this time I just followed directions and freely went with my own emotions. Kneeling was my favorite part.”³⁶ My husband, who would typically be somewhat reluctant to participate in something like this, surprised me by his comment following one of the early movement-meditations: “It was wonderful—people who chose not to do it just missed out on something meaningful... I don’t often do things, not if they’re hokey. But this wasn’t hokey. It was an opening ... before going into the

³¹ InterPlay group members #s 1 and 5, post-project questionnaires.

³² Salford member, post-project questionnaire open call.

³³ InterPlay group member #12, post-project questionnaire.

³⁴ Salford member, post-project questionnaire #30.

³⁵ Salford member, post-project questionnaire open call.

³⁶ Salford member, post-project questionnaire open call.

silence. It was good.”³⁷ One man in his early sixties responded with the brief comment, “would like more.”³⁸

For all those who appreciated the movement-meditation pieces and found them to enhance their worship experience, there were at least as many who did not. Those who did not appreciate the invited all-congregation movement found it disruptive, lacking dignity, uncomfortable, taking something away from worship. In some ways the level of negative response should not have been at all surprising to me. Though for some the short pieces of movement that led into the times of meditation were passé and hardly worth a thought, for others they were new territory, and the experience of such things in a worship context was quite foreign. A closer look at some of the resistance to efforts at embodiment will follow in the next chapter.

³⁷ Jerry Yoder, conversation with author, February 24, 2013.

³⁸ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire open call.

CHAPTER FIVE
I SHALL NOT BE MOVED

One of the Lay Advisory Committee members expressed the fantastical hopes I did not dare own for myself, in regard to the many experiences of embodiment we introduced to the congregation in these weeks: “I hoped everyone would have such a wonderful experience, they would want to have it all the time.” It was, of course, not that way. While there was a remarkable spirit of openness in much of the congregation, a willingness to give it a go, there were also pronounced voices of resistance and dissent. For a time there were muttered reports of some people staying away from the services, because of these elements we were introducing into the worship. One person specifically commented about the Palm Sunday presentation that he “didn’t come because of the drama sermon.”¹

Negative reactions often especially targeted the all-congregation movement/meditation. “I found this disruptive to the worship service,” reported one man, whose sentiments were echoed by others.² “I did not like any of it at all. It was very disruptive. Took away from worship.”³ “Not for me—I am one who prefers dignity in

¹ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire open call.

² Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire #23.

³ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire open call.

worship and this was not helpful,” commented another.⁴ Some spoke in terms of the level of discomfort they experienced or observed. “[This was] okay to do sometimes in occasional service but the wiggling, stretching, touching of hands to others made some feel uncomfortable.”⁵ “Very uncomfortable, took away from worship and spirit of the sermon,” said one.⁶ One woman who found it “not too meaningful” commented, “I prefer to watch drama and not have to be involved in movement. Concerned about the comfort level of guests. They don’t come expecting this and then they’re thrown into it.”⁷

Objecting voices came from a variety of individuals, with no one “type” emerging. Of fifty-two post-project questionnaire comments about the weekly all-congregation movement/meditation pieces, twenty were negative. Responses did not vary much by gender or by age. The breakdown between percentages of male and female was about the same in total number of responses and in number of negative responses. All age categories were represented in those registering negative feedback, though higher percentages of negative voices within those offering feedback did appear in the seventies and eighties age groups, with 62 percent and 50 percent of those responders, respectively, making negative comments. The lowest percentage of negative responses within those offering feedback was in the fifties age group, with about 11 percent of that age group’s responses being negative.

⁴ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire #19.

⁵ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire #29.

⁶ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire open call.

⁷ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire open call.

One notable distinctive appeared to be connected with church background. All of the negative responses came from individuals who identified themselves as having grown up within the Mennonite church; none of the negative responses originated with people whose early years had been in a non-Mennonite setting. There was, admittedly, a great imbalance in responders along that line: of fifty-two total comments about the all-congregation movement/meditation element, forty-three identified themselves as having grown up Mennonite, and nine as having non-Mennonite background in their early years (83 percent Mennonite; 17 percent non-Mennonite). Even so, the difference in distribution of negative responses was striking (see Appendix J).

A somewhat parallel trend could be seen along the lines of length of participation at Salford: of the comments made regarding the movement/meditation pieces, 67 percent were by people who have attended Salford for more than fifteen years; 13 percent by people who have been at Salford for six to fifteen years; and 20 percent by people who have attended Salford for five years or less. These percentages did not stay the same, however, within the domain of negative responses: 95 percent of the negative responses were made by people who have attended Salford for more than fifteen years; 5 percent of the negative responses came from individuals attending for six to fifteen years; and none of the negative responses came from individuals attending for five or fewer years (see Appendix J). The conclusion seemed to be that those with Mennonite upbringing were more likely to register negative responses to the all-congregation movement/meditation portion of the project, and individuals who had participated at Salford for more than fifteen years constituted nearly all of the originators of negative comments to that aspect of the project (as recorded in the post-project questionnaires).

By the fourth week of small groups presenting the Lenten pieces and my leading the congregational movement, our lead pastor began to hear some objections directly. A small group of individuals who live in one of our Mennonite retirement communities spoke in some consternation with the lead pastor while he visited there. The gist of their communication to him was that this sort of thing did not belong in church, and they wondered why he was allowing it. Aware of this sentiment, I prefaced my leading of the movement/meditation on the fourth Sunday with a joking comment that I had the feeling some people were starting to wonder whenever I got up during these weeks, “What’s she going to try to get us to do now?” As I was greeting people at the end of that service, one woman acknowledged that she felt just that way, and as a result we had a good and lengthy interchange later in the week about her perspective.

For Norma (not her real name), as for others, the all-congregation movement/meditation experiences were not the only objectionable element in what we were doing. She had found unnerving the sequence of shapes and stillness accompanying scripture verses pertaining to fear and love. “I couldn’t settle back into Joe’s sermon for a while after that,” she said. The general effect had reminded her of “ghosts on old TV shows.”⁸ She also reported that a Sunday school class member had said the prayer movement the following Sunday seemed silly. When I shared with her that one of the movers had expressed how meaningful it was for her to do it, Norma seemed surprised, though accepting of that difference. The things we were doing had been disturbing enough that Norma and her husband had talked about visiting another congregation one Sunday—not considering a change of churches, but just taking a break from the

⁸ Salford Mennonite Church member, conversation with author, March 13, 2013.

strangeness at Salford. With something between chagrin and a twinkle in her eye, she reported that when they looked in the paper to see what was happening at that other congregation the Sunday they thought of visiting, it turned out there was going to be a dance troupe there. The irony was lost on neither of us, and I, personally, found it delightful. I was also intrigued by Norma's readily volunteered comment that she herself loves to move to music; and in fact I had observed her swaying rather freely during a song we sang one of those weeks. For her a bridge between her own natural response in other settings and her sense of appropriateness in the worship setting had not yet been created.

There had been signs of likely resistance even before the project began to unfold during the weeks of Lenten worship. When I had contacted one of the older women about her willingness to be one of the randomly selected people who would complete questionnaires before and after the project presentations, as well as be interviewed about some of her own experience and perspectives, she flatly refused. Knowing her to be someone who readily expressed her opinions, I sought to extend the conversation and glean whatever I could from her about her response. I gathered she may have held some negative feelings (distrustful? intimidated? resentful?) about higher education, for she suggested I get the educated people to be the ones involved. Some of her response, however, seemed more to do with change, in and of itself. "You're throwing a lot at the older people all at once. I don't think the older people will like it," she said.⁹ In part she was referring to the five-week sermon theme then underway and immediately preceding

⁹ Salford Mennonite Church member, phone conversation with author, January 21, 2013.

the weeks of Lent and my anticipated project: “Body and Soul,” a series on sexuality, based on materials developed by a staff of writers appointed by our denominational leadership. By the time of my conversation with her, we were just two weeks into the sexuality series, and anxieties in the congregation were still somewhat high about what would happen in the series. Though we addressed hardly any of the more troubling or controversial topics within the subject of sexuality, a significant number in the congregation felt uneasy about the fact that this was being spoken of at all over the pulpit. On the one hand, I had anticipated that the sexuality series immediately preceding the project events might heighten reactivity to what happened in the project. With sensitivity already in place about being stretched and entering unfamiliar territory, some people, I imagined, would feel pushed and increasingly uncomfortable. On the other hand, the sexuality theme seemed perfectly intertwined with the work I planned, for the whole point of my project was to move further along in the integration of body and soul.

With that first “no” in hand, I turned to the next person on my list, a gentleman in the same age category, who also raised cautions about what I was about to do. “It’s not in our Mennonite heritage. It might be better to start with the younger ones.”¹⁰ I was intrigued by his recollection of when, for a period of time, he had attended a more charismatic church. “I think maybe eventually I raised my hands some, but it took a while.”¹¹ I heard concern in his voice—for me and for the older members of the congregation. These conversations stimulated my curiosity about what factors

¹⁰ Salford Mennonite Church member, phone conversation with author, January 24, 2013.

¹¹ Ibid.

contributed to this preliminary posture of closed-ness and whether there would be those among the older set who would come to appreciate any of the experiences ahead.

One coffee-stained, rather crumpled pre-project questionnaire turned in quite some time after the deadline offered some possible clues about themes that may have helped shape the negative responses of some. This, too, was from an older person, though interestingly enough, not someone who had grown up Mennonite. I was not alert enough to have recorded the date I received the questionnaire, but it seems likely it had been completed sometime after the project had actually begun in the worship services. Early on the sheet there was a warning about strength of feeling in the responses, for the contributor had underlined the line, “*Your honest responses will be much appreciated,*” and had lettered beside it the words “I doubt it.”¹²

Sensitivity about levels of education seemed to be an element of negative response. “Go to school and don’t bother me with your education program,” the respondent had written.¹³ As mentioned previously, the LAC was attuned to this sensitivity and had counseled me against requesting that information as part of the demographics on the questionnaire. I considered a number of possible perceptions that might account for some reactivity: a sense that education results in unequal valuing of persons in the congregation; a perception of the congregation being used for the purposes of achievement within the education field; perhaps a feeling that I was flaunting my educational pursuits. One other person had also stated the opinion that it was inappropriate for a research project to be carried out in the congregation, though later I

¹² Salford Mennonite Church member, pre-project questionnaire open call.

¹³ Ibid.

was not able to re-locate the exact quotation. Both indicated some reservations about the interplay between higher education and the spiritual life of the congregation.

Another theme that may have contributed to negative response had to do with artifice, which in the best sense of the word has to do with making artistic form, but which also for some suggests artificiality. My entitling the project “Playing Our Prayers” drew a reaction: “Never, we should never play act with God.”¹⁴ My use of the word “play” grew out of my intention to draw from the InterPlay approach and my underlying sense of theater forms, and it also reflected my interest in the question of whether people experienced any sense of playfulness in our worship experiences (one question on the pre-questionnaire asked that directly). The responder’s use of the word “play” also picked up on the theater language in the questionnaire, and presumably, reflected his experience of some of the early presentations in the Lenten series. He intertwined themes of entertainment and insincerity in some of his responses. “I don’t come to church to be entertained and I resent any insincere act as an invasion to my privacy ...”¹⁵ In response to the question regarding which parts of a worship service are the most energizing, he responded, “Sincere acts. When religion becomes dramatic arts, it is time to close the church.”¹⁶

Reaction against use of dramatic form in worship emerged in responses of several other individuals on post-project questionnaires, as well. One younger person consistently commented about the pieces that were based in theater forms: “too much

¹⁴ Salford Mennonite Church member, pre-project questionnaire open call.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

drama ... felt I didn't need to see it acted out ... didn't come because of drama sermon."¹⁷ An older woman wrote in response to each of the pieces that were drama-based, "[I] don't care for theater acts."¹⁸ A younger woman commented, "I will sum it all up. I don't come to church to be entertained so I am not a fan of all the drama."¹⁹ One of the older men in the congregation wrote at the end of the questionnaire, "I am sure there [are] those who enjoyed the theater form, however it is not my cup of tea (underlining, his—sentence followed by a smiley-face). I suggest get up there and present the Gospel!"²⁰

In the midst of so many who had found the drama pieces helpful or moving or meaningful, these minority voices raise intriguing questions about expectations people bring to the worship experience. What about the dramatic form violated those expectations? For some it seemed to infringe on a sense of appropriate decorum as suggested by voices that spoke of one piece being too loud, another seeming chaotic, one being overly dramatic, one feeling uncomfortable to the point of embarrassment. Perhaps for some it was primarily the introduction of an element that is not regularly present in the worship services. Was the deviation from usual patterns itself unsettling for some? I wonder if for some the very act of embodying the scripture seemed disrespectful, perhaps by reducing a sense of distance between us and the text.

¹⁷ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire open call.

¹⁸ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire open call.

¹⁹ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire open call.

²⁰ Salford Mennonite Church member, post-project questionnaire open call.

I sought to engage individuals voicing discontent with the project when it seemed appropriate. Sometimes in order to honor the convention of anonymity I did not feel free to go back to someone, even though I was fairly sure of the person's identity. Occasionally, a comment was forwarded to me by someone else. One of those came in reaction to preparatory communication the LAC and I made to the congregation. It was made to one of my co-pastors who encouraged me to speak directly with the person who had voiced complaint to her. As a result I had a substantial and meaningful conversation with both the man and his wife. They expressed their appreciation for my speaking directly with them, and our interchange was very cordial. They had both picked up on the word "dance," used very minimally—but present—in the advance communication the LAC and I made. For the man his objection was primarily that it "isn't Mennonite." The woman recounted an experience she had had in another church (a Methodist congregation) some years before. It had been announced that liturgical dancing would begin in the congregation, and she felt quite open to what she imagined it would be. When it actually occurred, she was surprised to discover that she really did not like it. That experience predisposed her to be less welcoming of something that might be called dance in our setting. As we talked, she commented, "It has to do with change. Change is hard."²¹

I suspect this was an underlying factor for many who reacted unappreciatively to the various elements of the project. Occasionally comments were linked with other changes, or feared changes, in the church. One person observed in response to a preliminary question about use of dance or movement in worship, "This type of thing

²¹ Salford Mennonite Church member, conversation with author, January 27, 2013.

does not raise the hackles near as much as homosexuality discussions.”²² One of the InterPlay group members reported back about discussion in his Sunday school class the morning when the free-form prayer movement was done; the teacher had led the class in a review of multiple changes they had experienced in the church over the years.

Similarly, when confronted with the agitation of the retirement home residents, the lead pastor encouraged them, also, to think back on changes they had experienced over the years. One that he dwelt on with them for a bit was the acceptance of women in ministry, which most of them recognized as an area where they had changed their own thinking as time had gone by.

In my own mind incorporation of theater- and movement-based elements in worship did not constitute a very big change when compared to many that have occurred in the church in the last fifty years. It was big enough, though, to stimulate sensibilities and anxiousness and protective reactions. The project in effect gave me a snapshot of the contours of differences, disagreements, and potential conflict that are live in the congregation, though for now mostly quiet. The experience afforded me fertile lessons and reminders about leadership, its risks and challenges and gifts.

²² Salford Mennonite Church member, interview by Tom Nolan, January 22, 2013.

CHAPTER SIX
UNLESS YOU LEAD

Dance has been a favorite metaphor of mine for a long time. By the time I was ordained to ministry in 1996 it was enough a part of me that I invited a friend from high school days, herself an ordained woman by then, to sing at the ordination service a text by Mennonite poet Jean Janzen:

I cannot dance, O love, unless you lead me on.
I cannot leap in gladness unless you lift me up.
From love to love we circle, beyond all knowledge grow,
For when you lead we follow, to new worlds you can show.¹

As we moved toward and through the implementation of the project in actual congregational worship, I felt the weight and drag of leading into new territory. I had to remind myself that I was continuing to follow where the Spirit had been leading me for many years. As the project concluded and I evaluated and reflected, I continued to ponder the question of how the congregation had experienced transformation, if at all. There were certainly moments of exquisite resonance and newness. I realized that some aspects of transformation, however, had occurred primarily within myself. While I love the imagery of dancing and leaping and being lifted up, of entering new worlds, my temperament and habit of being is much more cautious and sluggish. Phlegmatic tendencies aside, there were indeed moments of leaping in gladness as I made my way

¹ Jean Janzen, "I cannot dance, O Love," in *Hymnal: Worship Book* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1992), no. 45.

through the project. It was a time of more fully experiencing the Spirit as a warm, playful, smiling partner in the dance.

I felt the presence of my Spirit partner early on. As I faltered toward defining what a project might be, a path kept opening in unanticipated ways. Unrequested and unexpected affirmations of incorporating InterPlay appeared. When I was still in the very early stages of stammering around with options, a friend said, seemingly out of nowhere, “You can do InterPlay.” I had had the thought, but had hardly dared speak it to myself, let alone aloud. Weeks later as I was in the midst of trying to describe to a group of women pastor colleagues what I hoped to do, and rather apologetically included the word InterPlay, two of the young women at the table practically shouted, “InterPlay! You teach InterPlay?!” Their recognition and excitement and immediate understanding of how that might inform worship was an enormous boost and encouragement—a leap of gladness.

Similarly, the assembling of the Lay Advisory Committee was an experience of being lifted up. Everyone to whom I issued an invitation responded with interest and warmth and support. In a context of busy schedules and myriad activities it was astonishing to be able to schedule our first four or five monthly meetings on the first attempt, with no conflicts at all. As a young girl I had never been completely able to relax and float in water, but it occurred to me that I was being given another opportunity to trust such a holding process with the LAC. Their interest and offers of assistance, readiness to do interviews and craft research questions, and belief in the value of what I was trying to do all gradually registered with me. Spirit was meeting spirit among us,

and while I had initiated the outward process, I came to see more clearly that I was also being led and supplied from beyond myself.

This unanticipated full partnership of the Spirit came through also in the willingness and openness, even eagerness, of participants in some of the worship forms we did. I was touched by the enthusiasm and ready spirit of those venturing into unfamiliar ground, as we conferred and rehearsed just before doing the Fear/Love postures on the second Sunday. Later in the series other individuals gave wholehearted attention to the details of position and garb for the tableaux sequence, eager to be co-creators in the process. A willingness to step out in vulnerability characterized this generous spirit, as well: the movers for the free-form prayer and the actors for the bibliodrama, especially, took risks as they moved and spoke without choreography or script. The final group performance event on Palm Sunday felt almost like a barn-raising effort (a traditional community-spirited collaboration) with so many people involved in rehearsing and presenting. The care with which the men involved rehearsed and experimented with when and how to drop the cross into place for just the right thud was heart-warming.

Another unexpected gift was the articulation of the LAC back to me, at the time of the site visit with my faculty advisor, of what they had witnessed in my leadership. One member commented that I had led people out of their comfort zone, and it was refreshing for many.² Another noted that I had created a bridge to bring experiences of movement into the church that many have known only outside of the church till now.³

² Tom Nolan, site visit interview, May 21, 2013.

³ Sandy Drescher Lehman, site visit interview, May 21, 2013.

My lack of defensiveness in the midst of challenge was recognized.⁴ From the person who had observed several of my InterPlay class sessions came the comment that I led by doing, by helping the group feel more comfortable, and by participating with them and doing the same things I asked of them.⁵ The group attested to the fact that some who were disinclined to participate nevertheless chose to do so, simply because they trusted and respected my leadership and were willing to come along accordingly.

I am chagrined to notice how surprising this all seemed to me. This character of God's Spirit as generous and warm, supportive and even playful, is not different from what I have believed and witnessed and experienced in a variety of ways over the years. It is ever new to me, nonetheless, and the overall experience of the project will remain as a large stone in my "ebenezer" (Joshua 4:3-9) pile of remembrances of God's presence and provision. As the song says, "From love to love we circle ..."⁶

While I experienced these significant consolations of the accompaniment—and leading—of God's Spirit, I also saw more clearly some of my weaknesses and temptations as a leader. As the weeks went on and frustration and objection rose in some quarters, I saw again how much I want the approval and affirmation of people in the congregation. I noticed the impulse to shrink, even to avoid eye contact, where I thought there might be displeasure or disapproval. I was almost as disquieted by those who found the movement events very unadventurous, as by those who found them objectionable. With many responses being very positive and receptive, I saw again how much more I let

⁴ Joy Sutter, site visit interview, May 21, 2013.

⁵ Cindy Moyer, site visit interview, May 21, 2013.

⁶ Janzen, no. 45.

negative feedback disturb me than I let positive feedback encourage me. My weariness by the end of the project implementation reminded me that for me it takes lots of energy to lead something new and unfamiliar, particularly in the face of some resistance. The challenge remains for me to keep stepping forward in the light of my gifts and calling and to minimize voices that find fault or simply prefer a different way.

Despite qualms and uncertainty at times, I had led the congregation into some new territory. Some followed with delight and curiosity and openness, some more hesitantly. About two months after the project was completed, I participated in the wedding of two of our congregants. My role was small (I read a passage of scripture), but afterwards another member of the congregation said to me, “It felt like something was missing—I felt like we should be moving.” It was a light-hearted comment, but nevertheless it reflected a sense of impact. Some months after project completion, another member said to me, “You haven’t led any of the dramas recently.” There have, in fact, been several short dramatic pieces done in the intervening months, which have felt like a carrying forth of some of the momentum.

My hopes of measuring a shift in the course of project implementation were not fulfilled. We asked for self-assessments of various worship responses before and after, though the questionnaire administered afterward asked for people to respond to what they had experienced *during* the actual project weeks. Using a scale of one to five, respondents were to indicate degree of emotional response, with nine categories identified. There were some variations between responses before and after, but nothing really conclusive. I had thought that such things as playfulness, being moved to tears, or level of boredom might shift in the course of the project. Of the responses received from

the random ten percent of the congregation who were followed, in all categories responses that showed no change outnumbered responses that went up or down. Looking only at the responses where change was indicated showed that more respondents had experienced increases in feeling sad, in feeling anger or protest, in sensing play, in feeling awe; also, more respondents had experienced a decrease in boredom. On the other hand, of those who had experienced some change, more indicated they had experienced fewer times of being moved to tears, fewer times of laughter, and less of a sense of being connected with others present in the service.

Would there have been a way to measure times of greater openness to God, or experiences of reverence or mystery or feeling drawn closer into the presence of God? How does one measure spiritual growth or detect movement in the ongoing process of spiritual formation? Ultimately, I felt confined to the witness of persons' verbal reflections, many of which have been recorded throughout these pages. Many of these verbal reflections were encouraging, as people spoke of having encountered scripture, and sometimes Jesus, in a new way. Some spoke of a kind of openness in prayer they had not experienced before, others of an experience of more full connection to God in prayer. Several spoke of being stretched in a good way. One woman commented that these weeks of worship were the most "alive" she had experienced for a very long time, perhaps ever.⁷ These were not vast numbers, but significant in experience. Many people voiced their appreciation for seeing so many of their fellow congregational members participating up front, including many who do not often do so in such a visible way. I

⁷ Carolyn Nolan, conversation with author, June 22, 2013.

believe the involvement by so many gave the whole congregation an expanded awareness of being a body together and heightened the sense of worship as a participatory activity.

Though I would not know how to measure or calibrate, I believe one effect of the project was, in fact, to stretch out the jointly held worship space. Six continuous weeks of incorporating generally unaccustomed experiences tested the elasticity of spirit there, and the resilience held. Invited, even urged, into new expressions of worship for six weeks on end, people gradually found their own preferred way of responding: some gladly participated, some calmly watched and perhaps enjoyed, some grudgingly waited it out, some objected and complained. While individual voices were varied, the space created by all voices together accommodated the newness and the difference. In that way the congregation grew, I believe.

Another significant impact from the project that I sense, but did not seek to measure, was the effect on children in the congregation. Parents of some of the middle-aged children (later elementary and junior high) reported some discomfort on the part of their children, particularly with the all-congregation movement. One mother commented, “My boys are at an age where they are easily embarrassed, so I don’t think they were excited to move around.”⁸ Another said, “They thought it was strange and uncomfortable. After speaking to our children and parents of other children, it seemed our children were uncomfortable with all the touching and movements.”⁹

Children’s responses to the performed pieces, however, suggested there was some formative power in what we presented. Increased attention and interest in what was

⁸ Salford member, post-project questionnaire open call.

⁹ Salford member, post-project questionnaire open call.

happening in the service was noted by a number of parents. One dad reported about his daughter, “Her head would pop up and she wanted to see what was happening up front.”¹⁰ Another dad commented, “[There was] clearly a heightened awareness [compared to] during a ‘normal’ service.”¹¹ A mom wrote, “Children were much more involved; my child was interested in what was happening. She stuck her head up a lot. Over all, much more interest in the service from children.”¹² Still another mother observed, “[They] stopped their playing to observe/ask about a piece. [It] surprised them to see/hear different things in church.”¹³ I was especially gratified to hear of conversations between parents and children occurring because of the presentations we did. A father said their family “had some neat discussions about the pieces after church— what was going on, what the stances meant, what the characters were thinking, doing, feeling, etc.”¹⁴ After commenting that “involvement, interest, attention, participation all increased during the theater/movement pieces,” yet another young mother said her child was “very affected at Palm Sunday when banner was removed and cross put up; asked a lot of questions ... also more attentive when multiple people were up front and taking turns speaking; moved (danced) along with wordless prayer movement on March 3.”¹⁵ Also in response to the Palm Sunday service another woman wrote, “This was an

¹⁰ Salford member, post-project questionnaire open call.

¹¹ Salford member, post-project questionnaire open call.

¹² Salford member, post-project questionnaire open call.

¹³ Salford member, post-project questionnaire open call.

¹⁴ Salford member, post-project questionnaire open call.

¹⁵ Salford member, post-project questionnaire open call.

amazing service for us as adults and our children. It connected them in ways I didn't expect, walking through as the congregation waved palm branches. My four-year-old was teary-eyed as she talked to me about everything Jesus did for us throughout the week.¹⁶ A woman whose own children are now young adults reported sitting next to and watching a little family of three foster children (ages two to six). She was particularly captivated by the girls' participation in the congregational movement we did that morning. "It was just wonderful for them to have that experience, to take part like that," she told my husband after the service that day.¹⁷

For the many children who were drawn in by the theater and movement pieces during these services I believe there were a number of themes to name as elements of formation. The fact of greater attention and interest suggests an increased openness and greater possibility of receiving what was going on in the gathered community around them. What they saw stirred questions and conversations with their parents, which also attests to a significant level of engagement with and processing of the experience and ideas involved. Additionally, their participating equally with adults in the all-congregation movement afforded them a very tactile way of experiencing themselves as an integral part of the larger body. If I needed more encouragement to continue offering leadership for incorporating elements of movement and theater into the worship experience, the benefits to children would be adequate reason alone.

"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good," writes the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 12:7, NRSV). It has been a lifetime process to continue to

¹⁶ Salford member, post-project questionnaire open call.

¹⁷ Salford member, conversation with Jerry Yoder, March 3, 2013.

own and claim the gifts given to me and to offer them unapologetically to the church community. In joyfully embracing the song cited at the beginning of this chapter—"I cannot dance, O Love, *unless you lead* [emphasis added] me on"—I recognize not only my own dependence on the Spirit for God's leadership and empowerment, but also the importance of my offering what has been given me. Certainly there are others who can and will envision employment of the arts in worship, who can and will seek to engage more whole-self participation by worshippers. *Unless I lead* in the times and places where I am set down in any given time of my life, however, what lies in me remains unavailable to the larger body.

In those moments when I most questioned what I was doing and why, when I felt least confident in the value of all the effort put forth, I kept returning to several primary convictions. One, we are created as complex beings, energized and shaped by both head and heart; worship at its best should call forth and make room for head and heart, mind and body. Two, our ongoing healing and wholeness as individuals and as a community will involve fuller integration of these parts of ourselves; worship that calls forth more whole-self participation moves in the direction of that healing and wholeness. Three, through images and emotion and the sensory engagement of the body come some glimpses of who God is and what God's love is like that do not appear in more didactic, logical presentation. Four, worship that stimulates images and engages emotion and senses can widen and deepen our experience of God. With these convictions as underpinnings for my work, my hope always was to nurture the spiritual well-being and worship life of the congregation.

As the project unfolded, I was gratified and encouraged by a Facebook post from one of the members of the InterPlay group. “This made me think of you, Beth,” she wrote, and quoted from N.T. Wright’s *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*:

What I want to propose, as we reach the end of this book, is that the church should reawaken its hunger for beauty at every level. This is essential and urgent. It is central to Christian living that we should celebrate the goodness of creation, ponder its brokenness, and insofar as we can, celebrate in advance the healing of the world, the new creation itself. Art, music, literature, dance, theater, and many other expressions of human delight and wisdom, can all be explored in new ways. The point is this. The arts are not the pretty but irrelevant bits around the border of reality ... they are highways into the center of a reality which cannot be glimpsed, let alone grasped, any other way.¹⁸

My fondest hope was that some of the people of the Salford Mennonite congregation would catch glimpses into portions of the reality of God’s presence and way with us that could have come only through the bits of theater and movement we did during those weeks. As I listened and observed, it seemed that hope was met. We “played our prayers” in a variety of ways. The InterPlay group experienced playful community and moments of wordless openness to God and each other, both in the instructional setting and in the worship services. The playing of various scenes through choral readings and bibliodrama and tableaux creation brought scripture to light in new ways. Connection to biblical faith deepened through these experiences for both participants and observers. The almost whimsical movement that preceded times of silence also ushered some individuals into moments of wordless openness to God. In the words of InterPlay and the spirit of incrementality I, and we, had taken the next small step on a journey I hope will continue.

¹⁸ N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), Kindle Edition, 235, cited by Kendra Rittenhouse in Facebook post, February 25, 2013.

Appendix A INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

These questions were administered by the five interviewers and myself, as we conversed individually with members of the core InterPlay group and with thirty people who comprised a randomly selected ten percent of the congregation.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A] Recall one or two of the most meaningful worship experiences you've had in a church setting. Describe what occurred in the service(s).

What do you remember seeing, hearing, or doing?

What seemed to make the experiences particularly meaningful?

B] What has been your experience with movement and dance throughout your life, in any setting?

What emotions have gone with your history with movement and dance?

What has been your experience with the church's attitude, teaching, or practice regarding dance and movement?

Were there also messages/teachings about other, related areas – the arts, performance, attitudes about our bodies, etc?

What have you experienced or observed of dance or movement used in worship (in any setting)?

What are your thoughts, feelings, response - to what you've experienced or observed of dance or movement used in worship?

Your thoughts, feelings, responses to the possibility of incorporating dance or dance-like movement in Salford's worship experience?

Movement in worship – Use of the body for purposes of praise, prayer, or other spiritual expression; including, but not limited to, dance and dance-like action.

Ritual - a symbolic action that expresses a spiritual intent: baptism, communion, footwashing are established rituals of the church; term to include other actions used in specific services of worship such as sprinkling with water or having water poured over one's hands; lighting candles; receiving the oil of anointing; etc.

Circle One - Values 1 through 5

1. Evaluate the general level of engagement in the worship service on the part of those attending worship at Salford, as you observe it.

(1 = least amount of engagement; 5 = most)

1 2 3 4 5

1-a. Evaluate **your own** level of engagement in the worship service at Salford.

(1 = least amount of engagement; 5 = most)

1 2 3 4 5

2. Evaluate the general level of active (physical) participation in the worship service on the part of those attending worship at Salford, as you observe it.

(1 = hardly any physical participation; 5 = very much physical participation)

1 2 3 4 5

2-a. Evaluate **your own** level of active (physical) participation in the worship service at Salford.

(1 = hardly any physical participation; 5 = very much physical participation)

1 2 3 4 5

3. During worship services at Salford how frequently do you find yourself ...

(1 = never or rarely 5 = very often or always)

Moved to tears	1	2	3	4	5
Laughing	1	2	3	4	5
Feeling sadness	1	2	3	4	5
Feeling anger or protest	1	2	3	4	5
Experiencing joy	1	2	3	4	5
Experiencing a sense of playfulness	1	2	3	4	5

Moved to wonder or awe	1	2	3	4	5
Feeling more connected with the others present	1	2	3	4	5
Feeling distracted or bored, with attention wandering away from what is going on	1	2	3	4	5

Short Written Answer

4. For me worship happens (whether in a church service or elsewhere) when ...
5. When do you feel most engaged during a worship service?
Which parts of a worship service energize you the most, or draw you in the most?
Which parts do you find draining or least engaging?

Circle One – 1 through 5

6. Using the following scale, what frequency do you recommend for each of these forms?
- 1 - never or hardly ever
 - 2 – very occasionally
 - 3 – about half the time
 - 4 – quite often
 - 5 – in most worship services

I think it would be good to include *theater forms* in our worship

1 2 3 4 5

I think it would be good to include *rituals* in our worship

1 2 3 4 5

I think it would be good to include *movement* in our worship

1 2 3 4 5

PLEASE RETURN YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE CHURCH OFFICE BY
February 17

POST – PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE***“Playing Our Prayers”***

Spring 2013

Now that the “Playing Our Prayers” project is complete, please take a few minutes to respond with your thoughts about how you experienced the worship services during this year’s Lenten season. Beth Yoder will be tallying responses as part of her studies and will report to the Lay Advisory Committee, as well as to the leadership team upon completion. A brief summary will be presented to the congregation.

Thank you for your gracious participation – and your honest responses below!

Responders’ Background Information – Please mark each category.

____ Gender

____ Marital status

S- Single, M- Married, W-Widowed

____ Age

____ Yes or No Children (0-15 yrs) present with you in worship

Length of attendance at Salford Mennonite Church

____ 5 years or less

____ 6 – 15 years

____ more than 15 years

Denominational background

____ Mennonite

____ non-Mennonite for significant time:

denomination _____

Questionnaire before the Project began

____ Yes, I turned one in

____ No, I did not turn one in

Definition of Terms Used (to refer to as needed)

Engagement in worship – experiencing thoughts and/or feelings in response to what is happening in the service as it is happening; attention held and maintained during the worship service.

Active (physical) participation – referring primarily to physical movement in the course of the worship service.

Forms of theater - Includes dramatic monologue, enacted scripts, mime, bibliodrama, improvisation.

Movement in worship – Use of the body for purposes of praise, prayer, or other spiritual expression; including, but not limited to, dance and dance-like action.

Ritual - a symbolic action that expresses a spiritual intent: baptism, communion, footwashing are established rituals of the church; term to include other actions used in

specific services of worship such as sprinkling with water or having water poured over one's hands; lighting candles; receiving the oil of anointing; etc.

CIRCLE ONE - VALUES 1 through 5

1. Evaluate the general level of engagement in the worship services ***during the Lent series – Feb. 17 through March 24*** on the part of those attending worship at Salford, as you observed it.

(1 = *least amount of engagement*; 5 = *most*)

1 2 3 4 5

1-a. Evaluate ***your own*** level of engagement in the worship services at Salford ***during the Lent series – Feb. 17 through March 24***.

(1 = *least amount of engagement*; 5 = *most*)

1 2 3 4 5

2. Evaluate the general level of active (physical) participation in the worship services ***during the Lent series – Feb. 17 through March 24*** of those attending worship at Salford, as you observed it.

(1 = *hardly any physical participation*; 5 = *very much physical participation*)

1 2 3 4 5

2-a. Evaluate ***your own*** level of active (physical) participation in the worship services at Salford ***during the Lent series – Feb. 17 through March 24***.

(1 = *hardly any physical participation*; 5 = *very much physical participation*)

1 2 3 4 5

3. During worship services at Salford ***during the Lent series, Feb. 17 through March 24*** how frequently did you find yourself ...

(1 = *never or rarely* 5 = *very often or always*)

Moved to tears	1	2	3	4	5
Laughing	1	2	3	4	5
Feeling sadness	1	2	3	4	5
Feeling anger or protest	1	2	3	4	5
Experiencing joy	1	2	3	4	5
Experiencing a sense of playfulness					
	1	2	3	4	5
Moved to wonder or awe	1	2	3	4	5
Feeling more connected with the others present					
	1	2	3	4	5
Feeling distracted or bored, with attention wandering away from what is going on					
	1	2	3	4	5

PLEASE COMMENT BRIEFLY on the way each of the following affected your worship and/or understanding and perspective of scripture.

Also, mark *Y* (yes, I was present) ... *N* (no, I was not there) ... or *DVD* (I saw it on video)

___ Feb. 17 six-person dramatized reading of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness
[*theater form*]

___ Feb. 24 five-person movement/stillness postures expressing fear, freedom from fear, love
[*movement to watch*]

___ Mar 3 four-person movement to offer wordless prayer during prayer-song, "Through our fragmentary prayers"
[*movement to watch*]

___ Mar. 10 three-person bibliodrama of the prodigal son
[*theater form*]

___ Mar. 17 six-person tableaux (frozen "pictures") of the woman anointing Jesus' feet with perfume
[*theater form*]

___ Mar. 24 scripture drama, "I Heard the Voice of Jesus" ... Jesus' words in life and from the cross ... palm branches, colored "cloaks" on the path, cross, candle ... musical instruments
[*theater form*]

___ Mar. 31 dramatic re-telling (Beth Y) of the John 20 story of Mary Magdalene & the resurrection
[*theater form*]

___ Feb. 17-Mar 17 guided meditation with simple movement suggested, primarily with hands /arms ... breathe ... note tension ... wiggle or squirm ... stretch ... kneel (once)
[*MOVEMENT TO DO*]

CIRCLE ONE - 1 through 5 - regarding Recommended Frequency

Using the following scale, what frequency do you recommend for each of these forms?

1 - never or hardly ever ... 2 - very occasionally ... 3 - about half the time
4 - quite often ... 5 - in most worship services

It would be good to include *theater forms* in our worship 1 2 3 4 5

It would be good to include *rituals* in our worship 1 2 3 4 5

*Examples: lighting candles, anointing with oil, pinning prayers on "prayer hands,"
sharing bread*

It would be good to include *movement to watch* in our worship 1 2 3 4 5

It would be good to include *movement for us to do* in our worship

1 2 3 4 5

PARENTS OF (ages 2 - 15) CHILDREN - PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING

What did you observe in your children during the times that any of the theater/movement pieces were happening?

Did their level of involvement, interest, attention, participation shift at all during the times that the theater/movement pieces were happening?

If you can, note any specifics that you can recall—what they did or said; if there were specific pieces they responded to, or interacted with, please note that.

PLEASE RETURN YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE CHURCH OFFICE BY

April 21

Short Answer

Please write 4 or 5 single words that characterize how you experienced the InterPlay activities and evenings.

What did you find most surprising about the InterPlay evenings and activities?

What, if anything, did you experience in the InterPlay evenings and activities that could have bearing on your on-going experience of worship, prayer, community, spiritual life?

Which worship ‘pieces’ did you participate in during the Lent season?

- _____ Feb. 17 Choric reading about Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness
- _____ Feb. 24 Movement about “Fear” and “Love” and “Freedom from fear” scriptures
- _____ Mar. 3 Prayer movement during the song “Through our fragmentary prayers”
- _____ Mar. 10 Prodigal Son bibliodrama
- _____ Mar. 17 Tableaux of Mary of Bethany anointing Jesus’ feet with oil
- _____ Mar. 24 Scripture drama – “I heard the voice of Jesus”

What impact did your participation have on your own worship, prayer, or sense of scripture during that worship service – or beyond?

Share any feedback that you received from others that seems pertinent (positive or negative).

Appendix C INTERPLAY FORMS

One Hand Dance

Can be done sitting on a chair, though most often is done lying on one's back on the floor. After introduction of the possible repertoire of movements that one hand can do, participants are invited to let one hand "dance" to music that is played. Players experiment with smooth, jerky, slow, fast moves, as well as with creating held shapes and making points of contact with the floor or the body.

One Hand Dance, on behalf of

An adaptation of the "One Hand Dance," this form invites participants to choose a person or situation or relationship and then dedicate the one hand dance to that person, situation, or relationship as a form of non-verbal prayer. Done to music.

Hand to Hand Contact

A form done by two people together, beginning with each person placing the palm of one hand against one palm of a hand of the other person. The pair experiments with shapes they can make together with their hands, with pushing against each other, with pulling each other, with sensing the connection between them even when their hands are not against each other, with stretching and compressing the distance between them, and with discovering moves they might make to trick or surprise the other person. After initial introductory experimentation has happened, this is done to music.

Babbling

Participants work in pairs, taking turns for thirty seconds at a time to respond verbally to a spoken prompt given by the leader. Participants are encouraged to release expectations or criteria of judgment and to just let a stream of consciousness emerge. Instructions specifically name the possibility of speaking fast or slow, with many words or few, in a linear or non-linear and even nonsensical way, and with no need to be interesting. Prompts may be about objects or abstract concepts; participants may be asked to describe a place or an experience (real or fabricated).

Group Hand Dance

The same principles are used as in "Hand to Hand Contact," but with a larger group of participants working together.

Playing with Patterns and Space

Beginning with just two or three people and then adding others in, participants are invited to create patterns and shapes with their bodies, looking for ways to be connected with or in clear relationship to the shapes others are making. This can be done as a frozen sculpture or with moving parts. One variation is to introduce a theme or an emotion and have the group create shapes that convey the theme or emotion.

Note: These forms are explained in the InterPlay® leaders' training notebook, *Leading Your Own Life: Secrets 1* (see Bibliography).

Appendix D
SCRIPT—JESUS' TEMPTATION

Based on Luke 4:1-13

Voice A – stands in the center on the middle step of chancel steps
(Voice A wears a distinctive color or a sash to distinguish him/her from other voices)

Voice B – stands at the center of the top step,
positioned behind and stage right of Voice A

Voices C, D, E, F – form a V coming down from where B is standing;
the bottom ends of the V extend below where A is standing

The Voices take their places one at a time, each one just before his/her first line.

Voice A Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit returned from the Jordan and was led by
by the Spirit in the wilderness

Voice B where for forty days

Voice C he was tempted

Voice D, E, F (*in succession*) tempted

Voices B-F (*in unison*) by the devil.

Voice A He ate nothing at all during those days,
and when they were over,
he ... was ... famished.

Voice B The devil said to him

Voices C, F, D (*in succession*) Son of God

Voices B-F (*in unison—whispered*) Son of God

Voice B If you are the Son of God

Voice C command this stone

Voice D to become a loaf of bread.

Voice B If you are the Son of God ...

Voices C-F (*in increasingly rapid succession*) ... stone to bread

Voice B If you are the Son of God—

Voices C-F, and B (*in succession, two rounds*) ... IF ...

Voices B-F If you are the Son of God,

Voice C command this stone

Voice D to become a loaf of bread

Voice E Son of God—

Voice F stone to bread.

Voices B-F (*in unison*) ... BREAD.

Voice A Jesus answered him,
It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’

Voices B-F surround Voice A in a closer circle and “move him” (without touching him) to the top of the steps. Voices B, C, D stand stage right on top two steps, Voices E and F stand staggered on top two steps stage left.

Voice B Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant
all the kingdoms of the world.

Voice C And the devil said to him, To you I will give their glory and all this authority.

Voice E for it has been given over to me,

Voice D and I give it to anyone I please.

Voice F If you then will worship me,

Voices B-F (*in unison*) ... it will all be yours

Voice B - yours -

Voices B-F (*in succession, and gathering in around Voice A*) – glory and authority –

Voice E – yours –

Voice B If you then will worship me ...

Voice A Jesus answered him,
It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’

Voice F goes down the steps and picks up step-ladder which has been laid in front of first pew, proceeds down center aisle and puts the ladder up in about the center of the aisle. He/she waits beside the step-ladder.

Voices B-E begin to snake-lead (beckoning, gesturing, enticing) Voice A down the center aisle, gesture-ushering him up the ladder.

Voice B Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, ‘If you are the Son of God ...’

Voices C-F (*in succession*) ... IF ...

Voice B If you are the Son of God ...

Voice C throw yourself down from here,

Voices D, E For it is written,
‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you.’

Voices C, F And, ‘On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’

Voices B-F (*in succession, taking turns, doubling back*)

God will protect you.
God will take care of you.
No harm shall come to you.
Go ahead ...
You are invulnerable ...
You can do it ...

Voice A (*breaking into the rabble from the top of the ladder*)

Jesus answered him,
It is said, ‘Do not ...

(*his/her voice now cuts through and overpowers the rest*)

Do not ...

Voice A descends from the ladder, and at the foot of the ladder continues)

Do not ...

Voice A returns to steps and takes position in center of middle step, where he/she had first stood, and continues)

Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’

Voices B-F fold up ladder and scatter to places and postures of vigilance off to the sides.

Voice A When the devil had finished every test,
he departed from him until an opportune time.

Voice A holds position for a moment, then leaves the playing space, as do Voices B-F.

Appendix E
SCRIPT—FEAR/LOVE SHAPE AND STILLNESS

Based on Psalm 27 and I John 4:16, 18

Reader: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it have a good understanding.

Reader: You shall fear the Lord your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast.

Movers begin to enter as this verse is read. Enter fearfully – holding on to each other, looking around at what might be coming from behind or what might ‘jump out’ from the sidelines.

Reader: Fear the Lord your God.
Movers take positions on the platform, expressing fear.

Reader: Fear the Lord your God.

Reader: The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

Movers take positions of openness, freedom, joy ...

Whom shall I fear?

... they then slowly return to the cramped body-state of fear.

Reader: The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Movers take positions suggesting strength ...

Of whom shall I be afraid?

... they then slowly return to the cramped body-state of fear.

Reader: God is love. God is love. There is no fear in love,
but perfect love casts out fear.

Perfect love casts out fear.

Movers relax into positions that are free and upright, relaxed ... after a short while the “old patterns” begin to set in a bit; their positions indicate tentativeness, some uncertainty.

Reader: God is love.

One thing I asked of the Lord,

That will I seek after;

To live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

Movers take positions of seeking, longing, searching.

Reader: God is love. God is love.

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud,

Your face, Lord, do I seek.

Do not hide your face from me.

Movers take positions of intensified seeking, calling out, pleading.

Reader: God is love ... there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.

God is love ... there is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out fear.

They draw each other into positions of freedom, connectedness, joy – exchanging welcome and greetings ... forming a final ‘sculpture’ of belonging and release. Hold for a few seconds, and then quietly withdraw from the scene and return to seats among the congregation.

Appendix F
TEXT: THROUGH OUR FRAGMENTARY PRAYERS

Through our fragmentary prayers
and our silent, heart-hid sighs,
wordlessly the Spirit bears
our profoundest needs and cries:
(hum)

Deeper than the pulse's beat
is the Spirit's speechless groan,
making human prayers complete
through the God who makes us whole:
(hum)

Let our jabberings give way
to the hummings in the shoul,
as we yield our lives this day
to the God who makes us whole:
(hum)

Search and sound our mind and heart,
Breath and Flame and Wind and Dove,
let your prayer in us impart
strength to do the work of love.
(Alleluia or Amen on last stanza)

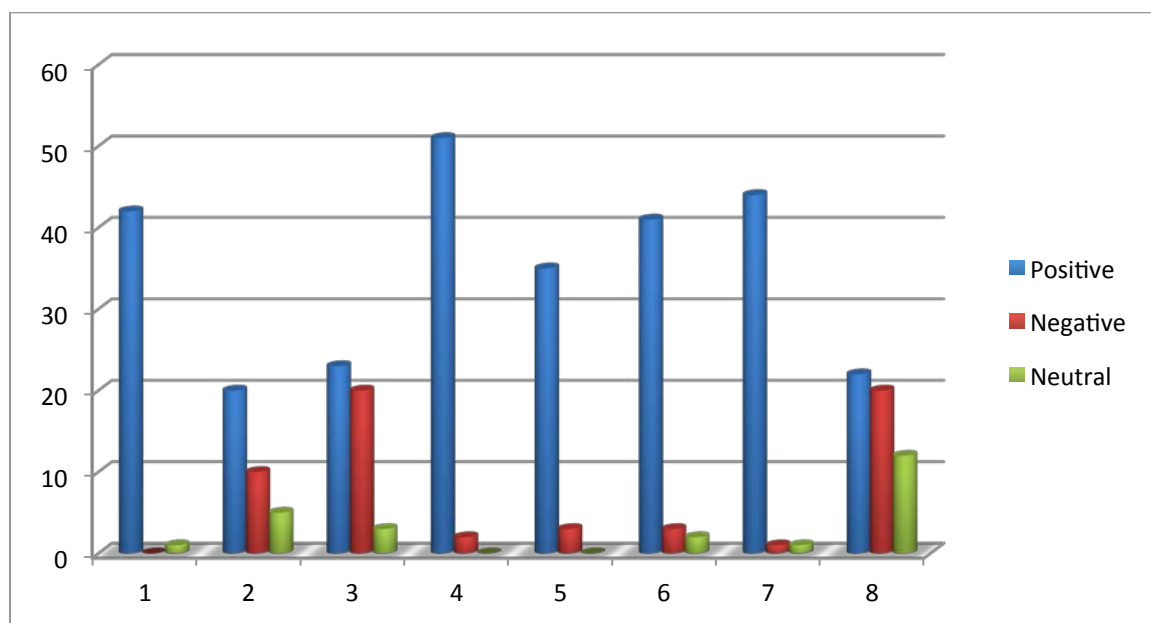
Thomas H. Troeger, 1985
New Hymns for the Life of the Church, 1991
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Appendix G RESPONSES TO LENT PIECES

88 Questionnaires received Post-Project:
 14 InterPlayers ... 27 Random 10%
 28 Open Call, repeat responders ... 19 Open Call, first-time responders

TABULATION OF COMMENTS:

PROJECT EVENT	TOTAL	Positive	Negative	Neutral
1 - Jesus' Temptation	43	42	0	1
2 - Fear / Love Postures	35	20	10	5
3 - Prayer Movement: "...Fragmentary Prayers"	46	23	20	3
4 - Prodigal Son	53	51	2	0
5 - Woman Anointing - Tableaux	38	35	3	0
6 - "I Heard the Voice of Jesus"	45	41	3	2
7 - Mary Magdalene scripture	46	44	1	1
8 - All-Congregation Movement	54	22	20	12

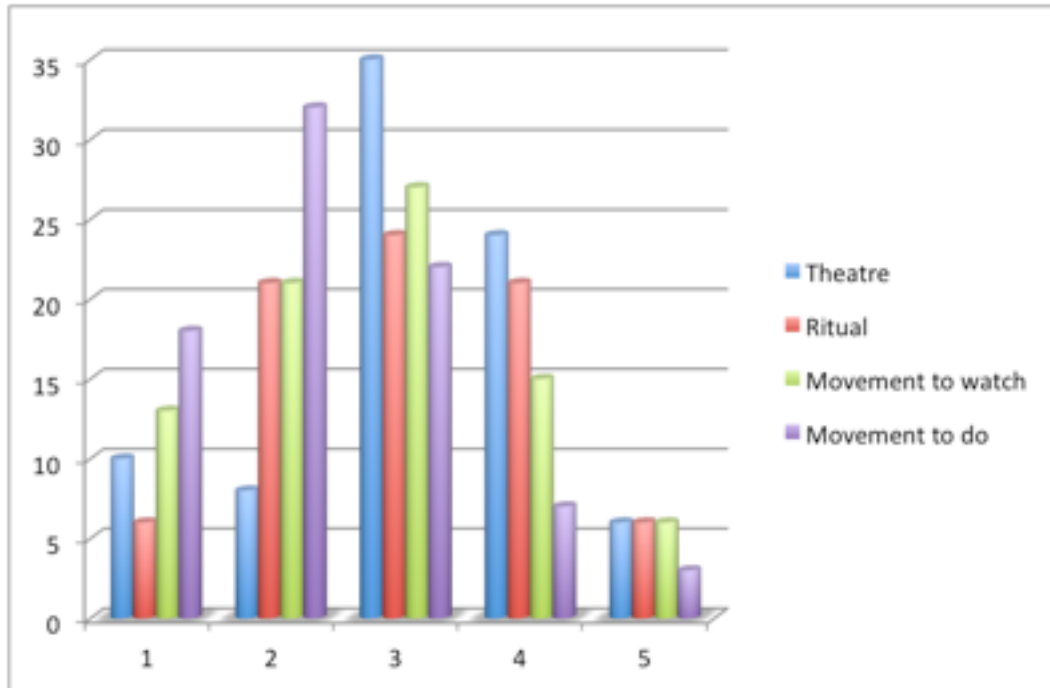


TABULATION OF RESPONSES RE. RECOMMENDED FREQUENCY OF USE:

Scale:

- 1 – never or hardly ever
- 2 – very occasionally
- 3 – about half the time
- 4 – quite often
- 5 – in most worship service

	Theatre	Ritual	Movement to watch	Movement to do
1	10	6	13	18
2	8	21	21	32
3	35	24	27	22
4	24	21	15	7
5	6	6	6	3



Appendix H
BIBLIODRAMA QUESTIONS

Introductory Comments Given

We will be taking a somewhat longer time with our scripture passage this morning, and we will be doing together and aloud what we regularly do silently and usually by ourselves. That is, we take the words that are on the pages of scripture and let them stir in us pictures of how we see what's going on. Or, we may supply a tone of voice. We might start filling in some of the spaces (which we do whenever we read—whether it's a story or a newspaper account or whatever it is). We find ourselves imagining what might have prompted a particular comment that somebody made. Or we start filling in what it was like in that time and place.

So this morning we are going to take time to do that in a way that we can hear each other doing it. There will be three people who are the primary voices for this story that we will be re-visiting together.

I'm also going to spend some time every now and then when I will turn to you and invite voices from you there in the congregation. Be listening for the questions to a particular character in the story at a particular moment, and if something comes to your mind in response to the question, please call it out. I will repeat it so that everybody can hear it. In that way we participate together in the process that usually we do on our own.

Scripture Text and Questions

Luke 15:1-3 and 11-12a read aloud.

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them. So he told them this parable. "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.'

Question: Younger Son, what brought that on, your request?
(response given)

Question, building on response: That's a little bit unusual, isn't it?
(response given)

Question: Father, I'm wondering how you felt about this when he came to you.
(response given)

Luke 15:12b read aloud

So he divided his property between them.

Question: Elder Son, it sounds like you got your share, too. How about this?
How did you experience all this?
(response given)

Question: I'm wondering if there are other Elder Sons out here (*in the congregation*) who have some perspective on what's transpired here with the Younger Son asking for his portion. Any other voices of the Elder Son?
(responses given)

Luke 15:13a read aloud

A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country...

Question: Elder Son, how is this moment for you as you see him headed out?
(response given)

Luke 15:13b read aloud

He traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.

Question: We don't know exactly what the setting was for this father and these two sons. We know that there was property, and we know there were servants, and we can guess that there was a surrounding community looking on. We are familiar with surrounding communities looking on as families go through "stuff."

So, I'm wanting to hear a little bit from the townspeople. What are thinking, saying to yourselves in your own homes or to your neighbors as you watch this?

(responses given from the congregation)

Question: Elder Son, I don't know if you're hearing these, but I'm guessing you have a pretty good sense of what's being said, whether you hear it or not. How are you feeling about that?

(response given)

Question: Younger Son, though we cannot see you (*he has left the visible space*), we are interested in hearing some of what's happening for you there in distant country.

(response given)

Luke 15:14 read aloud

When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need.

Question: We don't know how long that took—weeks? months? years?
Elder Son, what's been happening there at home?

(response given)

Question: Father, as time is going on, how are you managing with this?
(response given)

Luke 15:15-16 read aloud

So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

Question: Younger Son, how are you now?
(response given)

Luke 15:17a read aloud

But when he came to himself ...

Question: Younger Son, could you tell us a bit what that is?
(response given)

Luke 15:18a read aloud

[The younger son said], 'I will get up and go to my father ...'

Question: Younger Son, what is this like, heading toward home?
(response given)

Luke 15:20a

So he set off and went to his father.

The Father sees the Younger Son coming and runs down the center aisle to meet him; they improvise interaction.

Luke 15:22-23 read aloud after the action

The father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate ...'

The Father and Younger Son work their way up to where the Elder Son stands.

Luke 15:31-32 read aloud

Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'

The Elder Son looks at them both, then turns away in disgust and walks off.

Closing Comments Given

And so we return the characters and our roles to the pages of scripture, but the thoughts and feelings, identifications and empathies, the questions that they stirred in us we hold, as we continue to listen for what God is saying to us in this time and place.

Appendix I
SCRIPT – I HEARD THE VOICE OF JESUS

A Palm Sunday Scripture Drama

Readers needed

Readers 1, 2, 3	the voices of Jesus
Threat	the voice of the gathering threat against Jesus (reader does not need to be visible to the congregation, will likely need mic)
Narrator	also signals to congregation for their responses

Instruments needed (if possible)

Trumpet, recorder, flute, cello, saxophone or clarinet, violin
(adapt according to what is available in the congregation)
Drum – preferably one with a deep voice

Bulletin insert with Congregation's (ALL) Responses

Stagehands

Two persons needed to “de-robe” the worship space, as indicated in script
Additional persons to carry in cross, if that is used.

Props, according to preferred practice

Palms – earlier in the service children or others process through the space waving palms and eventually dropping them at a predetermined space, recalling the palms laid on Jesus' pathway.
Colored scarves – placed down center aisle by children or others, earlier in the service, recalling the cloaks laid on Jesus' pathway.
Christ candle
Cross

Hymn – “I heard the voice of Jesus say”

Text – Horatius Bonar

Tune – Kingsfold, English folk melody adapted by Ralph Vaughn Williams

Hymn to be sung by the congregation just before the scripture drama begins.

An alternative would be to have one instrument play through one verse of it.

The Scripture Drama begins:

Readers 1, 2, 3 take their places in staggered formation at different levels on chancel steps. One of them carries the Christ candle and holds it until the first Pause. It will need to be placed somewhere then for later use.

Trumpet plays first phrase of "I heard the voice of Jesus say ..." sustaining final note on "say")

- Reader 1 Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near
- Reader 2 The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.
- Reader 3 I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God.
- Reader 2 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ...
- Reader 3 he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor,
- Reader 1 to proclaim release to the captives
- Reader 2 and recovery of sight to the blind
- Reader 3 to let the oppressed go free,
- Readers 1, 2, 3 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

PAUSE

Christ candle is set in pre-determined place.

- Reader 3 The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed;
nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!"
- Reader 2 For in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.
- Reader 1 The kingdom of God is within you.
- Reader 3 The kingdom of God is at hand.
- Readers 1, 2, 3 I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God.

Recorder plays first phrase of "I heard the voice of Jesus say..." sustaining final note

- Reader 1 Follow me.
- Reader 2 Come, take up your cross and follow me

- Reader 3 Come and see.
- Reader 1 Come to me ... take my yoke upon you, and learn from me.
My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.
- Reader 3 *Here* are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of God is
my brother and sister and mother.
- Reader 2 If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up
their cross daily and follow me.
- Reader 3 I will make you fishers of people.
- Reader 1 Come. Follow me.
- Reader 2 Come.
- Reader 1 Follow.

Narrator (could be Worship Leader) indicates to congregation to make their 1st response:

ALL A report about him spread through all the surrounding country.

Drumbeat (one ponderous strike)

- Reader 3 Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown.
- Threat All in the synagogue were filled with rage. They drove him out of town
and led him to the brow of the hill, that they might hurl him off the cliff.

Drumbeat (one ponderous strike)

Flute plays first phrase of "I heard the voice of Jesus say..." sustaining final note

- Reader 1 Stretch out your hand.
- Reader 2 Rise. Take up your bed and walk.
- Reader 3 Woman, you are set free from your ailment.
- Reader 1 Go in peace, and be healed from your disease.
- Reader 3 Be silent, and come out of him.

Narrator indicates to congregation to make their 2nd response:

**ALL Amazement seized all of them,
and they glorified God and were filled with awe.**

Reader 2 Rise.

Reader 1 Walk.

Reader 2 Go.

Reader 3 See.

Reader 2 Hear.

Reader 1 Speak.

Reader 3 Live.

Narrator indicates to congregation to make their 3rd response:

**ALL Word spread abroad; many crowds would bather to hear him and be
cured of their diseases.**

PAUSE

Drumbeat - one strike

Narrator The scribes and Pharisees watched him to see whether he would cure on
the Sabbath.

Threat He did so, and they were filled with fury and discussed with one another
what they might do to Jesus.

Drumbeat – two strikes

PAUSE

Reader 2 Little girl, get up! ... *pause* ...

Reader 1 Woman, do not weep. Young man, I say to you, rise. ... *pause* ...

Reader 3 Lazarus, come out! Unbind him, and let him go. ... *pause* ...

Narrator indicates to congregation to make their 4th response:

Left **Fear seized all of them, and they glorified God, saying,
“A great prophet has risen among us!”**

Right **They were astounded at the greatness of God.**

Reader 1 Your sins are forgiven!

Reader 2 Your sins are forgiven!

Reader 3 Your sins are forgiven!

Narrator indicates to congregation to make their 5th response:

ALL **And some began to say among themselves,
“Who is this who even forgives sins?”**

Left **Who is this?**

Right **Who is this?**

Cello plays first phrase of “I heard the voice of Jesus say ...” sustaining final note

Reader 1 Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Reader 2 You must be born from above.

Reader 1 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Reader 3 I will give you living water.

Reader 1 Blessed are the pure in heart.

Reader 2 Seek first the kingdom of God.

Reader 3 Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.

Reader 1 Blessed are the peacemakers.

Reader 2 Ask and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find;
knock, and the door shall be opened to you.

Reader 1 Blessed are the meek.

Reader 3 Let the little children come to me, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.

Reader 1 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

Readers 1, 2, 3 And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Narrator indicates to congregation to make their 6th response:

ALL The crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

Drumbeat – one strike

Reader 1 Woe to you who tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds, and neglect justice and the love of God.

Reader 2 Woe to you who love to have the seat of honor in the synagogues and to be greeted with respect in the marketplace.

Reader 3 Woe to you who load people with burdens hard to bear and do not yourselves lift a finger to ease them.

Threat The scribes and Pharisees began to be very hostile toward him, lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.

Drumbeat – three strikes, deliberate and slow-paced.

Saxophone (or clarinet) plays first phrase of “I heard ...” sustaining final note

Reader 1 The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

Reader 2 See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.

Reader 1 For he will be handed over to the Gentiles

Reader 3 and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon.

Reader 2 After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again.

Reader 3 When some said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you,” he replied, “Today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way.”

Drumbeat – one strike

Narrator And he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

Readers 1, 2, 3 come together in a straight vertical line—eyes straight ahead, chin slightly lifted; one at a time, front to back, the exit ... each “going to face what lies in Jerusalem.” If space allows, each takes a different path.

Threat The chief priest, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him ... they wanted to lay hands on him at that very hour ... they watched him and set spies who pretended to be honest, in order to trap him by what he said.

Drumbeat – four strikes, quick-paced

Brief comments by worship leader or pastor about Jesus and the cross, ourselves and the cross, our need to understand and receive and live in the reality of the cross.
(The following comments can be used as is, or others created.)

The common folk along with the religious and political leaders of the day were unsettled by their disturbing sense of who Jesus was.

The early church sought to understand who Jesus was and what his life and death meant. They found loud echoes of his person and ministry in the writings of the prophets. One such passage was Isaiah 50:4-9a (the OT lection for Palm Sunday, Years A-C)

Isaiah 50:4-9a (or vv. 4-7) is read

As the church of today we, too, seek to understand who Jesus was and what meaning his life and death have for our lives. As we enter this Holy Week, we remember Jesus setting his face toward Jerusalem, setting his face like flint, giving his back to those who struck him, not hiding his face from insult and spitting, confronted by his adversaries.

As we enter this Holy Week, we are again invited to stand before the cross and open ourselves anew to the meaning of his suffering and death there—hearing, even as we gaze, his words: “If anyone would follow me, let him or her take up his cross and follow.”

If anyone would follow me, let him or her take up his cross and follow.

***The cross is carried into the worship space and set in a prominent place.
The Christ candle is set at its base.***

-pause-

Reader 3 Get up. Let us be going. See my betrayer is at hand.

Drumbeat

(the “ball of colored garments is removed form worship space and carried out)

Reader 1 Is it with a kiss you betray the Son of Man?

Drumbeat – five strikes, then a loud roll

(Lent banner is removed from front of worship space and carried out)

Reader 2 Woman, here is your son.

-pause-

Reader 3 I am thirsty.

Readers 1, 2, 3 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!

PAUSE

The Christ candle is blown out.

Narrator And the voice of God was silent.

Allow significant period of silence before continuing with the remainder of the worship service. Service should close in a spirit of reverence; congregation may be encouraged to depart in silence.

Appendix J
GUIDED MEDITATION FOR MOVEMENT

Guided Meditation with Movement

February 17, 2013

Includes wiggling free of shame, appreciating breath, greeting each other with playful nonverbal interaction.

As we enter the silence today, I'm going to suggest a couple of very simple things that you might do physically. And it's a choice, please know; feel free to just sit there.

As we enter the silence today, I invite you to close your eyes ... and for a moment just notice in your own being, are there places of tightness or discomfort, of feeling held-in.

It's possible that which threatens to shame you, in part, finds its way there where you feel that discomfort or that tension.

And because we believe and know that God seeks to release us from shame, to know ourselves to be those who will delight God as we bloom, I invite you to wiggles just a little bit—shake it out ... shake your shoulders ... shake your legs even as you're sitting there ... you might want to shake your hands ... just because it feels good.

And then allow yourself to feel the goodness of taking a deep breath.

We often sing, "Breathe on us, breath of God." In the silence today I invite you to just feel your breath, coming in and going out. An easy simple reminder of the presence of God with us.

[Silence.]

God's love bids us rise. So I invite you to stand, preparing to sing the next song, but also to stand and again just wiggle--squirm. Feel the goodness of not being held in.

And because we are to receive and to share that gift with each other, I invite you to find three other people nearby to turn to and in some way greet—whether it's a hand shake, or palm-to-palm, or a fist-bump, or a shoulder-bump, or whatever. Have a little fun with it.

Greet three people.

[And stay standing to sing.]

Guided Meditation with Movement

February 24, 2013

Includes InterPlay “wheeee!” release of judger, breath of awareness and shaking out stiffness, arm movements for opening to and receiving and sharing God’s gifts.

God invites us to bring body, mind, and soul to our worship. A little bit later in the morning we will be listening to scripture and those that will be helping to do that will be using more of body, mind, and soul than we sometimes do.

One of the practices that has been helpful as we (the core group of players) have learned more about how to allow ourselves to let our whole being enter into prayer and worship is this funny little recognition that for many of us there resides in our brain—and we might even say it is right here in the center of our forehead (between our eyes)—a judger-person. Somebody that wants to sit back and say, “That’s good, and that’s not good, and oh, don’t you think you’re about to look like a fool (that one’s really strong for me).” So, the invitation is to ‘grab hold of’ that thing (the judger) and for a moment—not forever, but for now—fling it away. (*Do the motions.*)

In the InterPlay classes that we’ve been doing, we’ve actually said something with that, so I invite you to join me in it, if you’re daring enough. To go, “Wheeee!” and just pitch it away. Join me. (*Do the motions, say the “Wheeee!”*)

God invites us to bring body, mind, and soul into our worship.

And as we move into a time of silence now, I invite you—if you choose—to close your eyes ...to notice *your* physical being this morning. How are you? Are there places of soreness, of tightness, of tension or discomfort?

Knowing that God seeks to heal us and to free us. Sometimes just a deep breath helps—directed to those places of tightness or stiffness. (*Take a breath, or several.*)

Accepting that gift of God’s intention to heal us and free us, I invite you to just wiggle a little bit where those places are: shake your shoulders, shake your legs, shake your hands (if you wish)—feeling a little bit more of the freedom that God intends for us.

And as we move into the silence, I invite you as you breathe in the breath given by God, letting it out again ... I invite you to hold your hands in a gesture of prayer, whatever that might be for you ... and then to slowly raise your hands and arms ... you might want to open your eyes and follow your hand, letting it become a symbol of your reaching to God.

And slowly, as you choose, open wide—or not so wide—your hands and arms to receive the goodness that God would bring to you this morning. You might want to finish with your hands directly in front of you, perhaps resting on your lap.

In the silence, God, we open ourselves to receive all of your good gifts as we hear the sounds of life around us.

[Silence]

And if you wish, you might fold your arms and hands to your heart, taking in as fully as you can what God has given, seeking to cherish it, to hold it, to remember and to give thanks.

What we are given is meant for sharing, and so I invite you to open your arms and move toward some other people. You don't have to stand up—or you can. Just reach out—“reach out and touch someone,” or a bunch of people. You might want to tap hands, tap shoulders ... see how many you can share the goodness with.

Guided Meditation with Movement**March 3, 2013**

Includes a sequence of waking ourselves, opening to God, presenting ourselves before God.

[Following a soloist singing Mumford and Sons, “Awake, My Soul”]

In these bodies we live, in these bodies we will die, In these bodies we numb ourselves, and in these bodies we can awaken again.

(patting cheeks, then extending arms upward in wide-apart gesture) Awake, my soul ... (lower arms and hold hands palm-up and in front) you were made to meet your Maker.

Join me. I invite you to stand if that would be comfortable. Children, we need you to help us do this. If you can't see and your parents say it's okay, stand on the benches. If you prefer to sit and not be involved, that's fine, too.

Once more, I'll do it; and then join me.

(patting cheeks, then extending arms upward in wide-apart gesture) Awake, my soul ... (lower arms and hold hands palm-up and in front) you were made to meet your Maker.

With me...

(patting cheeks, then extending arms upward in wide-apart gesture) Awake, my soul ... (lower arms and hold hands palm-up and in front) you were made to meet your Maker.

And without words...

Pat cheeks, extend arms upward in wide-apart gesture ... lower arms and hold hands palm-up and in front of oneself.

(keeping the posture of hands open in front of oneself)

We come to a time of silence, hands open to receive the rich, abundant goodness that costs no money Help us to receive, O God.

In the time of silence, feel free to stay standing or if it's more comfortable for you to sit, that's fine.

[Silence.]

Keep us awake, O God.

Guided Meditation with Movement**March 10, 2013**

Includes slight movement, primarily guided meditation about being received and receiving others in embrace of welcome.

Jesus would have us see that our God is the one who scans the horizon for any hint, any rumor, of our heading toward home. So I invite you for a moment to stay with that awareness, and I would encourage you to stand, if you are comfortable standing; remain seated, if you prefer.

Stand, and find a little bit of space, perhaps close your eyes.

Remember for yourself, or imagine, what it is to meet a child running toward you, to open your arms to a family member who has been away for a very long time ... perhaps even to feel what that is like in your body just now ... the lean forward ... the arms extended ... This is God toward us.

(some silence)

And this is the call of God for us toward any and all prodigals.

(more silence)

In what ways do you/I/we need to feel again the embrace of God running toward us?
Who in our lives at this time do we need to run toward?

(brief silence)

Amen.

Guided Meditation with Movement**March 17, 2013**

Includes shaking free of constriction, expressing thanks to God, blessing others, and kneeling.

Jesus invites us to become like little children as part of our spiritual journey, and I have thought sometimes that these movement explorations that I have been leading you in is one little spiritual practice that gives us a reminder of what it feels like to be child-like.

So I invite you into that space, remembering that as children we were free of self-consciousness, and we were willing to do things that were kind of silly and a little playful. Perhaps in doing those things now, as we are adults, we can get a taste again of the freedom that [preacher Maribeth] was talking about that is ours.

Sometimes people take notes about sermons; I'm going to suggest that we take notes in our bodies this morning, remembering some of the themes that [Maribeth] talked about.

Those of you that are willing, will you stand?

Jesus gives us the gift of unwrapping that which binds us and leads us to freedom. So for a moment, perhaps with your eyes closed, just take a bit of time to notice in your physical being where you might have a sense of being bound up, of having wrappings around your own experiences – wounds – recent or long ago. What constricts you?

And accepting that our breath is gift of God, let us take a deep breath – receiving from God the gift of breath into those very places that bound, held. And again.

And then as you are ready and willing – and with your eyes open so you don't fall – take just a little bit of the physical freedom ... you might want to even imagine the wrappings coming off ... tossing them off ...

Feel free to play – if you would. And if you wouldn't, then enjoy others playing.

What would it be like in your physical being – and to whatever extent you are willing to do it – to express to God some of that freedom, some of that joy and gratitude and praise?

And together let's find how we might do that now.

And we are invited to pour out blessing and gift to others. And so I invite you to do that – without words – find a way to turn to three or four people around you and extend a blessing ... extend some of the love that we share together.

You will need to move somehow to do that. Without words.

And then while we are still in this space – though it's hard to do from just one spot there – shower upon all of us that blessing that we do share because we are gift to each other. So in whatever way you can find to do, again without words – physically bless all who are here.

And the last posture that [Maribeth] suggested for us was to come before our God in adoration and praise, by kneeling. Some of us remember from long ago that that was part of our tradition in worship.

So I'm going to invite you – if you think that it will be okay, and not too painful, and that you can get up again – to turn in the benches and to kneel for the remaining part of our silence. And if that's not good for you, staying seated and just leaning forward and perhaps resting on the bench in front of you is also good.

Let us come, let us kneel before our Maker.

Appendix K
RESPONSES TO ALL-CONGREGATION MOVEMENT

Total number of comments	52
Number of negative comments	20 (38% of all responses)

GENDER

Male	Responses made	20 (38% of all responses)
	Negative responses	7 (35% of male responses)
Female	Responses made	31 (60% of all responses)
	Negative responses	12 (39% of female responses)

Undisclosed

Responses made	1 (2% of all responses)
Negative responses	1

AGE

	Responses made	Negative responses
20's	4	1 (25% of age group's responses)
30's	8	2 (25% of age group's responses)
40's	3	1 (33% of age group's responses)
50's	9	1 (11% of age group's responses)
60's	13	4 (30% of age group's responses)
70's	8	5 (62% of age group's responses)
80's+	4	2 (50% of age group's responses)

CHURCH BACKGROUND GROWING UP

Mennonite	Responses made	43 (83% of all responses)
	Negative responses	20 (100% of negative responses)
Non-Mennonite	Responses made	9 (17% of all responses)
	Negative responses	0

LENGTH OF INVOLVEMENT AT SALFORD

More than 15 years	Responses made	35 (67% of all responses)
	Negative responses	19 (95% of negative responses)
6-15 years	Responses made	7 (13% of all responses)
	Negative responses	1 (5% of negative responses)
Fewer than 5 years	Responses made	10 (20% of responses)
	Negative responses	0

Appendix L
VIDEO CLIPS

Click on an image for link to video or access each by provided URL.

First Sunday – Jesus’ Temptation

www.youtube.com/watch?v=td5EcvvZH_A



Second Sunday – Fear/Love Shape and Stillness

www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2xmJeqDgak



Third Sunday – Prayer Movement, “Through Our Fragmentary Prayers”

www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CpEG8YaajE



Fourth Sunday – Bibliodrama of Prodigal Son, part 1

www.youtube.com/watch?v=k13VO1_Ccew

**Fourth Sunday – Bibliodrama of Prodigal Son, part 2**

www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXMDoDqp6zg

**Fifth Sunday – Tableaux of Woman Anointing Jesus' Feet**

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jw1X1cQ4urE



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