

A TRINITY OF LOVE:  
THE FORMATION OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN WORSHIP

A professional project submitted to the Theological School of  
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requirements for the degree,  
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## ABSTRACT

### A TRINITY OF LOVE:

#### THE FORMATION OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN WORSHIP

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It is the purpose of *A Trinity of Love* to employ narrative research methodology to explore *Trinity Community Presbyterian Church's* understanding of growing in love together as the Body of Christ in worship. The project assessed community formation in worship and used *Love Song for a Savior* by the band Jars of Clay as its organizing principle.

As the project paper discusses, when researchers encountered congregational resistance to project elements, they revised their methodology to settle on two explorations between February and May 2014. The first ministry action asked about the impact dancing (Holy Motion) has on community. The second facilitated interaction with the cross as a symbol during the seasons of Lent and Easter.

The paper evaluates the project and explores its implications for the practice of ministry. The gathered stories present the conclusion that both change and transformation occurred. We observed these differences in three distinct ways: worship as play; worship as participation; and worship as community. We discerned transformation related to the following symbols: dancing, the communion table, the cross and death. Each of these symbols, often through challenge, invited a new way forward and the emergence of a new future. The stories highlight the need for further study

regarding the impact that the role of dancing and interaction with symbols might have on the formation of Christian community in worship.

In the midst of change and transformation we discerned a preferred future related to sustaining a healthy community of love that is led by the Holy Spirit. At *Trinity*, it is in and through embracing grief and proclaiming hope that our preferred future of love might arrive. We are called to claim a new story if we are to seek a new future as the Body of Christ.

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Finally, to the colleagues in my Drew Doctor of Ministry class, I give thanks for your companionship and sharing in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## INTRODUCTION

### THE TRUTH ABOUT STORIES

“The truth about stories is that that’s all we are.”<sup>1</sup>

“You know when you were up there talking today, and said that line about nothing good ever being able to come from Nazareth, well I wonder if anything good can come from *Trinity*.”<sup>2</sup>

What a story! It was only a few words, a very few words. If stories are primarily about who we are and how we make sense of our existence, then this story packed a punch. It landed hard and fast. It spoke something of significance about *Trinity* and its ministry in the name of Jesus Christ. *Trinity’s* is a story of significant joy, pain, tragedy and love. I do not believe that individual offered these words as harsh criticism or in a mean spirited manner. Rather these words spoke power and truth about aspects of the recent history at *Trinity Community Presbyterian Church*. It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand a person, a place or a thing without hearing a story, often a bigger story. We cannot begin to know what Nathaniel means when he offers harsh criticism about Nazareth without knowing the story of Nazareth. Further, we cannot

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories, A Native Narrative: CBC Massey Lectures* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 2003), 32.

<sup>2</sup> The words spoken to the minister by a member of *Trinity Community Presbyterian Church* after worship on Sunday morning referring to a sermon about John 1: 43-51 in which Nathaniel asks Philip: can anything good come out of Nazareth.



begin to understand the profound hope in Philip's response to these words without knowing the story of God's love in Jesus Christ. So, "come and see"<sup>3</sup> my story of ministry at *Trinity Community Presbyterian Church*.

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<sup>3</sup> John 1: 46b, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). All scripture quotation in the professional paper are from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted.

## CHAPTER 1

### I WANT TO FALL IN LOVE WITH YOU

I was ecstatic after reading the email on my phone. April 24, 2013 is a day I will remember! I had not heard anything in the two weeks since my last meeting with the search team. Prior to my interview with that team there had been a flurry of activity, emails, phone calls and documents. Then – silence. Of course there was the required “thank you for meeting with us” email, and then, for fourteen days, nothing. I figured the longer I waited, the lower my chances. They always call the selected candidate first and then, only after a yes, references checks and some general agreement on terms; they deliver the bad news to the other finalists. The email, with the subject line references, arrived at 10:29 a.m. The word made me so curious, and at the same time I could feel my knees getting weak. I started to sweat and I lost all focus. I was standing with a group of adults and children, drinking apple juice and eating animal cookies with my son, Nathan at a Parents and Tots event. I opened the email from the interim moderator: “I am requesting the names and contact information for your references. A special session meeting has been called on May 2<sup>nd</sup> to consider a sole candidate. We are coming down to the wire...hang on!”<sup>1</sup> I felt so excited and so nervous in that moment. I was having a hard time hanging on. I closed my eyes for a moment and my head began to spin. I opened my eyes, smiled and nodded at the parent who had been speaking with me the

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<sup>1</sup> Email from *Trinity's* Interim Moderator, April 24, 2013.

whole time, completely unaware of anything she said. As I walked over to my wife and son, who were sitting across the room, I felt rather strange. There was a new energy inside me and yet I was so nervous, so unsure. I knew that everything from that moment forward would be different.

### ***TRINITY COMMUNITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH***

I am currently in my second year of ministry at *Trinity Community Presbyterian Church*. *Trinity* has a story to tell, as today it represents an amalgamation of three churches that came together fourteen years ago, in 2000. Its history goes back to 1840, when Scottish immigrants founded a church in Guthrie, Ontario. By 1890 there were five Presbyterian churches in the township of Oro. In 1894 the congregations of *Central*, *St. Andrew's* and *Guthrie Presbyterian* became a three-point charge and remained so until amalgamation in the year 2000. In 1998 the three congregations voted to sell their



**Figure 1. *Trinity Community Presbyterian Church, Oro Medonte, Ontario.***

current buildings and build a new church with a new name. In 2000, *Trinity* was born and experienced significant growth in a brief time. The new congregation spent three years worshipping in a local school. In January 2003 *Trinity* moved into its current

location, a new site, an 18,000 square foot modern church building.<sup>2</sup> The congregation continued to grow until 2007 when the pastoral staff members, a lead and associate minister, resigned. In explanation, they expressed impatience with presbytery process and revealed their sense of call to a new ways and model of ministry. After leaving *The Presbyterian Church in Canada*, they each began new and separate non-denominational congregations in the surrounding area. One of those congregations, *Connexus Community*, originally received over 80% of the families who were worshipping at *Trinity*. Today, *Connexus* continues to grow and many people attending *Trinity* have friends and family members who worship there.

On November 4, 2007, after the previous pastoral leadership departed, one hundred people gathered in the gym to worship. The scene was a stark contrast to the congregation of nine hundred individuals who had gathered for worship, at three separate services, the Sunday before. Two interim moderators led *Trinity* as it defined a new reality and new ministry. During January 2008 leaders organized a congregational consultation that answered four questions: Who are we? Why are we? Who is our neighbor? What size church is God calling us to be? Emerging from those gatherings was the following statement:

*Trinity Community Presbyterian Church* is a caring, hospitable, passionate joyful, excited, and somewhat anxious faith community. We are seeking to reach multi-generational families through welcome, worship, and witness. We see ourselves growing from a pastoral-size congregation into a program-size church.<sup>3</sup>

During summer of 2009, *Trinity* called a new minister and, from an outsider's perspective, the church stabilized and began to grow again. In 2011 the new minister

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<sup>2</sup> See Figure 1.

<sup>3</sup> Excerpt from the background section of the 'Congregational Profile' prepared July 18, 2012.

resigned in the midst of significant conflict, left the denomination and accepted a call to a church in the Bahamas. In short, the congregation has gone through two leadership and identity transitions in the past six years. During my first year in ministry at *Trinity* I began to hear, from an insider's perspective, that *Trinity's* narrative is even more complex than the surface view presents.

### **THE CALL**

The adventure of my transition to be the Minister of *Trinity Community Presbyterian Church* is a complex love story. Beginning to discern God's call for a change in my ministry context I explored local churches in the process of searching for a minister. Previously I had not served in congregational ministry, although it had always been a part of my larger calling to ministry. After finishing seminary I served in ministry for two years at *Montreat Conference Center*, a year at the national offices of *The Presbyterian Church in Canada*, and four years in regional youth and young adult ministry consulting. As I began to explore possibilities, I became interested in *Trinity* when something about the church profile caught my attention and nudged me to apply. The profile was different than others I had read. It presented a community of faith who, despite a challenging past, seemed willing to embrace a future. It also might have been the lower average age of the members, the contemporary style of worship or the energy for being the church in the here and now. While there were many positives, I was also aware of the complex congregational history, specifically related to the last two ministers. While *Trinity* appeared open to embracing a future, it was clear that the past was a large part of the present moment. I was well aware the past would have a significant impact on the next minister and had knowledge of specific challenges *Trinity* faced. This

knowledge emerged from friends and colleagues who had worshipped, been part of the community and held leadership roles in the past at *Trinity*. I knew that ministerial leadership at *Trinity*, even with all its potential, would nevertheless be a challenge. Even so, I sensed that my broad and varied experiences in ministry, especially in non-traditional settings, provided skills and resources that could assist *Trinity*. While I was more liberal theologically, and more liberal in my worship leadership than previous ministers, with the match in our requisite gifts and requested skills, I was not concerned. Another significant factor in the discernment process for me was family. In fact, at that moment in my life, my strongest sense of call was to family. I am part of a young adult clergy couple with an infant son. My wife was entering her fourth year of ministry at a local church in the presbytery. While we were open to discussing the prospect of a geographical move, there was no doubt that moving could present other challenges. In the midst of all these factors in the discernment process I applied to *Trinity*.

At the beginning of the process, it felt like a long time before I heard a response from the search committee – there were over fifty applicants. Then the field narrowed to eight and the search committee asked each of us to submit video sermons. At this moment I felt as if a relationship had been birthed. As the process continued, the committee invited three people to interview. Preparing for the interview led me to realize how much I felt drawn to *Trinity*, despite an awareness of their history, and the actual interview was a God-moment in so many ways. It was a God-moment indicating that a long-term relationship was possible, despite some of the challenges we would both need to face. For me, and as I learned later, for the search team as well, it never felt like a question and answer process. Rather it was all dialogue. Before I knew it, we were

planning our future together with energy, excitement and passion. For me, this was a moment when I felt as if I were seeing “face to face.”<sup>4</sup>

Reflecting back, this seeing clearly was God at work forming our relationship. Ministers often talk about feeling a sense of call; wow – did I have that feeling! It was intense, passion-filled and joyful. When the search team invited me to preach for the call, I said to the interim moderator that I felt as if I had been on one blind date with the church, and although it went amazingly well, I wanted to meet with the session for a further “date.” With a strong sense of *Trinity* being the ‘right’ church, I was nevertheless aware of dynamics that continued to present questions: *Trinity’s* ministerial history, varied theological perspectives and my strong sense of call to family.

As can happen in romantic relationships, an amazing first date sometimes leads to a search for something deeper from which to form a lasting relationship. I remember my first date with my wife Courtney well. We went out for dinner at an Asian fusion restaurant called *Cravings* and had such a great time that we extended the evening to a great local restaurant and bar on Danforth Avenue in Toronto called *Allen’s*. While there is no doubt that I was infatuated with Courtney’s beauty, what I remember more was being drawn into the great conversation we shared.

I experienced this additional informal meeting with the *Trinity* session in the same way as I had my meeting with the search team. I sensed God’s Spirit at work. As much as I was drawn to the church, I was even more drawn into the great dialogue I shared with these leaders about life, love and God. The energy, passion and love were still evident, but something deeper was also forming and beginning to take shape. Something deeper forming in relationship together made some of the other questions seem less significant.

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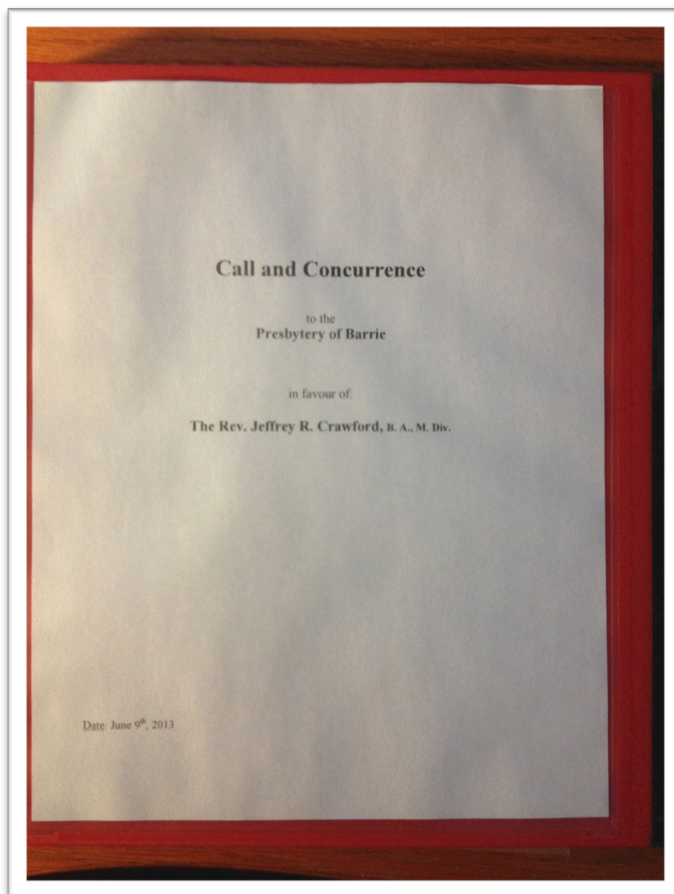
<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 13: 12-13.

During the weekend that I preached for the call, the love story continued. On Saturday there was an afternoon meet-and-greet social, an evening out for dinner with the session and dessert at a session member's home. Sunday included morning worship, a potluck lunch and then a congregational meeting.

During the meet-and-greet on Saturday and worship service on Sunday, it was evident that our relationship was developing further and continuing to take shape. Before worship, I

gathered with the elders and we

prayed together. For me, this time of prayer was one of clarity and insight; once again the sensation of seeing "face to face." *Trinity* voted ninety-eight percent in favor of calling me as their minister. Following Presbyterian tradition and polity, all the members and adherents<sup>5</sup> signed their names to the call (a document).<sup>6</sup> Representatives of the



**Figure 2. Call and Concurrence to the *Presbytery of Barrie* in favor of The Rev. Jeffrey R. Crawford.**

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<sup>5</sup> An adherent is an individual who is a semi-regular attendee of a congregation and declares an affiliation with the church. Adherents are permitted to sign their support on certain congregational votes and decisions but are not eligible to be elected to eldership (spiritual leadership) within the church. Some adherents, after a time of connection with a congregation, become members; others remain as adherents for their whole lives. A growing number of adherents in congregations highlights the postmodern challenge of membership.

<sup>6</sup> See Figure 2.



congregation then presented the call to the *Presbytery of Barrie*<sup>7</sup>, who deemed it was indeed a gospel call and placed it in my hands. When the Presbytery placed the call, with one hundred and fifty signatures, in my hands, I felt a profound sense of excitement and responsibility. I felt excitement – as I knew that this new relationship had received the support and blessing of the church. *Trinity* and I had affirmed our commitment to each other, and now the church was also confirming that this relationship was a good match. I felt a responsibility – as the call document was weighty in my hands. I felt a sense of commitment to these individuals who had signed their names to the call and our shared commitment to the Gospel. I accepted the call and our formal covenantal relationship began. A new chapter of the story, a search for faith, a love, came into fruition when on September 3<sup>rd</sup> I began as *Trinity's* new Lead Minister.

#### LOVE SONG FOR A SAVIOR

I resonate with *Love Song for a Savior* by the band *Jars of Clay* (also known as *I want to fall in love with you*). For me, the song reflects the experience of falling in love with the people of *Trinity Community Presbyterian Church*, and also the experience of falling in love with God all over again.

Love is complex – it challenges and rewards at the same time. Over the last two years, *Love Song for a Savior* has come to represent many of the joys and challenges of my journey in congregational ministry with *Trinity Community Presbyterian Church*. In this Doctor of Ministry project, the song became part of our worship together, the focus

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<sup>7</sup> The *Presbytery of Barrie* is a body of church elders (ruling elders) and ministers (teaching elders). This administrative body (church court) represents all the local congregations of a regional geographic area and has the authority to act as corporate bishop. The *Presbytery of Barrie* represents 31 churches, of which *Trinity Community Presbyterian Church* is one.

of our interviews, and a guiding principle for our life together. As part of our story, the song is now part of my story.

In open fields of wild flowers,  
 she breathes the air and flies away  
 She thanks her Jesus for the daises and the roses  
 in no simple language  
 Someday she'll understand the meaning of it all  
 He's more than the laughter or the stars in the heavens  
 As close as a heartbeat or a song on her lips  
 Someday she'll trust Him and learn how to see Him  
 Someday He'll call her and she will come running  
 and fall in His arms and the tears will fall down and she'll pray,

I want to fall in love with You

Sitting silent wearing Sunday best  
 The sermon echoes through the walls  
 A great salvation through it calls to the people  
 who stare into nowhere, and can't feel the chains on their souls

He's more than the laughter or the stars in the heavens  
 As close as a heartbeat or a song on our lips  
 Someday we'll trust Him and learn how to see Him  
 Someday He'll call us and we will come running  
 and fall in His arms and the tears will fall down and we'll pray,

I want to fall in love with You

It seems too easy to call you Savior,  
 Not close enough to call you God  
 So as I sit and think of words I can mention  
 to show my devotion

I want to fall in love with You  
 my heart beats for You<sup>8</sup>

### **THE PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT**

Focusing on narrative research, pastoral researchers Richard Hester and Kelli Walker-Jones urge us to find our own story, to get to know ourselves, the unfolding

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<sup>8</sup> Jars of Clay, "Love Song for a Savior," Jars of Clay. Released October 24, 1995, on *Jars of Clay*. USA, CD.

direction of our lives, and the way we do ministry, in order to lead others effectively.<sup>9</sup> Based on this understanding of leadership, it will be the purpose of the project to explore *Trinity's* understanding of growing in love together as the Body of Christ in worship. We will explore growing in love together (community) in worship through three experiences: communion, play (Holy Motion,) and our developing minister-congregation relationship. This worship project on Christian community will be a narrative exploration about growing together in love. The project is a causal/predictive research puzzle, defined by ethnographer Mary Clark Moschella as: “the effect of one practice on another.”<sup>10</sup> The project will explore how the following experiences impact community: participating in communion; playing together; and forming the minister-congregation relationship. As a community we have promised to form a lasting relationship based on mutual trust, health and wholeness.

### **A TRINITY OF LOVE**

The project paper will use *Love Song for a Savior*<sup>11</sup> as its organizing principle. Following the topics and language of the song, the project paper will model and mirror the words of *Love Song for a Savior* to examine the formation of Christian community. Chapter two will develop the biblical and theological basis for the project as it explores the God of love. Chapter three will articulate how the project methodology focuses on growing in love together, while we ‘sit in silence wearing Sunday’s best.’ The fourth chapter will share the project experiences of playing together, holy week and the growing

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<sup>9</sup> Richard L. Hester and Kelli Walker-Jones, *Know Your Story and Lead With It: the Power of Narrative in Clergy Leadership* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2009), 6, 104-105.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 77.

<sup>11</sup> “Love Song for a Savior.”

minister-congregation relationship as a ‘sermon echoing through the walls, while a great salvation calls’ for ‘the people who stare into nowhere and can’t feel the chains on their souls.’ Chapter five seeks to ‘understand the meaning of it all’ through evaluation and will focus specifically on the signs and symbols which are ‘more than the laughter or the stars in the heavens; as close as a heartbeat or a song on our lips.’ Wrapping up the evaluation the paper will present the ways we ‘trust Him and learn how to see Him’ face to face. The project paper will conclude by exploring the practice of ministry, as we ultimately know that ‘someday He’ll call us and we will come running, fall in His arms and the tears will fall down and we’ll pray.’ It is from this point of departure that the project paper seeks to explore a *Trinity* of love.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE GOD OF LOVE

I remember being told, talk about God, do not talk about yourself. People who come to church want to hear about Jesus, not about you. You should be invisible. Our professors of preaching reiterated this, but it also found its way into other classes and in general conversation at seminary. I thought I was doing a good job until someone said to me: “put a little more of you into Sunday morning, tell us about your faith and family.”<sup>1</sup> It dawned on me that I had been so concerned about keeping the focus on Jesus that I had removed myself altogether. Canadian Presbyterian minister John Congram points us to the reality that God speaks into our lives: “Fredrick Buechner was right when he said ‘all theology, like all fiction, is at its heart autobiographical...if God speaks to us at all in this world, if God speaks anywhere, it is into our personal lives.’”<sup>2</sup>

UK professor of theology and religion Stephen Pattison’s model of theological conversation from *Some Straw for the Bricks* helps frame my ministry context at *Trinity* and invites personal stories. Three areas of focus for dialogue emerge within the larger Christian tradition: scripture; my own Presbyterian tribe and its faith presuppositions;

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with a congregant, February 19, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> John Congram, “Your Story and God’s,” *Glad Tidings* volume 90.1 (January/February 2014) 15-18.

and the realities of *Trinity's* current what-is.<sup>3</sup> Grounding the purpose of the project in the larger Christian tradition invites a dialogue with the biblical narrative and myriad of possible ensuing theological frameworks.

### **BIBLICAL ENGAGEMENT**

Throughout the biblical narrative we encounter a God who acts in many and various ways. In the midst of it all, God almost always acts and moves towards love. Even in the midst of judgment and challenge, God seeks ways to show mercy, compassion and grace. God in Jesus Christ, again and again, shows the power of love and challenges us, God's people, to respond in kind. The grounding for the project is found in the God of love, as we explore meeting God face to face<sup>4</sup>, speaking the truth in love,<sup>5</sup> and being the body of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

### **FACE TO FACE**

“We text but don't talk ... we Skype but don't always speak well to one another... we measure friendship not by depth but by numbers on Facebook. In contrast, God seeks to meet us face to face, and calls us into intimate and faithful relationships.”<sup>7</sup> These words from a video about *The Presbyterian Church in Canada's* national youth ministry conference invite us to encounter God in a personal way. Paul's love-language in 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13 about seeing face to face is an intimate image in a world that

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Pattison, “Some Straw for the Bricks: A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection,” In *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, edited by James Woodward, Blackwell Readings in Modern Theology (Oxford Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 139-141.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13.

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 4: 11-16.

<sup>6</sup> Colossians 1:11-20.

<sup>7</sup> The Presbyterian Church in Canada “Canada Youth 2014” (video) April 2014.

disconnects us, ironically, with connectivity. This text speaks about love's emergence from seeing face to face. Even if seeing in part is all that is possible now, these glimpses of God empower us for the journey of life. This story from 1 Corinthians grounds the project in the biblical narrative and is the focus text for the February worship series.

My experience of arriving at *Trinity* is in essence a love story. A love story that began with a first date with the search team, a second date with the session, and a third date on a Sunday morning with the whole church community. I have to admit when I arrived to meet with the search team on that April morning, I was not looking to fall in love. In fact, I was not really sure about *Trinity*. I had been sensing that God was calling me to something new, but I was unsure what that something might be. I was drawn to something about *Trinity* and I suppose this was the reason that I applied, but I was not sure. I was so unsure about it all, that I arrived at the interview saying to myself, "God this is crazy, I am not sure this makes any sense." During my interview, it seemed as if I attempted to suggest reasons why a relationship might not work. As the morning progressed, the urgings in my heart were pushing me, and I began to wonder if this was something I should be considering. I began to become interested in these people who were asking me questions. I began to sense their passion and yearning for God. I found that our time together felt less like an interview and more like a dialogue in which we started planning our future together. I left that 'date' interview feeling as if something had happened – as if God had been working. When I arrived home I said to Courtney that I really felt I had encountered God. Seeing the search team face to face, I had experienced God to be calling me to *Trinity*. My first date with *Trinity* was so good that I

knew God was at work. It only got better as I met the session and then the whole church family.

The love that Jesus talks about in scripture is not romanticism. True love is always concerned about the other person, which at times can make it challenging, difficult, and downright painful. The kind of love that Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 13 is called *agape* love. This love is one that God creates in your life. As I experience it, *agape* is God loving another person through you. It is God's acting in and through each of us that empowers and enables us to love another in selfless, giving and passionate ways. This *agape* knows how to care, it knows how to give, it knows grace. It is a call to be open to the power of God working in you and loving another person through you.

Theologian Frederick Buechner says love is: "...a grave, fierce yearning and reaching out for paradise itself; a losing and finding of the self in the paradise of another."<sup>8</sup>

A modern paraphrase of this passage was developed by writer and editor David Sanford entitled *Gods Definition of Love*, and it help us, particularly in the church, to really hear this story from scripture in our own lives:

If I talk a lot about God, the Bible, and the Church, but I fail to ask about other people's needs, I'm simply making a lot of empty religious noise. If I graduate from a respected private Christian university and know all the answers to questions you'll never even think of asking, and if I have all of the degrees to prove it...and if I say I believe in God with all my heart, soul, and strength, claiming to have incredible answers to my prayers, but I fail to take the time to find out what makes others laugh and why they cry, I'm nothing. If I sell an extra car and some of my books to raise money for poor starving kids somewhere, and if I give my life for God's service and burn out after pouring everything I have into the work, but do it all without ever once caring about the people, the real hurting people—the moms and dads and sons and daughters and orphans and widows and the lonely and forgotten—if I pour my life into the Kingdom but forget to love those here on earth, my energy is wasted, and so is my life. Here is what love is like...genuine love. God's kind of love. It's patient. It can wait. It helps others, even if they never find out who assisted them. Love doesn't look for

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<sup>8</sup> Frederick Buechner, *The Sacred Journey* (New York: Harper Collins, 1982), 54.



greener pastures. Love doesn't boast. It doesn't try to build itself up to be something it isn't. Love doesn't act in a loose, immoral way. It doesn't seek to take, but it willingly gives. Love doesn't lose its temper. It doesn't keep changing its mind. Love doesn't think about how difficult the other person is, and certainly doesn't think of how it could get back at someone. Love is grieved deeply over the evil in this world, but it rejoices over truth. Love comes and sits with you when you're feeling down and finds out what is wrong. It empathizes with you and believes in you. Love knows you'll come through just as God planned, and love carries on to the end. It doesn't give up, quit, diminish, or go home. Love perseveres, even when everything goes wrong and the feelings leave and the other person doesn't seem as special anymore. Love succeeds 100 percent of the time. That, my friends, is what genuine love is.<sup>9</sup>

Ultimately, Paul came to understand that love is the most important way Christians express their gratitude for and acceptance of the love of God made known in Christ. This love is ours, not as a reward or payment for anything we have done, but because God chooses to offer it.<sup>10</sup> For many of us, myself included, when we experience this love in our lives, we feel called to share it with others. So I love my neighbors, not because I will get something back, but because the love of God inspires me to do so. I seek to love sacrificially and extravagantly because that is how God loved us first. As I love, the more aware I become of what a wonderful thing it is to be loved, and gratitude deepens.

I believe much of our earthly life is about growing in our understanding of God and ourselves. It is also about coming to terms with the reality that some mysteries cannot be solved. Sometimes we are unable to see face to face, here and now. Ultimately, we can rejoice that in God's eternity we will know God fully, as we have always been fully known.

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<sup>9</sup> David Sanford, "True Love- Gods Definition of Love: a paraphrases of 1 Corinthians 13" The Christian Broadcasting Network- Spiritual Life, 2010, accessed February 1, 2014, [http://www.cbn.com/spirituallife/inspirationalteaching/Sanford\\_Love.aspx](http://www.cbn.com/spirituallife/inspirationalteaching/Sanford_Love.aspx).

<sup>10</sup> Romans 8 & 12.

## SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

It was one of those meetings where you want to sit behind the desk. Most of the time when I meet with people in my office I am intentional about not sitting behind the minister's desk, but instead I take a chair or a seat on the couch. I had just returned from vacation. I arrived back to a message from the clerk of session saying please call me first before you respond to email or other voicemail messages. I knew that something was not right. Indeed there was a conflict and it required a face to face meeting with the three primary people involved before the matter escalated any further. As I met with the people involved in my office we began with prayer and the reminder that we would speak the truth in love.

Ephesians 4: 11-16 is about the call of all God's children to speak the truth in love. This story is about how love can at times hurt, challenge and cause anger, and how we are called to be forgiving and loving, just as we receive love and forgiveness from God. Our call as Christians is to grow up into Christ by proclaiming the truth in a loving way. In order to speak the truth in love, vulnerability is often necessary. My experience has been that loving as Jesus loves asks that I take risks both large and small. On many occasions when I have been prepared to become vulnerable, then Jesus has met my need for love. It we are to speak the truth, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us "love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend."<sup>11</sup>

Children can often help us speak and know the truth in a way that adults cannot. We turn to the children's book by Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit*. In the story a toy horse and a toy rabbit are talking to each other and the conversation goes like this:

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<sup>11</sup> Mervyn Warren, *King Came Preaching: The Pulpit Power of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2008), 135.

What is real? Asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. “Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?” “Real isn't how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but really loves you, then you become real.” “Does it hurt?” asked the Rabbit. “Sometimes,” said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. “When you are Real you don't mind being hurt.” “Does it happen all at once, like being wound up, he asked, or bit by bit?” “It doesn't happen all at once,” said the Skin Horse. “You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand.”<sup>12</sup>

For me these words from *The Velveteen Rabbit* contain a simple and yet complex message of love – a message that calls me to wrap the brokenness of the world in arms of love. As Canadian theologian and professor Douglas John Hall recorded, when a group of ministers asked, “What is the mission of the church in the twenty-first century?” their response was, “It is time to embrace and take seriously the mission ‘to confess hope in action – in the church, tell the story; in the world, live the story.’”<sup>13</sup> Their insight was that living the story in the world is possibly the simplest, and yet more profound way of speaking the truth in love.

### **THE BODY OF CHRIST**

I believe that many people have the words to at least one love song permanently imprinted on their hearts. Words that we carry around because they mean something significant to us about our loved one, God and ourselves. One of my favorites is Joni

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<sup>12</sup> Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 1997), 12-13.

<sup>13</sup> Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 195-197. This answer was developed by a group of eight minister/scholars meeting together as the ‘Campbell Seminar’ at *Columbia Theological Seminary* in the fall of 2000 seeking to answer the question: ‘What is the mission of the church in the twenty-first century?’

Mitchell's *A Case of You*. Courtney and I danced to this song, the K.D. Lang cover of it, at our wedding:

Oh I am a lonely painter  
 I live in a box of paints  
 I'm frightened by the devil  
 And I'm drawn to those ones that ain't afraid

I remember that time you told me you said  
 "Love is touching souls"  
 Surely you touched mine  
 'Cause part of you pours out of me  
 In these lines from time to time  
 Oh, you're in my blood like holy wine  
 You taste so bitter and so sweet

Oh I could drink a case of you darling  
 And I would still be on my feet  
 I would still be on my feet<sup>14</sup>

The words evoke vivid images, powerful emotions and conjure up memories.

Love songs have an ability to speak truth to the heart. The hymn from Colossians 1:11-20 is a love song and it invites us to explore who Jesus is and how we can sing songs of love with our lives for Him. The words from Colossians invite us to listen in on a love song from a particular community, the church at Colossae, to Jesus Christ. Biblical scholars believe that Colossians 1: 11-20 is a fragment of an early Christian hymn. It is a song sung by the first generations of people who followed Jesus. The writer of the letter is quoting this song back to them, as the writer greets them and prays for their strength and faith. The song is filled with beautiful and important reflections on the nature of Jesus, who he was and is, what he meant to that early community and what He means to us today.

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<sup>14</sup> K.D. Lang, "A Case of You," by Joni Mitchell, 1971. Released July 27, 2004, on *Hymns of the 49<sup>th</sup> Parallel*, Canada, CD.

This love song from Colossians tells us about relationships, about a relationship of encounter. When we fall in love, it utterly changes the way that we look at the world. When the first Christians lifted their voices to sing these words, I believe they were attempting to describe a relationship that was life changing, world-altering – their encounter with Jesus Christ. When we hear the words of this song, they are a reminder of one community’s extraordinary experience of the Christian life as relationship with the One towards whom all our stories and love songs point: the living, eternal God, the risen Christ. I hear these words as an invitation to enter into that same relationship.

The Colossians love song invites followers to be transferred from one kingdom to another. This early community reminds us that truly encountering Jesus Christ is life changing, world-altering. It is as if he is saying that once we encounter and build a relationship with Jesus, He rescues us and transports us to a new land; a land that is our inheritance even though we did not earn it.<sup>15</sup> Our life is changed completely, now everything is different. It is not simply a matter of fitting Jesus into our present way of thinking. Instead, we are transferred, moved, from one Kingdom to another, from one way of living to another. The whole world is new; nothing is as we have known it.

Often our world emphasizes and celebrates that we are to be our own persons and to ‘do it our own way.’ The world seemingly encourages people to be independent, strong and self-sufficient. Paul had a very different idea about the goal of human life. He believed that we are not meant to be completely independent and self-reliant. Rather, we are meant to be part of a community, what Paul calls the Body of Christ, where we care for and encourage one another and grow in our self-understanding as beloved

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<sup>15</sup> Colossians 1:20.

children of God.<sup>16</sup> Paul taught that as we rest in the grace and acceptance and love of God, we grow toward wholeness and become free to love others as unconditionally as we are loved. We can acknowledge honestly our own weaknesses and strengths, confident that God can work through all aspects of our lives.

### **THEOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT**

My faith experiences of childhood in *The Presbyterian Church in Canada*, formal theological education and various leadership roles in ministry creatively shape my vision and theological understanding of ministry. My previous experiences connecting with congregations at various stages in their life cycle provide me a sense of grounding when listening to some of *Trinity's* history. My understanding of ordained ministry of Word and Sacraments is to equip the congregation to be a practicing community of believers who are actively and intentionally living the Way of Christ at a deep and meaningful level. As I approach the challenging task of ministry, the deep roots of Presbyterianism continue to inspire me; roots that call us to be people who, reformed and always reforming, discern collectively.<sup>17 18</sup>

### **DECENTLY AND IN ORDER**

*The Presbyterian Church in Canada* believes that God's call to any individual, including a person in professional ministry, while it is deep, inward and personal, is also

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<sup>16</sup> The notion that we are the 'Body of Christ' is a biblical principle based on the following passages: Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 3:6, Colossians 1:18, Colossians 1:24.

<sup>17</sup> The Presbyterian Church In Canada, "The Preamble to the Ordination Vows," *The Book of Forms* (Toronto, 2013), Section 447.

<sup>18</sup> The Presbyterian Church In Canada, *Together in Ministry* (Toronto, 2004), 8-9.

discerned and affirmed by the wider community of faith.<sup>19</sup> My calling to professional ministry is indeed both personal and also affirmed by a wider community of faith.

Falling in love is something that we just innately know, inwardly and personally. All the while, falling in love is also something that others can observe as they see changes in behavior, demeanor and spirit. In the same way, my sense of call has been nurtured and deepened by questions and concerns raised personally and through the broader church community.

The broader church community tests a calling to ministry through participation in the sacraments, the wider church, the practice of ministry and the governance (polity) of the church. Just as love grows and changes as we encounter others face to face, various experiences within *The Presbyterian Church in Canada* have transformed my calling.

In my experience, the Presbyterian system of governance can bring great blessing for people. The system presents equal opportunity, and more importantly, equal representation of clergy and laypersons at the presbytery and general assembly levels. It calls for the Minister of Word and Sacraments<sup>20</sup> to be but one person in any decision making process. The system invites, encourages and uplifts leadership of the church by non-professional church workers. The congregational contexts in which I have been privileged to serve would lead me to believe that there is a direct relationship between the level of involvement by the session<sup>21</sup> and the lay leadership of the church and the all-

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<sup>19</sup> The Presbyterian Church in Canada “Theology of Ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments” *Acts & Proceedings of the 134<sup>th</sup> General Assembly* (2008), 353-365.

<sup>20</sup> Minister of Word and Sacraments is a formal title for pastor or minister within *The Presbyterian Church in Canada*. The ministry of Word and Sacraments involves preaching, teaching, conducting sacraments and offering pastoral care, in its fullest expression.

<sup>21</sup> A group of ordained members, who are chosen, called and empowered to be the spiritual leaders of the congregation. The session makes decisions, guided by the Holy Spirit, about the direction and vision

encompassing and effective mission and ministry of the church. In my experience, the love that is shown to others reflects the passion of the people.

Even so, we Presbyterians have a long-standing joke of deferring everything to committees for review, further study, or recommendations. This is one way I believe we can misunderstand how governance should operate. The *Book of Forms*, in my opinion, can be a valuable tool for oversight and maintaining order within the church.<sup>22</sup> However, I also believe that the rules in any system are only as effective and important as their overall outcome on the community. If the church is to discern its mission in the twenty-first century, I believe our calling is to speak the truth in love. For me, this means that the guidance of scripture should be the primary rule of faith in conflict.<sup>23</sup>

Further, my participation and leadership in the administration of the sacraments of the church is one way that I can and will seek the peace and unity of the Holy Catholic Church. Being claimed in the waters of baptism and fed at the table of Christ is one powerful way of claiming brotherhood and sisterhood in the Christian narrative of creation, birth, life, death, resurrection and re-creation. I feel called to be a steward of the mystery,<sup>24</sup> to embrace the holy while engaging culture.

As a leader, it is essential that I foster the two-fold nature of the church as a place of both refuge and outreach; a threshold that connects sacred and secular; that connects all the things that God loves. My deep desire is to lead a congregation that nourishes its members and provides them with a safe haven, even as it stretches and challenges them to

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of the church. The session is responsible to provide for worship, education and the care of the congregation. Sessions typically meet once a month in order to conduct the business of the church.

<sup>22</sup> The Presbyterian Church in Canada, *The Book of Forms* (Toronto, 2013), Sections 001-451.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 18, conflict resolution; Ephesians 4: 11-16.

<sup>24</sup> 1 Corinthians 4: 1-5, Steward of God's Mysteries.



be Christ in the world. As a minister, my role includes fostering trust that encourages members to follow the Spirit's call toward transformed and transforming community. For me, the relationship between minister and congregation, at its core, models something fundamentally Presbyterian in nature. In teams and in groups we are enriched with various perspectives and gifts forming a corporate wisdom in ministry that makes room for the guiding of the Holy Spirit.

### **THE TRINITY AND *TRINITY***

Theological reflection about the what-is at *Trinity* attends to how the larger Christian themes and specific Presbyterian tribal realities are connected or disconnected from this local congregation. The love that exists between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit demonstrates that we are meant to be in loving relationship with each other.<sup>25 26</sup> I believe the challenge arises not in knowing we are meant to be in relationship, but rather in how to be in relationship.

January 2015 marks the fifteenth anniversary of *Trinity Community Presbyterian Church*. The theme of love is one that permeates *Trinity's* whole journey. In the challenging North American mainline protestant landscape, we believe it is the work of the Spirit for three small struggling congregations to join together and form one community. The decisions to sell three church buildings, worship in a school for three years, build a new building and join together were significant, as are the upheaval and challenges that have occurred along the way. The recent challenges during the last two

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<sup>25</sup> Ted Peters, *God: The Worlds Future* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 107-111.

<sup>26</sup> Shirley C. Guthrie Jr., *Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 85-88, 91-95.

pastorates signal a call for the community to seek to encounter God face to face, and then reach out to each other, speaking the truth in love.

*Trinity* is struggling to acknowledge that the world around us, both natural creation and humanity, appears to yearn loudly and frequently for redemption. Not only creation, but also everything within it, appears to be in desperate need of re-creation and reconciliation. We believe the proclamation must be made: “the world is full of pain, and God loves the world.”<sup>27</sup> At *Trinity* the pain is palpable – the pain from six years of transition; the pain from a culture of mistrust; the pain from feeling abandoned. The pain lies right under the surface, but if you ask about it, silence is often the answer.

*Trinity* appears to lack a clear mandate of hope in a world consumed with so much pain, destruction, sorrow and heartache. The hope that emerged from three churches joining together was shattered when the break-up took place in late 2007. Hope is fundamentally linked with the experience of Christian faith, yet in many ways we at *Trinity* seem to lack this essential quality. When we talk about the future at *Trinity*, it is always in relationship with, in comparison to, or in direct competition with, the past. Hope for the future may be seen in concrete numbers and tangible objects, whereas biblical faith requires one to have hope in things that cannot be explained, rationalized, or easily understood.<sup>28</sup> Faith is about having a deep hope in the midst of reality, the time of here and now, which may be full of pain, hurt and sorrow; but also possibly peace, joy and love. Faith requires the ability to see that hope is a possibility in any situation no matter how difficult or seemingly impossible a positive outcome might be. Hope is not to be confused with happiness or pleasure, but rather it is linked with the coming of the

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<sup>27</sup> Hall, 32.

<sup>28</sup> Hebrews 11:1.

cosmic Christ in the birth of a child and the arrival of the King. It is this type of hope, rooted in Christian faith, which becomes the focus of an authentic Christian community. It is this type of hope that *Trinity* seeks if we are to truly encounter the God of love.

Theologian and Hebrew Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann argues that both Christian institutions and persons are so enculturated in the ethos of consumerism that they have lost their ability to believe or act personally and corporately.<sup>29</sup> Brueggemann argues that the church and her people have lost their collective memory and in many ways ridicule hope. As such, we need to engage the task of prophetic ministry and to evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the dominant culture.<sup>30</sup> Brueggemann explores hope as an alternative to the dominant culture. Brueggemann, in a profound manner, states: “the royal consciousness (dominate culture) leads people to numbness, especially to numbness about death. It is the task of prophetic ministry and imagination to bring people to engage their experiences of suffering to death.”<sup>31</sup> Criticism of reality begins properly in the ability to grieve, because it is in and through weeping that the claim is made that something is wrong and, therefore, hope exists for it to be better. It is through the process of prophetic imagination that we can engage suffering and death.<sup>32</sup> Walter Brueggemann makes the claim: “the riddle and insight of

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<sup>29</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination; Second Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

biblical faith is the awareness that only anguish leads to life, only grieving leads to joy, and only embracing endings permits new beginnings.”<sup>33</sup>

At *Trinity* claiming that something is wrong is a huge challenge. There is no doubt that the faith and church described above are radically different from the current church or the view from most members on Sunday morning. The difficult challenge for our time and place related to this promise of hope that arises from a deep mourning, is that we have no areas of life to explore hopefulness. We desperately need to tell our stories in sure and certain hope that they are true. Brueggemann tells us hope is:

the refusal to accept the reading of reality which is the majority opinion ... hope is subversive for it limits the grandiose pretensions of the present and dares to announce that the present to which we have all made commitments is now called into question.<sup>34</sup>

The ability to express this hope is grounded in theological language and doxology, which by all accounts is fundamentally subversive to the educated observer. The language of grief and lament, and the possibilities of hope that can arise from this weeping as the fundamental criticism of culture, is the task of prophetic ministry. God calls our Christian community to engage in this type of hope if we are to proclaim the gospel.

One of the goals, then, of the Christian faith is to practice ourselves into being Christian. The language that we use about our faith, the stories we tell, shapes an understanding of who we are: who we are in relationship to God, and where this journey of faith is taking us. Scripture scholar, Marcus Borg reminds us that: “how we speak and understand Christian language matters. It can change and revitalize our understanding of

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<sup>33</sup> Brueggemann, 56.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

what Christianity is about.”<sup>35</sup> As such, a focused and intentional use of language is paramount to the task of speaking and teaching the faith. It is through the reclaiming and transforming of stories that we can hope to be transformed ourselves, in life and faith.

The beautiful thing about stories is they are told from the perspective of the person who lived the experience. They are a primary account of events from the perspective of one person. In this sense all stories are true. A story’s truth emerges from the lived experience of the storyteller and gets codified in the telling and re-telling of the narrative. For some within the church, the personal and sometimes subjective nature of stories may be challenging; however, it seems necessary for us to live in that tension in order to find meaning. The existence of multiple stories about a singular event does not have to negate the validity of a single story; rather, multiple stories about a singular event may add to the veracity of it. Different versions of one event should cause us all to ask questions about the perspective or interpretation of that event.

Our God, our tribe and our own community call us to share our stories and tell again and again the story of Jesus Christ. John Congram reminds us, we need to tell our stories:

Karl Barth put it this way when he said that the church is Christ’s earthly form of existence. Stories of God that are interwoven with our own stories have a wonderful power: power to heal, and sometimes even to raise the dead. What power they have, when we tell them.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Marcus Borg, *Speaking Christian: Why Christian Words Have Lost Their Meaning and Power- And How They Can be Restored* (New York: Harper One, 2011), 234-238.

<sup>36</sup> Congram, 18.

## CHAPTER 3

### GROWING IN LOVE TOGETHER

“...sitting silent wearing Sunday best...”<sup>1</sup>

They all just sat there in their church clothes looking at me. At least it felt like they were just staring, looking, sitting, analyzing, and judging. Some wore more traditional church clothes, a shirt and tie here, a dress there. For the majority their Sunday best was comfortable jeans and a relaxed shirt. I wonder what they thought about me, about what I was wearing. Did they know I changed clothes three times and had stressed about all the little details? I was nervous, and ready to begin this new adventure. It was my first week, my first Sunday, September 8, 2013, as the minister at *Trinity Community Presbyterian Church*. I felt strange, awkward even, to be standing before these people, finally, with whom I had entered into this significant relationship, but knew little about. There were a few warm smiles, but mostly it was unfamiliar faces sitting silently.

One of the most important things, if not the most important thing, that the church does each week is worship. As a reformed worshipping community three basic elements are essential to worship: scripture, prayer and sacraments. The gathered community focuses on the Word of God and explores, takes apart and puts back together the life-giving words of wisdom. Prayers of joy, confession, celebration, thankfulness, challenge

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<sup>1</sup> “Love Song for a Savior.”

and prayers for each other are offered as part of worship. In my reformed tradition, the sacraments of communion and baptism, rightly administered and celebrated, are a visible sign of invisible grace. It is in and at the table and font that the sacred story becomes real for individuals and the community. In acts of remembrance and subversion we set common things, bread, wine and water, apart for a sacred and mysterious use. God speaks to us in bread broken, wine poured, and the chaos of water. It is in the sacred messiness of the sacraments that the church comes alive. Worship and Sacraments are joined together as the two exist in unison, informing and completing each other. Indeed in the reformed tradition leaders are ordained to both Word and Sacrament, a prophetic and priestly calling. The community gathers around book, bath and table in prayer – all three are essential to being the church.<sup>2</sup>

*Trinity*, in its brief history, had become known for powerful, stirring, helpful worship. Worship had long been a strength of the church, its leaders and its people. Scripture, creativity, song and prayer were essential elements in every worship service, but the sacraments were required only once per quarter. In fact one member of *Trinity* recalls a time when communion was not celebrated for five months or more.<sup>3</sup> The worship team would spend careful time planning and debriefing the message, the music, and the transitions in worship. A congregant suggested that for a period of time, when *Trinity's* attendance was at its peak, worship was more performance than participation.<sup>4</sup> As such, a sense of community as part of worship was not a strength back then – worship seemed like a collection of unfamiliar faces that happened to be sitting together on a

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<sup>2</sup> Fred P. Edie, *Book, Bath, Table and Time* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2007), 42-51.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with a congregant, April 16, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with a congregant, March 20, 2014.

Sunday morning. As the Local Advisory Committee (LAC)<sup>5</sup> and I met to explore project possibilities it became evident that one of the ways we could explore who we were as a community together was in worship. Specifically, the ways we are community, as we play, feast and grow in love together.

The specific plan had been to explore how three lenses help form community in worship through: play (Holy Motion), communion and the minister-congregation relationship. Despite my narrative of concern and opportunity, and my strong personal desire to explore the minister-congregation relationship, by the late fall of 2013 I began to see this would not be life-giving for the LAC, nor for the congregation, and perhaps even self destructive to my ministry at *Trinity*, as the project will demonstrate in chapters four and five.

I began meeting with the LAC in September 2013, only two weeks after beginning as the minister at *Trinity*. We met monthly during the fall of 2013. While the focus of these meetings was the project, the reality is we also spent significant time getting to know each other, building connections and establishing trust. I was the brand new minister and my relationship with the LAC was in its infancy. I was aware of the leadership history and knew the minister-congregation relationship was a source of pain and hurt for many in the congregation. I suggested that we just rip off the band-aid. While some dropped hints of concern about my approach, the majority seemed okay with proceeding.

On the surface my idea of seeking to explore, struggle and heal this important relationship seemed sound. We knew congregants had strong feelings about the pastor

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<sup>5</sup> The Local Advisory Committee (LAC) is a group of people from the congregation, who are chosen by the candidate to work with him or her as a collaborative team to plan, execute and evaluate the professional project. At *Trinity*, I chose a team of six individuals all from the pastor search team.



who served during the merger. The feelings in the LAC and in the congregation ranged from gratitude to betrayal, and during the second formal LAC meeting a controversy developed between two members about him. One member of the LAC shared his feelings that the past should remain in the past. Another member, who had a longer history with the merging pastor, took offence to this other member's approach. She realized that she needed to deal with unresolved feelings and history from the past in order to begin to allow herself to heal and move forward. This resulted in upset and division within the LAC.

Following the second LAC meeting, I had a sense that the minister-congregation relationship dynamic might need to be dropped. This sense emerged from the concern that the LAC might not be able to carry out its duties, as a group of four, if the two LAC members involved in the conflict did not continue in their roles. Both members had informed me they were reevaluating their participation in the LAC and larger involvement in *Trinity*. I was concerned that the ministerial history of *Trinity* might become the entire focus of the project and would raise other matters outside the scope of the project.

The internal dialogue at *Trinity* was ongoing about the specific aspects of the project, and at the same time my cohort and faculty members raised curious questions and concerns as they listened to me share my hunches and the story about the second LAC meeting. The external voices were able to discern more effectively than those of us on the inside. The LAC and I were too caught up in seeking to put our best foot forward and we sat silently wearing Sunday's best even though we knew we needed to change

direction. The tipping point came in the months that followed as dialogue shifted to the most recent minister and his departure.

The most recent minister was the focus of intense feelings. Members of the congregation felt lied to, rejected and abandoned by his brief time as pastor and his sudden departure that had seemingly come out of nowhere. Before the fall of 2013 I had a hunch that members of the congregation had intense feelings; however, congregants did not talk about the previous minister, so it was difficult to confirm this hunch. In a conversation with a member of the congregation, even my mentioning the previous minister's name caused a noticeable facial expression of discomfort. Even though most members of the LAC were aware of some of these dynamics, they were not forthcoming with their personal feelings. I believe the LAC was anxious, wanted to protect me as their new minister, and at the same time, was reluctant to engage the pain of the broken relationships. I came to the conclusion that the LAC did not want the project to reignite a dispute about the last six years, specifically about the previous minister, in fear that additional members would leave *Trinity*.

In the end, it was the LAC's silence about the minister-congregation relationship that spoke loudest. I finally realized, as the project began, that this avenue of exploration would lead to more anxiety and controversy than I wanted to manage in the first year of my pastorate. The LAC and I decided to focus on love through play and communion, and eliminate the minister-congregation dynamic, with the support and permission of the faculty to depart from the prospectus.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The project will explore *Trinity's* understanding of growing in love (community) as the Body of Christ in worship. The project will examine community in worship through two experiences: play (Holy Motion) and communion.<sup>6</sup> This worship project on Christian community will be a narrative exploration about growing together in love. The project is a causal/predictive research puzzle, defined by Mary Clark Moschella as: “the effect of one practice on another.”<sup>7</sup> The project will explore how the following experiences impact community: participating in communion and playing together. Throughout the project, in one-on-one interviews, we will invite congregants ages eighteen and over to reflect on their personal experiences of love, Holy Motion, and the creation of the communion table as they explore their encounter with community through *Trinity Community Presbyterian Church*. We have promised to form a lasting relationship of community based on mutual trust, health and wholeness; and as indicated at the inception of this paper, the project would therefore seek to use *Love Song for a Savior*<sup>8</sup> as its organizing principle.

## PLAY

Dancing and worship are two words that do not always appear together in the Presbyterian tradition. In fact, one might suggest that the two words – dancing and Presbyterian – could be opposites. Despite how the two words might seem diametrically opposed for *Trinity*, I am always surprised at what happens when I have the privilege of

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<sup>6</sup> Within this framework and related to underlying dynamics, the project may explore: the role of minister and congregation in shaping community; ‘after pastor’ dynamics; the role of worship in forming community; the role of communion in creating community and the role of play in shaping community.

<sup>7</sup> Moschella, 77.

<sup>8</sup> “Love Song for a Savior.”

leading people in dancing in worship. Holy Motion is about building community through song and dance. Holy Motion uses music, energy, and motion to create a community where participants experience a sense of belonging in corporate worship. We celebrate that as God's creation we live and move and have our being in Jesus Christ. Holy Motion is also known as *Energizers* in many Presbyterian communities. The opportunity to use our bodies as instruments of praise and worship invites people to literally move in response to God's living Word. I am amazed at the ways the Spirit shows up and leads the dance of Holy Motion.

The action research portion of the revised project plan included: a four-week worship sermon series on love centered on participation in play (Holy Motion); the creation of a communion table during Lent; and Holy Week worship centered on communion. The sermon series, based on 1 Corinthians 13 and *Love Song for a Savior* by *Jars of Clay*, would focus on love and explore the following aspects of love: falling in love, sacrificial love, tough love and unending love. During the sermon series, the LAC and I planned to ask willing congregation members eighteen and over to share their experiences of first dates and falling in love. Following the sermon series, we would invite participants to share their personal experiences and stories of play (Holy Motion). In addition to qualitative interviews, we planned to utilize the participant observation model to capture people's experience of play. Professor and researcher Colin Robson says the following about the participant observer model: "...that as well as observing through participating in activities, the observer can ask members to explain various aspects of what is going on."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Colin Robson, *Real World Research* (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2011), 319-329.

## COMMUNION

One of the most significant events in my faith journey, one that shaped my sense of self and identity, was attending *Presbyterian Youth Triennium* in 1998. In the years leading up to this gathering I had been on a journey – searching, seeking and struggling – trying to determine who God was and what my relationship with God could be. At *Triennium* I was among six thousand other youth and young adults in an auditorium during communion. The person sitting beside me turned to me and said: “the Body of Christ, broken for you, Jeffrey!” In that moment, for the first time in my life, I felt that God’s presence with me and God was alive deep within me. In that moment God was no longer a word on a page or a story in a book. Rather, God was a reality, a real, alive being with life, and life to give abundantly. These words were life changing; they made me feel connected to Christ, to God in a way that I had never experienced before. In hearing these words about what God had done in Christ paired with my own name, I felt like I belonged to God and to this larger community. When I looked around during this experience of communion I realized that I was part of something larger. It was amazing to come to the realization that there were other Presbyterian youth out there to question and share with, learn from, and listen to. The experience of communion, those words, and the large community of young people surrounding me seemed to mark a threshold. This was a transformative moment unlike any other in my desperate search before the *Triennium*. To be in the presence of, share with, learn from, and listen to other youth who had been thinking, feeling and experiencing the same things I had in relation to God and the church was amazing.

The creation of a communion table would be the second aspect of the project. During Lent, we planned to invite congregants to participate as we gathered objects from the past and present to form parts of that table. During worship prior to Holy Week, we planned to explore *Trinity's* stuff from the past. We would invite the congregation to deal with our individual and collective stuff before coming to the Lord's Table, as scriptures tell us:

whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves.<sup>10</sup>

Together, we would wonder about the church's lack of a physical communion table and introduce the idea of creating a new one. During Holy Week, our focus for Maundy Thursday would be Jesus' direct command to love one another that forms the hallmark of discipleship and is an invitation to model the love that Jesus Christ has for us, his disciples.<sup>11</sup> Our focus on Easter Sunday would be the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus and how their eyes were opened in the breaking of the bread.<sup>12</sup> As we gathered to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord, we would share in communion, seeking to see Jesus face to face.

We hoped that Holy Week worship on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday would focus on communion and celebrate the dedication of our newly created communion table. We planned to utilize the participant observation model in order to capture the congregation's experience of communion. Following Easter, we

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<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians 11: 27-29.

<sup>11</sup> John 13: 31-35.

<sup>12</sup> Luke 24: 13-35.

would invite congregants to share their stories of the creation of the communion table and how it had shaped their connection to the community.

### **THE STORY**

In *Narrative Research in Ministry*, Carl Savage, biblical-historical scholar, and William Presnell, marriage and family psychotherapist, speak of the necessary interaction between our stories and biblical stories of faith:

interfacing the stories of conflict, dysfunction and suffering with the stories of hope found in the Old and New Testaments constructs a roadbed down which the divine Spirit may choose to travel in order to touch and transform the situation.<sup>13</sup>

The process of gathering each week to worship God, seeking to enter into the story, is one way of inviting people to enter into this narrative process. As we enter into the drama of worship our goal would be to encourage theological reflection. Worship asks us, really calls us, to explore and reflect on who God is and who we are. The experience of worship seeks to articulate a preferred future by asking the question: ‘What is God saying to us today as we work together in community?’ Our individual and collective responses to this narrative process may contain profound understandings of who God is and who we are in relationship to God.

The stories we tell will reveal something about who we are as a community, in relationship. The plan was to interview those who self-select to participate in February and again after Easter. Although interviewing each participant twice was our goal, we believed that single interviews would also be valuable. The project would begin February 1, 2014 and conclude May 31, 2014 as, in worship, we would seek to foster growth in love together as the Body of Christ.

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<sup>13</sup> Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 84.

“You may not realize it but you gave me my Valentines’ Day card early! Here it is.<sup>14</sup> This is the call.”<sup>15</sup> A Gospel call in the Presbyterian tradition is a document

presented to a minister.

The presbytery places a

call in a minister’s hands

when the presbytery has

confirmed the proffered

relationship between that

minister and a

congregation. Reformed

theology understands

calling as having both an

inward and outward

dynamic. Frederick

Buechner, the preeminent

preacher, says: “the place

God calls you to is the

place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”<sup>16</sup> Calling is a deeply

intimate inward sense of God’s directing a person. A gathered community outwardly

confirms this inner sense, as I described earlier in chapter one. In the Reformed tradition,

▶ This page is signed by Members. ◀

**Call signed by members**  
We, the subscribers, members of the congregation of Trinity Community Presbyterian Church, Oro, hereby express our support for the call to **The Rev. Jeffrey R. Crawford**.

Member's name - please print	Member's signature
Tamah Markle	T. Markle
LYDIA ROBERTSON	Lydia Robertson
BRENDA VERBYSHIRE	B. Verbyshire
Brian Holmes	Brian Holmes
LINDA SHERWOOD	Linda Sherwood
TED PENLEY	Ted Penley
SARA STAHL	Sara Stahl
FRANCO TULIPANO	Franco Tulipano
DOROTHY WILLIAMS	D. Williams
David Williams	David Williams
BRUCE M. BOYES	Bruce M. Boyes
JILLIE BOYES	Jillie Boyes
Carole Crawford	Carole Crawford

**Attestation by elder re members who signed the call**  
I hereby certify that [number] 13 professing members belonging to the congregation of Trinity Community Presbyterian Church, Oro, have in my presence subscribed to the call in favour of **The Rev. Jeffrey R. Crawford**.

June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013  
(Place and date)

[Signature]  
(Signature), Elder

**Figure 3. A Page of The Call.**

<sup>14</sup> See Figure 3.

<sup>15</sup> Jeffrey Crawford, “*Falling in Love*” (sermon, Trinity Community Presbyterian Church, Oro-Medonte, February 9, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking; A Theological ABC* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 95.



the gathered community observes and confirms a match between the gifts and skills of the one called and the situation of the local community of faith.

When you invited me to preach for the call and voted in favor of calling me, you all were asked to sign your names to this document. For me this document is part of our love story. It is you agreeing to invite me to join you on the journey and me saying Yes. I look at this Valentines Day card often, it lives in my office. I often look at your names, praying for you. At the beginning, I wondered who some of you were, as I have gotten to know each of you and fallen in love, my prayers for you are different, more personal. Our love is growing in Jesus Christ.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Jeffrey Crawford, “*Falling in Love*” (sermon, Trinity Community Presbyterian Church, Oro-Medonte, February 9, 2014).

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **LOVE HAPPENS**

Our teaching series for the month of February is called: “Love Happens.” We are going to be exploring the theme of love. Telling stories of first dates. Exploring how we fall in love. Fall in love – with whom or what. Talking about how sometimes true love hurts, how love at moments it is not easy and we will end by talking about the power and hope love has hold on us and on our world. We are going to be sharing lots of stories and experiences of love this month and I invite you to share your stories with me and with each other. Some stories may be told with microphones, others in a whisper, others around tables or over coffee. The power of stories is that each and every one of them hold meaning, hold truth, hold God. So my question for you as we begin this journey together is what will your verse be?<sup>1</sup>

The ‘Love Happens’ chapter explores what occurred during the project and shares the research results that emerged from the project.

#### **THE PROJECT**

#### **FIRST DATES**

“...the sermon echoes through the walls... a great salvation through it...”<sup>2</sup>

#### **“THE SERMON ECHOES THROUGH THE WALLS”**

On the four Sundays in February 2014 we offered the worship teaching portion of the project. Focusing on the theme of love, we explored Biblical stories of love and

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Crawford, “*First Dates*” (sermon, Trinity Community Presbyterian Church, Oro-Medonte, February 2, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> “Love Song for a Savior.”

invited the community to dance in response to God’s love in our lives. The series was entitled “Love Happens.”<sup>3</sup>

#### SERMON SERIES



The first aspect of the sermon series focused on Biblical teachings on love.

**Figure 4. Love Happens Series Logo.**

Week one of the sermon series was about first dates. The stage was set for the series with the words that appear at the beginning of this chapter. Each week as part of the gathering time in worship I read a children’s story by author Nancy Tillman: *Wherever You Are My Love Will Find You*. The worship experience continued by reminding people that our stories, individually and collectively, make us who we are. We watched a television commercial for the *Apple iPad Air* that invited us to ponder what our contribution to the big story would be – what verse would we add to the story of life. “The powerful play

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<sup>3</sup> See Figure 4.

goes on and you will contribute a verse? What will your verse be?”<sup>4</sup> We explored the Biblical story of Jacob’s and Rachel’s meeting, their first date that ended with a kiss after which Jacob wept.<sup>5</sup> Two couples from the congregation shared their stories of first dates. One couple told the same story from each of their perspectives – this was rather hilarious, as the stories were much different. I shared the story of my first date with my wife. The message concluded with an invitation to reflect on each of our first dates with God. Each week, we provided people with three questions to reflect upon and discuss during the gathering time that followed worship. The first week, the questions were: “Share a story of your first date,” “When was your first date with God? What happened on that date?” “What will your verse be?”<sup>6</sup> Our benediction during the series included actions that we repeated each week entitled, ‘*May the Road Rise to Meet You.*’<sup>7</sup>

‘Falling in Love’ was the theme for week two. The story by Nancy Tillman was *On the Night You Were Born*. A member of the congregation told his love story with a series of statements displayed in reverse chronological order and shared how God was present in it all. Highlights from the story are: “still very much in love after thirty-five years; blessed with a second child, a son, in 1995; dated for six years; had to be sure eh; met one fateful afternoon, July 1, 1979.”<sup>8</sup> Our story from scripture was 1 Corinthians 13:

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<sup>4</sup> Apple, “iPad Air: What Will Your Verse Be” (video) January 12, 2014, accessed January 17, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjyIcz7wUH0>.

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 29: 1-12.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Crawford, “*First Dates*” (post-worship questions, Trinity Community Presbyterian Church, Oro-Medonte, February 2, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Holy Motion, *May the Road Rise to Meet You*, Appendix 3.

<sup>8</sup> Congregant presentation, “*Falling in Love*” (worship, Trinity Community Presbyterian Church, Oro-Medonte, February 9, 2014).

1-13.<sup>9</sup> I shared my call story of falling in love with *Trinity*. A member of the congregation and LAC shared her love story about God:

I have been a journey with God and that I now understand in a different way. I feel like when I was in hospital...praying with the women whom I shared a room with, and having the porter pray for me before surgery, that I came to see God in a new way – even face to face.<sup>10</sup>

She had experienced a renewed relationship with God and other members of the congregation when she had surgery for Crones' disease in the fall. Worship concluded with our praise team singing *Love Song for A Savior*. The three questions for week two were: "Share your story about falling in love," "Complete the sentence: 'Love is...'" "Is your God story, a love story?"<sup>11</sup>

Week three began with a Holy Motion called *Seasons of Love*.<sup>12</sup> I continued reading a children's story by Nancy Tillman, this week: *I'd Know You Anywhere, My Love*. Our Biblical focus was Ephesians 4: 11-16<sup>13</sup> about speaking the truth in love. The theme introduced the idea that vulnerability may be necessary if we are to speak the truth

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<sup>9</sup> "If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13.

<sup>10</sup> Congregant presentation, "*Falling in Love*" (worship, Trinity Community Presbyterian Church, Oro-Medonte, February 9, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey Crawford, "*Falling in Love*" (post-worship questions, Trinity Community Presbyterian Church, Oro-Medonte, February 9, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> The Rent Cast, "Seasons of Love," Jonathan Larson Composer. Released September 1996, on *Rent: Original Broadway Cast Recording*. USA, CD.

in love. Worship focused on an invitation to take risks, both large and small, if we are to love as Jesus calls us to love. We watched a scene from the movie *Dead Poet's Society* that reminded us: sometimes we need to be encouraged to be vulnerable in order to speak the truth in love that resides within us. Our Prayers of the People included a time of reflection as we listened to *Everybody Hurts* by REM.<sup>14</sup> The questions for reflection were: “Share a story of love,” “What do you feel like when you are vulnerable?” “What



will your  
verse  
be?”<sup>15</sup>  
The  
final week  
of our  
teaching  
series  
focused on  
“Love

**Figure 5. Part of the set for the Love Happens Series- Love Hurts & Love Actually**

<sup>13</sup> “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.” Ephesians 4: 11-16.

<sup>14</sup> REM, “Everybody Hurts,” Bill Berry, Peter Buck, Mike Mills, Michael Stipe. Released April 15, 1993, on *Automatic for the People*. USA, CD.

<sup>15</sup> Jeffrey Crawford, “Love Hurts” (post-worship questions, Trinity Community Presbyterian Church, Oro-Medonte, February 16, 2014).

Actually.”<sup>16</sup> The Nancy Tillman story was *The Crown on Your Head*. We invited everyone to share in the Holy Motion, *Seasons of Love*; see appendix two for music, action and instructions for this specific Holy Motion.<sup>17</sup> The message started as we watched the opening scene from the movie *Love Actually* that shows the arrivals gate at London’s Heathrow airport.<sup>18</sup> In the midst of coming and going, and even in the midst of tragedy, people share messages, embraces and gestures of love. Our Biblical focus was Colossians 1: 13-20<sup>19</sup>, a love song. We pondered the love songs we know and sing, reminded people that our stories matter and encouraged congregants to share their stories of life and love in the days and weeks to come. This last week, the LAC and I invited people to respond to familiar questions: “Share your favorite love song,” “What do you feel like when you are vulnerable?” “What will your verse be?”<sup>20</sup>

## HOLY MOTION

The second aspect of the February 2014 worship series on love focused on play and was called Holy Motion. We used two Holy Motions, *Seasons of Love* and *May the Road Rise to Meet You*, in worship as we acknowledged that we live, move and have our

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<sup>16</sup> See Figure 5.

<sup>17</sup> “Seasons of Love,” Appendix 2.

<sup>18</sup> *Love Actually*, directed by Richard Curtis (Universal Pictures, 2003), DVD (Universal Pictures, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> “He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” Colossians 1: 13-20.

<sup>20</sup> Jeffrey Crawford, “*Love Actually*” (post-worship questions, Trinity Community Presbyterian Church, Oro-Medonte, February 23, 2014).

being in God.<sup>21</sup> In addition, we also used both of these Holy Motions at other non-worship congregational gatherings during the winter and spring of 2014 while the project was in process.

*Seasons of Love* is a theme-specific Holy Motion where actions mirror the words in the song. The instructions and action for *Seasons of Love* can be found in appendix two.<sup>22</sup> Through the actions, our bodies seek to tell a story of love. This Holy Motion allows us to remember that all seasons are to be spent in love. *Seasons of Love* reminded us of the powerful love that Jesus has for us and the love He instructs us to have for our brothers and sisters. *Trinity* participated in *Seasons of Love* on Sundays February 16 and 23, 2014. *May the Road Rise to Meet You* was our congregational benediction during the *Love Happens* series.<sup>23</sup> During the first week in the series I taught the action to the whole congregation, and then, without introduction, we participated in this Holy Motion, as the last formal element of worship each week.

#### **“A GREAT SALVATION THROUGH IT”**

By the beginning of Lent, it became evident that the second aspect of the project, creating a communion table from new materials and objects from the past, was going to be problematic. First, our interaction with objects from the past, specifically from the three churches from which *Trinity* emerged, brought up significant unresolved issues from the past that were outside the scope of the project. Second, the notion of creating a permanent or semi-permanent object for the sanctuary risked division and hurt. Although symbols are not currently present in the sanctuary, I had not realized that the merging

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<sup>21</sup> Acts 17: 28.

<sup>22</sup> Holy Motion, *Seasons of Love*, Appendix 2.

<sup>23</sup> Holy Motion, *May the Road Rise to Meet You*, Appendix 3.



pastor had lead the congregation to remove all symbols from the worship space. The seeker-sensitive focus of the merging pastor mandated that symbols be omitted from the design and usage of space. As such, the addition of a communion table, a symbol, raised questions and presented unintended consequences.

One of the unintended consequences was the mysterious appearance of a cross in the early winter of 2014. When the cross first appeared it was unclear whom or why someone placed it in the church. I later learned that a member of the LAC and another elder found a cross in the church basement. These individuals had the cross refinished and a stand built. These two members of the congregation introduced the symbol by placing it in the church hall. At the same time, I learned that at a previous congregational meeting, there had been discussion about adding a symbol of faith to the sanctuary. The minutes from the congregational meeting identify this discussion as an item of new business, indicate there was no discussion about this issue, and record that a motion carried to form a committee to explore the topic further. The congregational meeting named individuals to this committee, but it had never met.

The LAC, faculty and I decided to revise the second aspect of the project. After discussion, prayer and dialogue a plan emerged to allow the congregation to interact with this newly found cross, using fabric, palm fronds, and stones during worship leading up to and including Easter. The symbol of the cross was the central focus and changed appearance weekly. The project continued to use the participant observation model in order to capture the congregation's experience of interacting with the cross. Following Easter, we invited congregants to share their stories from Lent and Holy Week; stories we read later in this chapter. The project plan for interacting with the cross was as follows:

## LENT

Lent 4 – Near the conclusion of the season of Lent, we intentionally placed the newly created cross in the sanctuary.

Lent 5 – Two female members of the LAC carried forward purple fabric and draped the cross during the reading of the Lazarus story.<sup>24</sup>

## HOLY WEEK

Palm Sunday – We added palm branches to the cross, arranging them on the purple fabric, as Holy Week unfolded before us.

Maundy Thursday – Worship was in the *Trinity Room* that evening rather than in the sanctuary because worship had a more intimate feel in that space. We placed the cross behind a round table with thirteen chairs around it; one chair had purple fabric with palm fronds on it. We set up a station with a basin and washcloth for hand washing. During the singing of *'Love Song for a Savior,'* I carried red fabric from the basin and washcloth to the cross, draping the cross with the red fabric as the song concluded. After the reading of the last supper pericope from the Gospel according to John and a brief meditation, we invited people to take communion after the manner of Scots Presbyterians: twelve people at a time, sitting at the table. We invited people to share in communion by saying words of love to each other while passing the bread and cup. I then washed the worshippers' hands with water from a basin. Following communion and hand washing, an elder read Luke 22: 39-62 and the gathered congregation departed in silence.

Good Friday – We erected a bare cross at the front of the sanctuary, on the same level as the congregation. During the 'Way of the Cross: Stations of the Cross' individuals tied

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<sup>24</sup> John 11: 1-45.



**Figure 6. The cross at the conclusion of Good Friday worship, side view.**

stones into bread. While people came to the cross to wait with Jesus, musicians played *Lead Me To The Cross*.<sup>26</sup>

Easter Sunday – Worship began with the cross, draped in white fabric, as the visual center at the front of the worship space on the platform in the middle of the worship team. The cross remained in the same place the following Sunday until we removed it from the worship space.

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<sup>25</sup> See Figure 6.

<sup>26</sup> Hillsong United, *Lead Me To The Cross*, Brooke Fraser: released March 17, 2007, Australia, CD.

pieces of black fabric to the cross as the Good Friday story unfolded in scripture, meditation, prayer and song. Near the conclusion of worship, we invited participants to come to the cross, tie black fabric to the cross and leave a stone at the foot of the cross as a symbol of waiting, brokenness and hurt.<sup>25</sup> The stones had been distributed the first Sunday in Lent when we told the story of Jesus' temptation to turn

In the weeks that followed Easter, the LAC invited members of the congregation to participate in narrative interviews focused on their experiences of Holy Week. The project concluded six weeks after Easter Sunday on May 31, 2014.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

### FALLING IN LOVE

“...calls to the people ... who stare into nowhere... can’t feel the chains on their souls...”<sup>27</sup>

### “CALLS TO THE PEOPLE”

The project issued a call to the people to share their stories, to share their lives, and to share their God during the project. This call to love invited people to engage during worship in dancing and symbols. The majority of the congregation did engage through participation in worship and through informal conversations. At the same time, only a few people were prepared to sit down and be interviewed. One of the most significant findings from the project is the lack of qualitative research. It is nevertheless significant to acknowledge that a lack of research, specifically a lack of interview data, is a result. The lack of results from one-on-one interviews speaks to the challenges *Trinity* faces with regard to community. The silence is a result – a result that may speak louder than words. The project sought to assess community formation in worship through dancing (Holy Motion) and interaction with the cross.

### THE BEGINNING OF A LOVE STORY

The invitation to share and tell stories came at a new beginning. I had been the minister at *Trinity* for four months when we introduced the project to the congregation. I

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<sup>27</sup> “Love Song for a Savior.”

was a new minister asking questions about who people were, about their love stories and about who we were as the Body of Christ. We expected some of the silence, and all of it tells us something. “You know that people are thinking that you’re leaving when you’ve done your doctorate. You get that right – people think you’re wanting to move up.”<sup>28</sup>

The LAC and I listened carefully to the stories being told; at the same time others listened and drew their own conclusions. The worship series on love invited participation in worship, and specific post-worship participation by the congregation. While the majority was silent post-worship, those who spoke had something significant to say, often something personal. One woman wrote a letter entitled ‘My first date with God’ in which she stated: “I am writing this at 1:30 in the morning as I can’t sleep and I thought this was a good way to be able to clear my feelings. My first date with God was Good Friday in March 2010.”<sup>29</sup> The research results mirror some of the reactions to a first date – the majority would not commit or comment, many were unsure, some were curious, and a few fell deeply in love.

#### **LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (LAC)**

The LAC was a curious group. From the beginning the LAC was interested in collecting stories. Some members were interested in their own stories, some the stories of *Trinity*, and all of them were interested in their minister’s stories. The LAC was made up of members of the search team who were highly involved in the life and ministry of *Trinity*. What’s more, they were also highly committed to me, the minister, since they had been the ones who were instrumental in bringing me to *Trinity*. The LAC was invested in the project because they had invested in me.

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with a congregant, May 27, 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from a congregant, March 2014.

One of the unintended consequences of the project was the functioning, or lack thereof, of the LAC. In many ways the LAC was a microcosm for the larger congregational context. Much like the congregation, the LAC was often silent when it came time to tell their personal stories. The group acknowledged this during the project site visit evaluation: “one of the significant evaluations to date has been the difficulty to get people to share stories openly one-on-one; for some members these difficulties are related to the past six years.”<sup>30</sup> LAC members themselves functioned as participant observers, often more as observers than participants. Despite their investment in the project, they were hesitant to tell their own stories. The LAC mirrored the highs and lows of the congregation. The LAC was a micro example of a macro problem for the congregation, a problem related to issues from the past that are not discussed and remain unresolved. Despite the many challenges the LAC experienced, largely in relation to the past, they were still able to say:

we are amazed at how well the project moved along given the many distractions that our community has experienced, the unexpected pastoral demands placed on Rev. Jeffrey’s time and energies, and the fact that he is a relative newcomer both to our pulpit and our local community.<sup>31</sup>

The LAC provided a specific glimpse into *Trinity’s* past and present as a community of faith, and an invitation to the future.

### **“WHO STARE INTO NOWHERE”**

The project sought to assess community formation in worship through two explorations between February and May 2014. The first was the impact that dancing (Holy Motion) had on community. The second was the impact that interaction with the

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<sup>30</sup> DMin Site Visit Evaluation Forms, June 30, 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

cross as a symbol had during the seasons of Lent and Easter. Both of these worship engagements sought to call us into new ways of seeing our *Trinity* community and ourselves as we follow God. In both instances, Holy Motion and the cross, the people who were staring into nowhere were stirred to action.

### **DANCE, DANCE, REVOLUTION**

“You can dance in a hurricane, but only if you’re standing in the eye.”<sup>32</sup> Brandi Carlile sings these words in her song *The Eye*. Our invitation to offer our whole bodies, whole selves, as instruments of worship and praise challenged people to let go of everything else and focus only on the music, the rhythm, the action, and God. In the midst of the chaos that was ongoing, both in people’s individual lives and our collective life as the church, it was extraordinary to see people free themselves to engage in a new way of worship. The chaos in our collective life as *Trinity* really began months earlier as we entered into a new relationship and a new phrase of ministry. Trying to determine how to be God’s people together was causing challenges, hurt, headache and struggle. Participating in Holy Motion as worship was as if we were dancing in the eye of the hurricane. For a brief moment we were able to cross the threshold, enter into liminal space and become a community of believers who together engaged in worshipping God.<sup>33</sup> Liminal space is a transitional place where people can separate themselves from normality and enter into a new reality. As Hester and Walker-Jones say: “in this liminal space people become open to different ways of thinking, feeling and acting. They often

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<sup>32</sup> Brandi Carlile, “The Eye,” Brandi Carlile, Phil Hanseroth, Tim Hanseroth. Released March 3, 2015, on *The Firewatchers Daughters*. USA, CD.

<sup>33</sup> Hester and Walker-Jones, 21-23.

leave this space having been changed.”<sup>34</sup> A member of *Trinity* comments on the normal way of life: “life has been so serious through these last seven years, people were so scared about what was going on that there was no time to play. There was a lot of fear.”<sup>35</sup> When we danced we were able to suspend the past, the hurt, and the challenges, and just be present in the moment. As one worshipper commented following dancing: “as I was participating in worship, I felt like I was falling in love anew with God.”<sup>36</sup>

The participant observer model allowed the LAC and I to observe people engaged in the dance and to gather narratives as people found themselves dancing. One of the interesting observations centered on the way our whole community participated in Holy Motion. At the outset of the project the LAC was skeptical that people would engage in the dance, but people did dance and we observed that they were having fun. There was a sense of energy, a feeling of lightness and an attitude of wholeness while we danced. One LAC member observed someone who, five minutes after engaging in Holy Motion, was still doing the actions in her seat. Another LAC member commented that while the kids had fun, it was the adults, even the older adults, who appeared the most engaged and energized by the Holy Motion. “In my life I have no time to play - no time even to walk, or read, or just be. Playing at church was wonderful.”<sup>37</sup> For me as the leader, watching the congregation move and dance was a joy and changed my perspective towards individual members and the state of our whole community.

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<sup>34</sup> Hester and Walker-Jones, 23.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with a congregant, February 19, 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with a congregant, February 9, 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with a congregant, February 19, 2014.



In the moment, in the eye of the hurricane, we were able to dance; however, when the dancing stopped so did the engagement. The lack of specific research results related to Holy Motion from one-on-one interviews speaks directly to the challenges *Trinity* is facing about community. Once we stepped from the eye of the hurricane, outside the liminal space, and back into the gale force winds and pouring rain, people were unwilling or uncomfortable to share their individual experiences of Holy Motion. One specific interview comment echoed the challenges and silence: “truthfully, the first time we did it (Holy Motion) I was worried about having to raise my arms. It was fun, but I don’t really want to talk about it.”<sup>38</sup>

### **THE CROSS**

The symbol of the cross is the lasting visual representation of the project. For good or bad, it is the visual reminder for the congregation that the project happened. The image of the cross evokes different emotions that run the spectrum. One LAC member commented: “each time I look at the cross, I think about the lack of a communion table at *Trinity*.”<sup>39</sup> The interaction with the cross developed only because we were not able to create a communion table. It is interesting that one symbol, the cross, was accepted as a visual element in our worship space. However, the notion of creating a communion table as a congregational effort raised so many concerns and challenges, before it was even formally presented to the whole congregation, that we amended the plan. The interviews yielded more reflection and stories about the cross than about other aspects of the project. The comments can be placed into two categories, the first about Holy Week, specifically Good Friday and the second, the physical location of the cross. Our interaction with the

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with a congregant, February 19, 2014.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with a congregant, June 6, 2014.

cross during Holy Week – Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday – evoked stories. On Maundy Thursday the comments focused on the red fabric draped on the cross and how that, combined with communion and hand washing, reminded people about service and sacrifice. Two people made comments about the red fabric, and how that color caught their attention: “why the red tonight? what is that about?”<sup>40</sup> The second reference to red fabric spoke about feelings: “the mood and color on Thursday



**Figure 7. The cross at the conclusion of Good Friday Worship, front view.**

made me mad and angry.”<sup>41</sup> On Good Friday, our movement toward the cross, both to place stones at its foot and to tie a piece of black fabric onto its wood, drew comments.<sup>42</sup> The image of the cross adorned with ripped pieces of black fabric was described as: sad, pitiful, ugly, weeping and broken. One member commented: “it is great to have a sacramental symbol in our church.”<sup>43</sup> The first Sunday of Lent we invited people to take stones as they departed the worship space. One member of

<sup>40</sup> Comment from a congregant, April 17, 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with a congregant, April 30, 2014.

<sup>42</sup> See Figure 7.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with a congregant, April 25, 2014.

the congregation, who stood at the door with a bowl of stones, commented:

the response of each person choosing his or her stone was positive. Each ‘gift’ was a personal choice, of color, design, texture or size. I waited until the majority had left and my stone was still there. The color was the darkest, and it stood out. I want to stand out more, shout out God’s love. My daily routine still includes my stone.<sup>44</sup>

Individuals then placed these stones at the foot of the cross on Good Friday. The comments on Easter Sunday focused on the white fabric and the drastic difference between Friday and Sunday. One congregant commented on the cross’ placement on the platform on Sunday, while on Friday it was down on the main level in the worship space: “the cross being up higher made me pay attention. It was always in my view on Easter, I couldn’t avoid looking at it.”<sup>45</sup> The number of comments about the cross, indicated that its use during Lent and Easter was significant for the people of *Trinity*.

The physical location of the cross received attention in research results. Following Easter 2, the cross was removed intentionally from the worship space. A number of weeks later it was back in the space, but no one claimed responsibility for moving it back. ‘Where’s Waldo’ became the way a few members of the worship team even referred to the location of the cross at the end of May. As one member of the LAC commented, “Where’s Waldo? Where the cross is and who is moving it makes this a real game.”<sup>46</sup> We placed the cross in the worship space during the Sunday of Lent 4 and it was removed on Easter 2. Two weeks later people began to ask where it was, and then, the following week, it appeared back in the worship space. No one on the worship team moved it back, and to this day we do not know who moved it back. Moving the cross in

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<sup>44</sup> E-mail message from a congregant, March 16, 2014.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with a congregant, May 9, 2014.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with a congregant, May 6, 2014.

and out of the worship space began in early May and continues. The paper will comment further on the physical location of the cross in the evaluation section on page 97.

The design of the project was to assess the implication of dancing (Holy Motion) and interaction with the cross as a symbol for the formation of Christian community in worship. The participant observer research method allowed the LAC and me to pay keen attention to the ways these two things impacted people and worship. With any plan, there are unintended and unforeseen realities and outcomes, while a few of these emerged during the project phase, two significant funerals had a direct impact on the formation of Christian community in worship.

#### **“CAN’T FEEL THE CHAINS ON THEIR SOULS”**

The deep sense of hurt and the challenge of the previous seven years at *Trinity* emerged in many ways throughout the project. A number of comments from interviews speak directly to the deep sense of weight on the people’s souls. In speaking about worship on February 16, 2014, when the theme was ‘Love Hurts,’ individuals said: “that really hit home, we hurt so much and we need to talk so much;”<sup>47</sup> and “that was a little too close to home.”<sup>48</sup> Connected with this deep sense of hurt and challenge is a sense of guilt about the ‘what is’ at *Trinity*. A number of comments emerging from the worship series hinted that love is possible, despite the pain: “it’s sad that we don’t actually tell our love stories.”<sup>49</sup> One member, commenting on the future, said: “we have a deep

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with a congregant, February 16, 2014.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with a congregant, February 16, 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with a congregant, February 23, 2014.

connection to love here (*Trinity*); one that is meaningful and significant, we just don't remember."<sup>50</sup>

Two funeral services during the project period addressed the research question of how worship itself can form Christian community. *Trinity* held two funeral services for members of our congregation, one in April for a long-time and highly involved member and another in May for a young woman. While no one anticipated either of these events, individually and collectively, they both spoke to *Trinity's* identity as a community of believers within the context of worship.

### **CANCER**

On Easter Saturday, over four hundred people gathered at *Trinity* to participate in a Service of Witness to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and to celebrate and remember the life of a dear and beloved member of our community. She had been diagnosed with brain cancer in the fall of 2013 and despite surgery and chemotherapy the tumors never stopped growing. In early March 2014 she transitioned to palliative care in her home. The congregation knew that we would eventually hold a funeral service, but no one wanted to talk about it or acknowledge it. This was especially challenging because she had been a leader in the kitchen and hospitality ministry for many years, the one who would coordinate all events related to the kitchen and food, and ironically, the food for funerals.

The days that led up to the funeral and the service of worship tell the story of a broken community seeking to find its way. The outpouring of support as the community mourned and we prepared for the funeral was overwhelming. When we posted a sign-up list for various funeral-related ministries on the Sunday before the funeral it was filled

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<sup>50</sup> Interview from a congregant, February 18, 2014.

within minutes, and we had to add additional pages. People agreed to help behind the scenes with food preparation before the funeral, and, on that day, to work in the kitchen, set up, clean the building, and support the funeral service. One woman with a challenging recent history who was struggling to find her place at *Trinity* was able to re-direct her focus and engage in the community as part of the team that set-up and organized for the funeral. The day of the funeral we had more volunteers greeting, ushering, and people in the kitchen then we knew what to do with. The *Trinity* community came together in a remarkable way. Before the funeral, I had never sensed their potential for this degree of love and support. The funeral, my first as minister at *Trinity*, was a different experience than any worship service I had led. One story that highlights the outpouring of support happened minutes before the funeral began. I went into the kitchen to ensure that the team was okay and ready. I discovered that people who came from the community to attend the funeral had also brought sandwiches and baked goods for the reception. The story of *Trinity's* deep sense of connection to the local community, or the local community's connection to *Trinity*, surfaced on Holy Saturday.

## **SUICIDE**

Monday May 12, 2014 is a day that I will not soon forget. We were in Toronto at my parent's home, as Monday's are our Sabbath day as a clergy couple. I received both a text and voicemail from a member of *Trinity* and I could tell from his voice that the news was not good. There was a fire at a family home in the early hours of the morning, the daughter lit herself on fire, and all of the family was receiving medical care. The daughter was not expected to recover and was flown to Toronto by air ambulance to the burn unit at a trauma center. I received the family's permission to be with their daughter

and stayed at the hospital until she died later that afternoon. Most of the rest of that day and the days that followed, until the funeral, were a blur.

The funeral was held nine days later and the way the *Trinity* congregation surrounded, uplifted and supported the family and the community tells the story of growing in love as the body of Christ. Even in the midst of questions surrounding the young woman's death, people came together to support the family and community. One of the few specific comments about the funeral speaks loudly about community: "they'd do that for us too, if we were hurt."<sup>51</sup> Many volunteers supported the funeral service as the tragedy invited people to work together in love. The funeral challenged some members, who were engaged in long-standing disputes, to come together in service and worship. The *Trinity* congregation raised over nine thousand dollars to support the family during this time of tragic loss and over forty volunteers gathered at the family's home two weeks later to help with cleanup and restoration efforts after the fire.

"Falling in love is a process...a few months went by, and then one day I just realized that I was in love."<sup>52</sup> A member of Trinity reminds us that love does happen. Love happened during the project at *Trinity*, often in ways and at moments that we least expected it. At times, love happened, in seemingly small and insignificant ways that you could easily miss or dismiss, and at times in large ways that challenged preconceived notions and ideas about who we are, or who we thought we were supposed to be, as the Body of Christ. Love happened.

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with a congregant, May 25, 2014.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with a congregant, February 19, 2014.

## CHAPTER 5

### SEASONS OF LOVE

In truths that she learned, or in times that he cried, in bridges he burned, or the way that she died. It's time now, to sing out, though the story never ends. Let's celebrate, remember a year in the life of friends. Remember the love... Measure in love (measure, measure your life in love). Seasons of love. Seasons of love (measure your life, measure your life in love).<sup>1</sup>

The ministerial project on love travelled on a journey through the seasons.

Seasons that invited learning, seasons that made us cry, seasons that hurt and seasons of death. A journey that sought to explore the implication that play and symbols could have on who we are at *Trinity* as people of God. As the paper seeks to evaluate the project and explore its implications for the practice of ministry, it engages in measuring love, through change and transformation.

#### EVALUATION

#### LOVE HURTS

“Someday we’ll understand the meaning of it all... he’s more than the laughter or the stars in the heavens...as close as a heartbeat or a song on our lips... someday we’ll trust him and learn how to see him”<sup>2</sup>

“I want to forgive my mother, it hurts. I never knew her and it’s difficult for me, I don’t like to talk about it. I gave away all of her things, to family members, and to

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<sup>1</sup> “Seasons of Love.”

<sup>2</sup> “Love Song for a Savior.”



others. I can't go to her grave. I just want the pain to go away. What am I doing wrong?"<sup>3</sup> As one member of *Trinity* reminded me, sometimes love is painful and it hurts. The process of gathering stories for the project invited many different stories of love to be shared both in public and in private. The goal was not to evaluate the good from the bad, or the right from the wrong; rather the goal was to listen to the stories. In seeking to evaluate and draw conclusions based on the stories gathered, it is important to remember that a story intends a future.<sup>4</sup> All stories seek to help us as individuals, churches, and communities to find our way into the future God intends for us.

In seeking to evaluate the project, the paper now returns to and builds on the theological basis from Pattison's *Some Straw for the Bricks*. The paper also examines Savage and Presnell's semiotic approach. Prior to engaging those two methods of evaluation the paper will first interact with Savage and Presnell's practice of evaluation: "observing change and discerning transformation."<sup>5</sup> We are called to remember the beginning narratives of where things stood, as we seek to draw conclusions based on comparing the pre-project and post-project stories. At the beginning of the project, the LAC and I attempted to collect stories of falling in love during and after the February worship series on love. Near the end of the project, during and after Easter, we again collected stories of love after people lived the Easter story of the cross and resurrection together. Based upon the analysis of these narratives we sought to observe change and discern transformation within myself as minister, within the Trinity congregation and in our relationship together. In the midst of this change and transformation we hope to

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with a congregant, February 26, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Savage and Presnell, 43.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 123-125.

discern more clearly a preferred future related to sustaining a healthy community of trust that is led by the Holy Spirit.

The project was a causal/predictive research puzzle, defined by Mary Clark Moschella as: “the effect of one practice on another.”<sup>6</sup> The project sought, in the context of worship, to explore the impact that the spiritual practices of dancing (Holy Motion) and interaction with the cross had on the formation of community. The postmodern narrative research approach invited adopting a not knowing position (*kenotic*), which at the outset discouraged a formal working hypothesis, but rather encouraged participant observers to focus on change and transformation, possibly leading to a preferred future. The gathered stories will present an initial conclusion that both change and transformation did occur. As well, this specific in-ministry project highlights the need for further study about the impact the role of dancing, the interaction with symbols, and the role funerals have on the formation of Christian community in worship.

We must also acknowledge that some tension exists between the dual roles of researcher and participant.<sup>7</sup> What is more, the role of leader, both for me as minister and for the LAC, creates other tensions as well. The wearing of multiple hats, so to speak, did invite us to enter into liminal space and at the same time, also caused some confusion about who we are or what we are doing. While the tension has been evident through the whole project process, it is somewhat palpable during the evaluation phase.

**“SOMEDAY WE’LL UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF IT ALL”**

Observing change and discerning transformation, both for myself and for the ministry context, invited us to pay particular attention to the specific details and nature of

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<sup>6</sup> Moschella, 77.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 147.

the story being told. John Savage, a psychotherapist and lecturer, suggests that four levels of story telling and listening exist:

the first level is a story from long ago, a ‘once upon a time’ recollection of something in the past. ... the second level of story also involves the past, but it includes the expression of feelings, ... the third level of story is one that describes the present. ... the final level of story is when someone starts to understand a deeper meaning of his life story while talking about it in your presence.<sup>8</sup>

Often when this fourth level of storytelling occurs, transformation is possible and we may intuitively sense that moment of deep learning. We often describe this moment as an “aha” moment.<sup>9</sup> During the project, the majority of the stories we collected were level one or level two; discussions about the past, sometimes with feeling.

## CHANGE

Observing change requires a comparison between the state of *Trinity* prior to the project, and the state of *Trinity* post-project. Savage and Presnell encourage us to focus on changes in activity, habits and the stories being told.<sup>10</sup> *Trinity*, as a community, is different at the end of the project than it was at the beginning. We observed these differences in three distinct ways: worship as play; worship as participation; and worship as community.

During the project we learned that we can play. These moments of play were often short-lived and brilliant. Worship as play was not a dynamic that existed pre-project at *Trinity*. Worship, and really all of church life, was about a serious, proper relationship with God and even each other, as God’s gathered community. Our

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<sup>8</sup> John Savage, *Listening and Caring Skills: A Guide for Groups and Leaders* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 79-81; in Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 160.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Savage and Presnell, 124.

engagement with dancing (Holy Motion) in worship invited a new moment, a new love and a new story. The ability to move to the music, use our bodies and observe each other playing as part of worship was new. The change occurred in worship during play – people laughed, they embraced, and they smiled. For a community engaged in seriousness for the previous six years, dancing invited moments of play. Post-project we are still a serious community the majority of the time. However, we are now able to respond to the question, “Do you want to dance?” with a “Yes!”

As a worshipping community, *Trinity* had an ethos of performance. Most aspects of worship were calculated, organized, rehearsed and executed. Performance is a word that some used to describe worship. As primary worship leader, I initially took on this style and feel of performance. It was only when a close friend came to *Trinity* to worship and said to me, “it feels like you’re acting,” that I become self-aware enough to acknowledge I had changed, adapting to the dominate operating style of *Trinity*. The teaching series on love in February 2014 allowed specific individuals, myself included, to tell personal love stories. Interviews, dialogues and interactions were all participatory in nature. Nothing was scripted and we often ended up changing the plan and flow as the stories led us. During the project, specifically during the end of the seasons of Lent and into Easter, we extended another invitation to participate. People gathered around a table and fed each other a meal. People gathered at the cross, placing fabric on it, placing stones at the foot of it, and tying fabric to it. The people participated in worship in specific and distinct ways and led worship. Worship as participation rather than performance was a change that occurred during the project phase. Our ability to dance also contributed to worship as participation, even if only for brief moments of time. As

worship leader, I changed during the project, adopting a more comfortable and less performance style during message delivery. Post-project, performance is still a word that continues to describe worship. Within this performance framework a change has occurred, as we feel more comfortable leading, moving and interacting. Liturgically we are growing, seeking for worship to become the work of the people.<sup>11</sup>

The third distinct change we observed during the project was intimately related to the previous two and centered on who we were as a community during worship. Two distinct stories reveal this change in community. The first centers on a question that surfaced again and again throughout the spring of 2014 at *Trinity*: “Can you live with it?” This question caused change and even some transformation within our community.

There was one person in particular who struggled with the new normal for *Trinity*. She had been part of the *Trinity* community prior to 2007, at the time when *Trinity* was a nine-hundred member worship community. The new reality for *Trinity* was significantly smaller and she struggled to find her place. She had previously served in a significant leadership role. In trying to define her place now, she was quick to attack and question the roles of others, especially those in current leadership positions. This member had moved into a leadership role when the split occurred in 2007 and functioned in that role during a time of pastoral vacancy and significant upheaval. As such, her ability to define herself and her role during a time of identified leadership, at least organizational, was challenged. She struggled through conflicts with others, often triangulating a third party. She was skilled at leading the parking lot conversations – those that occur outside the

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<sup>11</sup> The concept of liturgy as the work of the people arises from the Greek, *leitourgia* (*leitourgia*), meaning “work of the people.” Definition- service, ministry, worship, offering, sacrifice. Public service discharged by an individual- Luke 1:23; Phil. 2:17; Heb. 8:6; 9:21; a kind office, aid, relief, 2 Cor. 9:12; Phil. 2:30; in Barclay M. Newman, ed. *The Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), 107.

church building, in the parking lot, about others who are inside the building. I spoke with her, indicating her behavior was not helpful to the community and said that she needed to determine if she could live with the new *Trinity* or not. During the spring of 2014 she declared that she was going to leave. She was loud and somewhat dramatic about her displeasure with other individuals. It came to light that she had, some years earlier, declared a similar thing, and then a number of others in leadership chased after her, begging her to return. When she departed during the project period, no one chased after her. Since she departed I have remained in contact with her and she has been present at worship on only a handful of occasions.

At the beginning of the project we struggled to know how to love each other, despite a strong sense that we needed this love desperately. As we lived life each week in worship, as we prayed, broke bread and heard God's words of love for us, change occurred in small ways.

A second, specific and significant, change related to community occurred during the project phase. A former associate pastor and his family returned to Trinity. The associate pastor, who seven years earlier had departed with the merging pastor, began to reengage in the life of *Trinity*. This former associate pastor, during the previous seven years, had served in various worshipping communities, often for sprinter<sup>12</sup> type arrangements. His return occurred slowly throughout the project phase, and then prior to Easter he and his family returned to *Trinity* as regular worshipping members. At first people were curious about his presence and not sure why he was there. As someone

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<sup>12</sup> "Sprinter" is an expression, based on the work of Kennon Callahan, for ministries that lend themselves to short-term and intensive engagement, rather than a long-term commitment - sprinters versus marathoners. In this specific case – a term of service, followed by the leaders' departure from the ministry context.

commented, “He left us. I am not sure why he is back.”<sup>13</sup> His reemergence at *Trinity* provided an opportunity for people to embrace, in love, someone who had a difficult past related to the life of the community. It was a moment about creating trust in the community that allowed members of *Trinity* to be led by the Holy Spirit to healing and wholeness. It was a moment that required authentic relationships that sought wholeness. In addition to our community’s practicing healthy boundaries, the former associate pastor has also been clear about his current role and has remained self-aware of his own history. It is valuable to acknowledge that he led worship one Sunday in the summer of 2014. Even though this happened post-project, that Sunday was a powerful moment. The past, present and future collided; the Spirit moved; and people were transformed.

*Trinity*, as a community, is different at the end of the project than it was at the beginning. Near the end of the project phase, post-Easter, one particular story focused on both change and transformation. As one member commented,

...we talk to each other now... people stay after church for coffee hour to talk and be together. Really what is new is before worship. People all stand and talk in the lobby. Often those of us who greet need to herd people into worship, telling them, ‘It’s time to begin.’<sup>14</sup>

This narrative that emerged at the conclusion of the project was a moment that invited us at *Trinity*, as the family of God, to acknowledge it was time to begin again.

## **TRANSFORMATION**

Exploring transformation requires not only observing the “what is”<sup>15</sup> of *Trinity*, but also discerning the “what could be” at *Trinity*. This process of transformation is not

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with a congregant, February 2, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with a congregant, May 27, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Savage and Presnell, 87.

our doing, but rather God's doing, God's action. We are called to play a role in the story, and it is God who calls.

Reformed theology understands that we discern the movement of the Holy Spirit as having both an inward and outward dynamic. Often, discerning the work of the Spirit is a deeply intimate inward sense of God's directing a person to a place where his/her passion and energy meet the deep needs of the world.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, discerning the work of the Spirit is an outward confirmation of that directing by a gathered community of believers. In the Reformed tradition, the gathered community observes and confirms a unity between the inward and outward dynamic of the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is this movement of the Spirit that is at the heart of transformation. We experienced and discerned the movement of the Spirit in two ways during the project period: one, a personal transformation in my leadership; and two, transformation related to symbols.

My personal leadership is different after the project than before. The project taught me that adopting a not-knowing position would invite me as leader to listen deeply to the people of *Trinity*. This general orientation invited me not to focus on fixing or solving, but rather on being and listening. As the project began, it became evident that people were hesitant and even unwilling to be interviewed. The same people, even at the same moment, were however willing to get together for coffee and talk. It was during these conversations that some of the deep hurts from the past seven years and stories of conflict emerged. For me, listening to these stories, honoring these stories, and embracing these people, was transformational. I learned to listen to people tell me about the past, the present moment, and even hint at a future. In the midst of these stories, seeking to pay attention to what was not said, as much as what was said, I found myself

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<sup>16</sup> Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*, 95.



changing. My role as leader shifted from solution (right and wrong worldview) to just embracing the story. Rather than trying to fix or help problem-solve situations, I embraced the stories, sought to honor them, and prayed about them. The freedom to not have the answers invited me to change who I was and what I understood my role to be in the midst of seeking to foster a community of health and wholeness focused on the Triune God. During these conversations many people shared personal stories about their connection to God, their connection to *Trinity*, and their own stories of love. People's response to my listening, curious questions, and willingness to just be present, were positive. No one asked for answers, for direction, or for action. I was transformed as God moved, God directed and God acted. Near the conclusion of the project a congregant, someone with whom I had coffee months earlier, suggested that the most important thing I had done in my first nine months at *Trinity* was listening to the stories: "your listening is a gift to me and I know to others as well."<sup>17</sup> My personal transformation continues together with God's people at *Trinity* as we pay attention to the ways we play, interact with symbols, and love.

Transformation occurred at *Trinity* during the project period as we interacted with symbols. Our discussions about symbols demonstrated the intensity of feelings towards the past. Physical symbols from the past with which the project sought to interact were the ones that often were accompanied by intense feelings and silence. We had amended our original project plan to interact with symbols; even so, interaction with symbols emerged as Hester and Walker-Jones say: from the "cutting room floor."<sup>18</sup> The symbols

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<sup>17</sup> Comment from a congregant, June 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Hester and Walker-Jones, 18-19. The "cutting room floor" refers to the notion that when we tell a story most of the actual events end up discarded in the editing process. There is a gap between what

from the past were old objects, hidden in closets and basement cupboards, and a refurbished cross. Dialogue about these objects was brief and interview comments were nonexistent; nevertheless the struggle, angst, pain and heartache on people's faces told a story. The silence related to objects from the past was transformational as it opened a door to the future. Even though the objects themselves, and lack of dialogue about them, did not lead directly to transformation, it did let the light peek in under the door. The threshold to the future of symbols at *Trinity* emerged during the project.

We discerned transformation related to the following symbols: dancing, the communion table, the cross and death. Each of these symbols, often through challenge, invited a new way forward, and the emergence of a future. The transformation evaluation continues as the project paper turns to an exploration and interpretation of the signs and symbols at *Trinity*. Transformation invites us into a new story, a preferred future. Symbols evoked laughter, tears, and looking to the stars in the heavens.

**“HE’S MORE THAN THE LAUGHTER OR THE STARS IN THE HEAVENS ... AS CLOSE AS  
A HEARTBEAT OR A SONG ON OUR LIPS”**

The semiotic evaluation approach of Savage and Presnell provides a unique exploration for *Trinity*. “The semiotic approach examines the images, messages, codes and metaphors that express meaning for the context.”<sup>19</sup> Specifically we examined the signs, stories, and metaphors at work at *Trinity* in worship. Being able to name and read (discern) the signs and signals is important for interpreting the project. An assessment of love in the context of community, both the formal and informal, and spoken and

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actually happened and what we tell. Attending to the gap, by going back to the cutting room floor to pick up discarded film may change stories. With additional material from the cutting room floor alternative narratives may emerge.

<sup>19</sup> Savage and Presnell, 129.

unspoken relationships, assists in understanding how *Trinity* is a community of faith. Observing the congregation, both at play and interacting with the cross, is important to discerning the codes. Evaluating stories from congregants about their understanding of community and their interaction with symbols is paramount to discerning the codes of meaning at *Trinity*. Seeking to examine honestly how aspects of the past are manifest in the present and future is only possible after experiencing a different way to worship God, through the cross and at play.<sup>20</sup> Trying to make sense of these codes may assist in the development of language for a preferred future.<sup>21</sup>

## **SYMBOLS**

A symbol, the Merriam-Webster dictionary suggests:

is an action, object, event, that expresses or represents a particular idea or quality. Something that stands for or suggests something else by reason of relationship, association, convention, or accidental resemblance; especially a visible sign of something invisible.<sup>22</sup>

*Trinity's* symbols – or lack thereof – suggest and convey a number of realities about who we were and who we could be. Symbols shape our identity as people of love; people who gather around book, bath and table. At times these symbols are invisible to us, maybe especially as we gather around the waters, and to eat and drink together.

Symbols at *Trinity*, prior, during, and since the project phase have been at the center of significant dialogue. The LAC interacted with a number of objects, artifacts and secondary sources from *Trinity's* past as specific topics emerged. At the end of the project phase, as the LAC and I engaged in dialogue about evaluation, there was

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<sup>20</sup> Savage and Presnell, 128-129 and 134-136.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> "Symbol," Merriam-Webster, accessed February 28, 2015 <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/symbol>

disagreement about symbols themselves, and the meaning they conveyed. In the site evaluation forms the LAC writes:

... as the evaluation process is ongoing, everyone holds different opinions on specific topics at the church, such as, funerals, symbols, and community. Many of these issues need to be addressed and discussed. The project highlighted the use, or lack of symbols, at *Trinity*. We sense that Rev. Jeffrey is well aware of these dynamics and is trying to prioritize how and when to deal with these matters.<sup>23</sup>

It is within this framework that the evaluation of symbols occurs.

The symbols of our faith may help us name, claim and live the story of God. The previous leadership at *Trinity* intentionally omitted symbols in the design of the worship space. In the years that followed they temporarily added some symbols. During the project the LAC and I intentionally interacted with symbols in the sanctuary as part of worship. As Mary Clark Moschella reminds us: "...the power to change is integrally related to the power to speak to and for the world. This connection remains mysterious at some level. The process of naming one's current situation and worldview may give rise to a deeper knowing and longing for change."<sup>24</sup> One challenge at *Trinity* related to symbols was to name the current reality.

A reality about symbols at *Trinity* is embodied in the three objects in the *Trinity Room*. When the merger occurred between the three small congregations, and the newly amalgamated *Trinity* church moved into the new building, one object from each of the three churches came to the new building. The three symbols were: a burning bush stained glass window from *Central Presbyterian Church, Oro*; a stained glass image of Jesus from *St. Andrew's Presbyterian, Oro Station*; and a baptismal font from *Guthrie*

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<sup>23</sup> DMin Site Visit Evaluation Forms, June 30, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Moschella, 152.

*Presbyterian Church, Guthrie.* These three objects remain in the *Trinity Room* today, although not easy to find or identify unless you are looking for them. During the project period no one commented on these three symbols' existence in the church. I was able to acquire detailed information about all three objects, and following the project have been able to connect with the artists and donors who originally gave the symbols to the three merging congregations.

It is valuable to note that while some at *Trinity* are symbol-phobic, for the great majority the symbols themselves are not the issue. The issue is the meaning the symbols hold. It is the community's interpretation of the objects, visuals, and experiences that require careful analysis and evaluation.

### ***DANCING***

Dancing was an exploration of our ability to play. We play because God's people play. King David leaps and dances before the ark of the Lord with his entire might saying: "...therefore will I play before the Lord."<sup>25</sup> We read how God will rescue Jerusalem, "...and the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets."<sup>26</sup> Creation itself is playful, because of the creator. The Psalmist praises God for creating the sea and the creatures within. The Psalmist writes: "...and over there, the whale you made to play in the sea."<sup>27</sup> To engage in worship by using our whole bodies in response to God invited us to an attitude of playfulness.

Playfulness is a contrast to seriousness. Seriousness says family therapist Edwin Friedman, is: "...more than an attitude; it is a total orientation, a way of thinking

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<sup>25</sup> 2 Samuel 6: 14-21.

<sup>26</sup> Zechariah 8:5.

<sup>27</sup> Psalm 104: 25-26, NLT.

embedded in constant, chronic anxiety.”<sup>28</sup> Friedman suggests that play is a change agent when it comes to seriousness. At *Trinity* seriousness was something that we knew well. For us playfulness provided a vehicle that took us down a different road, a different story, even if only for a few miles. Play was a change agent at *Trinity* during the project. The image of God’s people moving, singing, dancing, laughing while in worship was transformational. At first it was a little awkward, as people looked to see if others were engaging, dancing, or participating. Slowly people embraced the opportunity to engage God in a new way.

We discerned transformation in the midst of the dance. It was symbolic that each week our worship concluded with Holy Motion. *May the Road Rise to Meet You*<sup>29</sup> sent us as the Body of Christ into a new week, with new love and new opportunities. The ability to play together provided a glimpse of the type of community we could be if we let the Spirit lead the dance. Once worship stopped so did the dancing and playing. In the eye of the storm we were free to live into a future, however, as we moved out of the eye, the “what is”<sup>30</sup> turned the sky stormy. *Trinity* knew how to dance, and we knew a new thing was just beyond the next step, the next move; but the moment the music faded, reality sounded. Singer songwriter Brandi Carlile reminds us: “you can dance in a hurricane, but only if you’re standing in the eye.”<sup>31</sup>

The symbol of dancing leads to a theology of play that invites us to dance because God dances. As God’s redeemed creation in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit gifts us with

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<sup>28</sup> Edwin Friedman, *Generation to Generation* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985), 50-51.

<sup>29</sup> Holy Motion, “May the Road Rise to Meet You,” Appendix 3.

<sup>30</sup> Savage and Presnell, 87.

<sup>31</sup> “The Eye.”

both work and play. Dancing encouraged inclusive participation by all of God's children. Holy Motion provided a safe space in which we came to know the joy and love of God for all God's children. Even though these feelings of joy, love and life were momentary, they were present.

Participation in music, energy and motion engaged us in acts of re-creation. In God we live and move and have our being.<sup>32</sup> Our ability to play saw the development of a new language and a different dialogue in worship. The ebb and flow of the dance told us at *Trinity* that Christ came so that we might have abundant life, and as God's people we could celebrate the freedom to love God and each other in response to God's love for us. The Lord of the dance called us all to dance in the joy of the Lord.

#### ***COMMUNION TABLE***

I was curious, and invited discussion about the lack of a communion table at *Trinity*. In my experience, a communion table would have archetypal significance. Yet the table did not exist, and most congregants were unaware this might be significant. The LAC and I wanted to create a communion table together, but had not yet shared this with the congregation. Some congregants became aware of the dialogue. However, most members had no knowledge of the plan to create a table. Recall that the LAC and I encountered sheer aversion to the creation of a symbol for the worship space and we shifted the project plan. Although we envisioned the table as a temporary or occasional object in the space, we began to hear concern that a table would become a permanent fixture. Despite our plea that creating a table together might build lasting relationships, the symbolic nature of a lasting symbol in worship caused heartache.

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<sup>32</sup> Acts 17: 28.

I personally struggled with the lack of a communion table at *Trinity*. I found it difficult to establish a meaningful connection to the sacrament, likely because of my own significant God moment with communion and the intimacy of sharing in the meal as God's family. The lack of a communion table highlights the historical insignificance of the sacraments at *Trinity* and an inability to trust each other. As I listened to people discuss their concerns about a communion table, I realized once again: it was not about the table itself, but rather about what it meant in worship. The focus needed to be fully on God, and so objects, what is more religious objects, were foreign to *Trinity*. The congregation was not acquainted with the reformed notion of sacraments as a visible sign of invisible grace, and this extended to the symbolic, including objects such as the table. A lack of mystery or awe around communion was part of the larger narrative.<sup>33</sup>

Our inability to create a table together was not transformational. However, the Holy Spirit moved in the dialogue that surrounded the communion table, stirred us and led to ask questions and engage in conversation. The lack of sacramental symbols at *Trinity* in the worship space, and the lack of interest in symbols in the space told us something about our God and ourselves. The invitation to intimacy in gathering at table and sharing in the meal together was not something we knew in worship. When it came to connections and intimacy, we preferred not to be challenged in our relationships; we preferred a lack of connection to the risk of intimacy.

### ***CROSS***

The fact that a cross exists at *Trinity* is an indication that the project occurred. The cross is the most visible symbol in our worship space and is not easy to miss. The

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<sup>33</sup> It is of interest to note that not only did the creation of a communion table cause much dialogue, but even the placing of the baptismal font in the worship space on weeks when there was not a baptism drew significant concern.



initial appearance of the cross tells a story. Two members decided that we needed a cross and so pulled an old one out of the church basement, refinished it and arranged for a stand to be built for it. As discussed in the research results section on pages 58-59, the appearing and disappearing nature of the symbols highlights in a dramatic and literal fashion the struggle to interpret and claim symbols at *Trinity*.

The image of the cross at the conclusion of Good Friday worship is symbolic for *Trinity*. The pieces of torn and ripped black fabric hanging from the cross named part of the “what is”<sup>34</sup> at *Trinity*. The image became a visual representation of who we are as a people, who we are as a community in worship. Our brokenness as individuals and as a family of faith could be seen visually on the cross. When a small group of us began to untie the pieces of black fabric, personally it felt almost blasphemous. The “what is” could be seen and we were taking it apart. We stood on holy ground that Friday. One member was in tears as we removed the fabric and gathered it together. The moments that followed the black fabric’s removal felt awkward. We were uncomfortable with moving the cross up onto the platform and draping it in white fabric for Easter Sunday. The awkward silence of the moment was broken when we realized that we had to move the cross because there was a funeral on Holy Saturday.

Our ability to interact with the cross, even briefly, as a symbol in worship, an instrument of torture and death, and not a table, told us something. It was as if we were stuck at the cross. Our journey together as a community of faith stopped sometime between Thursday night and Sunday morning. The cross reminded us that we knew the narrative of betrayal, death and dying well. We were not, however, willing to talk about the darkness of the cross or the loss of the past. We were unable to move from Good

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<sup>34</sup> Savage and Presnell, 87.

Friday to Holy Saturday and then Easter Sunday. It is as if we make sense of our lives through Good Friday. We are living Friday over and over again as we struggle with the pain and posttraumatic stress of the past. While this is extremely difficult, especially for those of us who have come to *Trinity* in the immediate past, I also sense it is the only way to move forward in hope. As professors Lakoff and Johnson state in the now classic *Metaphors We Live By*: “a large part of self-understanding is the search for appropriate personal metaphors that makes sense of our lives.”<sup>35</sup> It was as if the cross were a metaphor for life at *Trinity*. The challenge is that, for some, the cross appeared to be the end; it led us from Friday to nowhere. We could not remember, nor live, the rest of the story. Yes, we were able to cry, “He is risen!” on Sunday. However, our proclamation lacked depth. It was a cheap victory, a cheap love. It was not a love of depth that knew how to cope with suffering. Rather it was surface love, what some might call romance. In the cross we knew death – it almost seemed somewhat comfortable – but we struggled with life.

One of the metaphors that these symbols, and our lack of symbols, addresses is that we should worship God, not traditions, nor objects. They also name the seeker-sensitive orientation of the merging pastor. This orientation holds anxiety that objects from the past (history) might create barriers for someone who is new to the faith. The reality at *Trinity*, at least during the project, is that we are a community of individual believers who share a significant personal history of faith. We are people, who, for the most part, grew up with, learned to appreciate and seek the stories of God in and through objects. As one church member suggested, maybe some of the barriers that we put up in

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<sup>35</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnston, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 233.

our lives and in our church, even the lack of visuals, are to keep us from falling in love: “It’s sad that we don’t actually let ourselves fall in love.”<sup>36</sup> This person was able to speak words, a story, of transformation. Words that in the moment invited a future calling for vulnerability and openness to love and life. In order to fall in love with the future, we needed to sit and wait with Jesus on Good Friday, and we needed to mourn the death of one of our own on Holy Saturday.

### *DEATH*

It is ironic that in death we found life. In death we found life and love as a community during worship. The symbol that caused the greatest change and transformation during the project was death. Two funerals that occurred during the project period and saw us come together as a community in worship in ways we were unable to do otherwise. It felt ironic that in order to find life, we had to enter into the Christian narrative in a personal way. The death of two members of our community stirred something in us, at least during the weeks surrounding those funerals, which called us to be a real community. The funerals of people we had loved, who had loved us, who had served with us, required our personal participation in Good Friday. The funerals invited us in the days between the deaths and the funerals, to wait with Jesus and to engage in Holy Saturday. The waiting involved being together, telling stories about life and love, and remembering the rest of the story. When we gathered together to give witness to the Resurrection and celebrate and remember our friend’s lives, we then could begin to understand the life that the women found at the empty tomb that first morning. In the midst of death, we were able to acknowledge the brokenness, the pain, and the hurt; and from there we could know something about living.

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<sup>36</sup> Comment from a congregant, June 6, 2014.

During the project at *Trinity*, death fell in love. Death, in love, found life. The death of two of our own, one from cancer and one by suicide, stirred us to remember the story, to remember life. The challenging nature of death required us to struggle to find life. Our God, our tribe and our own community called us to share our stories and tell again and again the story of Jesus Christ. John Congram, using Barth's words, reminds us again of the power of story:

Karl Barth put it this way when he said that the church is Christ's earthly form of existence. Stories of God that are interwoven with our own stories have a wonderful power: power to heal, and sometimes even to raise the dead. What power they have, when we tell them.<sup>37</sup>

Our preferred future emerged from stories of death – stories that had the power to heal, the power to hope and the power to raise the dead.

The fact that the project was able to interact with and begin to encounter symbols at all is significant, especially the encounter with the cross. The history of symbols at *Trinity*, the design orientation of the worship space and the intensity of feelings towards symbols all created an environment of non-engagement. Once the community openly engaged with physical symbols, especially during Holy Week, there was an acceptance that symbols in worship might invite us to seek God and trust God in new eye opening ways.

**“SOMEDAY WE’LL TRUST HIM AND LEARN HOW TO SEE HIM”**

**TRUST**

Trust was a challenge during the project. The research results, or lack thereof, serve as an indication. The LAC had a difficult time trusting each other and inviting

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<sup>37</sup> Congram, 18.

others to trust. People were not sure they wanted to share, to be interviewed, or to offer their perspective.

I had served only four months when the project began and this was a factor. I was the fifth leader (three pastors and two interim pastors) *Trinity* had seen in the previous seven years. The people had learned that trusting the pastor might not be a wise idea.

The role of pastor was a factor too. Experience had taught that with trust came personal exposure. Some people had been hurt deeply by individuals in the church whom they trusted. For whoever was in the role of pastor, trust was an issue. Arriving at *Trinity* I was aware of the history of the previous six years. I was aware that despite anything previous pastors did or did not do, it was the congregants with whom I was entering into relationship and trying to establish trust. These were the people who lived during the upheaval, loss and change.

Trust was an issue for me personally because I had fallen in love. I fell in love with the people. I fell in love with who the people of *Trinity* wanted to be, not who they were. Courtship is not always an entirely truthful moment in our lives. Courting is a moment when we can create false selves and hyper-extend our abilities. Often we create idealized versions of ourselves. By the time the project took place, the romance that comes at the beginning of any love story was fading, and the challenging work of establishing a deep, lasting love was unfolding. We had promised to form a lasting relationship based on love, health and wholeness. At the conclusion of the project, eight months into my ministry at *Trinity*, we were struggling to trust each other.

## SEEING: FACE TO FACE

At the conclusion of the project we were also struggling to trust God. We sought to embrace a way of seeing God that invited us to be present to and with each other in worship. We sought to find ways to dance (Holy Motion) and interact with symbols that pointed us to God. Within these stories God acted. We caught glimpses of God. We had moments of seeing more clearly. We also had moments of challenge, confusion and heartache. There are moments in life and ministry when the mirror is cloudy, cracked, so dirty you cannot see anything; and then there are moments when the image is crystal clear and you can see God face to face. It was in these face to face moments that we felt love and experienced love most fully. “For now we see, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”<sup>38</sup>

## THE PRACTICE OF MINISTRY

### LOVE ACTUALLY

“Someday He’ll call us and we will come running...fall in His arms and the tears will fall down and we’ll pray...”<sup>39</sup>

The ministerial project and its implications are not just about seeing things or thinking about things in a new way, or even through a different lens, but rather action research is about a revised vision that might change the way we practice the faith.<sup>40</sup> John

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<sup>38</sup> 1 Corinthians 13: 12-13.

<sup>39</sup> “Love Song for a Savior.”

<sup>40</sup> John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 255.

Swinton, professor, and Harriet Mowat, leading authority on qualitative research, state this clearly: “the primary task of practical theology is not simply to see differently, but to enable that revised vision to create changes in the way Christians and Christian communities perform the faith.”<sup>41</sup> The final section of the project paper explores the implications for the practice of ministry based upon the ministerial project that occurred at *Trinity Community Presbyterian Church*.

### **“SOMEDAY HE’LL CALL US AND WE WILL COME RUNNING”**

Pattison’s model of theological inquiry assists in coming to terms with the *Trinity* community, my ministerial role, and the congregation as we seek to come together on a joint journey of trust in ministry and life. In exploring implications for the practice of ministry we return to a dialogue with my own faith, the Presbyterian tribe and its presuppositions; a dialogue with the larger Christian tradition (scripture); and a dialogue with the what-is/preferred future at *Trinity*.<sup>42</sup> This model of conversation invites us to hear various stories from partners and provides the opportunity for building community through dialogue.

The project did change and transform aspects of the life of our worshipping community at *Trinity*. It also continues to call us to explore change and transformation as we seek to live in the present moment and grow into the future to which God has called us.

### **BACK TO THE FUTURE (TRADITION)**

The project and its implications shook my faith. The invitation to help people remember the story of life in the midst of a culture of death was challenging. I fell in

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<sup>41</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 255.

<sup>42</sup> Pattison, 139-141.

love with people who spoke about light and life, but beneath the layers, there was hurt, pain and a sting from death. As I encountered people who were suffering, aching and struggling to find life – I too struggled. In the midst of people who know the story of death, even when trying to promote life, one can get pulled in. It was easy some days and weeks to get pulled into the death-dealing narrative.

I believe the project invited us to share our stories of faith and some stories of the past. The project has created a space for people to share their feelings, hurts and trials, specifically from the past seven years, even though many chose not to engage and tell their stories. It was generally accepted, although some still strongly disagree, that discussion about the past was okay. However, moving that past into a present moment that might lead to healing and reconciliation has not occurred. There remain unresolved issues from the past, still off limits for discussion.

*Trinity's* situation is unique and it is not. The specific details belong to *Trinity* alone, but many churches in our postmodern wilderness struggle with conflict that may lead to hurt and death. As congregational consultant David Burbank writes:

...yet despite this enormous capacity for transformation, congregations persistently experience significant internal conflict. My (Burbank's) own dissertation research found that in a five year period 45% of congregations experience a conflict 'significant enough to convene a special meeting or call in outside help.'<sup>43</sup>

*Trinity* is familiar with needing to convene special meetings and call in outside help – too familiar. *Trinity* is stuck in this narrative and we need to go back to the future. We need to revisit the stories of the past and own them as our history; not try to deny or hide from them. We also need to ensure that we do not let the past determine the future.

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<sup>43</sup> David Brubaker, accessed October 18, 2014, <http://www.congregationalconsulting.org/changing-the-ending-of-our-conflict-stories/>.



The stories we tell ourselves about the past impact the future. The stories we tell, shape our future;

thus, the stories we tell ourselves about conflict and its outcome determines to a large degree how we will respond to that conflict and what will result. If we expect that conflict is normal, natural, and manageable, it usually will be. But if we expect that conflict will divide us and destroy our congregation, it probably will.<sup>44</sup>

A return to the past might help us tell a different story about where we are in the present moment and what the future could be. At the conclusion of the project, despite sharing love in moments of dancing and symbols of faith, we still told a story of death.

In order to revision ministry, we need a new story if we are to seek a new future. January 2015 was the fifteenth anniversary of *Trinity Community Presbyterian Church*. As a way of celebrating and honoring the past in worship I lead us in praying by name for those who served as pastors, elders and ministry leaders in *Trinity's* history. Even in the midst of this fifteenth anniversary celebration Sunday people were unable to acknowledge any hope emerging from the past. This anniversary worship served as a reminder that the journey to health, wholeness and celebration is desperately necessary and will be extensive. The theme of love has been part of the story from the beginning of *Trinity's* journey. A love that manifested itself in so many ways: the creation of a new church from the merging of three congregations; the building of a new physical home; the explosive growth in faith and members; and the deep connections to the local community. The challenges during the last two pastorates invited a community to seek to encounter God face to face, and then reach out to each other, speaking the truth in love.

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<sup>44</sup> Brubaker.

### **SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE (SCRIPTURE)**

In a poignant irony, though living in a world focused on communication, I sometimes find it challenging, almost down right impossible, to connect face to face. Even in our families and intimate relationships sometimes we struggle to take the time to look each other directly in the eye when we communicate. Often face to face communication is necessary to speak the truth in love. Our dialogue with the Christian narrative (scripture) calls us to seek God face to face and speak the truth in love to each other.

A face to face encounter of love is one that God creates in our life. This agape love, in my experience, is God's loving one person through another. It is God's acting in and through each of us that empowers and enables us to love another in selfless, giving and passionate ways. This face to face love knows how to care, knows how to give, knows grace and invites the Spirit of God to work in you and love another person through you. At the end of the musical *Les Miserable* as Jean Valjean is dying, he encounters the spirits of Fantine and Eponine who guide him to heaven with the reminder that: "...to love another person is to see the face of God."<sup>45</sup> After Jean Valjean's death, the spirits of everyone who died at the barricades join together, asking us "...do you hear the people sing?" At *Trinity* the people sang in response to death. Our singing, even if only for a moment, revealed God's face to those who loved and lost. The people who, in the face of death, chose to love another, were able to see the face of God.

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<sup>45</sup> Herbert Kretzmer, *Les Miserable*, act 2, Valjean's death.

The call of all God’s children is to speak the truth in love.<sup>46</sup> Our stories of love can at times hurt, challenge and even cause anger. We are still called to be forgiving and loving, just as we receive love and forgiveness from God. During our journey as Christians we seek to grow up into Christ by proclaiming the truth in a loving way. In order to speak the truth in love, vulnerability is often necessary. We live in a world that sometimes claims loving means agreeing with everything the other believes and does. As we grow up in love we may be able to realize that we can be self-differentiated people and still love as Christ loved.<sup>47</sup> We are able to hold different beliefs or values and still respect and love each other with God’s help. As we grow, we can acknowledge and take responsibility for our beliefs, and ourselves, even though we may be different from others. When we encounter moments or situations of disagreement we can speak the truth in love having a confidence that we are being responsible for our community and ourselves.<sup>48</sup> Maturity as individuals and as a community of faith comes when we listen and act according to God’s word: “But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.”<sup>49</sup>

Knowing how and when to speak the truth in love often requires discernment and especially discernment of the Holy Spirit’s movement in the ebb and flow of our dialogue and disagreement. An interview comment reminds us of this truth: “. . .in my profession,

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<sup>46</sup> Ephesians 4: 11-16

<sup>47</sup> Edwin H. Freidman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury Books, 2007), 183-185.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 229-231.

<sup>49</sup> Ephesians 4: 15-16.

where we interact with and help people daily, I see the opportunity to invite God into other people's lives in passive ways. The truth is the moment needs to be right in order for the dialogue to begin, in order to speak truth and share personally."<sup>50</sup>

I fell in and out of love with the people of *Trinity* during the project. There were moments of great joy, light and love; and there were moments of anguish, pain and heartache. While the current reality remains a challenge, I nevertheless hold hope for the future. In my experience, as loving relationships develop we sometimes fall in and out of love – it is only after really getting to know someone, after time and struggle together, that we develop honest, lasting deep love based on mutual respect, commitment, and God. My relationship with the people of *Trinity* began based upon an intense feeling of love. Our relationship now required something greater than feeling only – it required a decision – a decision to love. The God of love has been present in the midst of it all and will continue to journey with us. The God of love welcomes us into God's arms and wipes away our tears, until the day that the tears and pain will be no more.<sup>51</sup>

**“FALL IN HIS ARMS AND THE TEARS WILL FALL DOWN AND WE’LL PRAY”**

#### **BODY OF CHRIST (PREFERRED FUTURE)**

Tears are part of *Trinity's* preferred future. We need to be brave and courageous enough to acknowledge at the present moment that we have a story that waits to be told. As preacher William Sloane Coffin reminds us, the reality is “...most of us fear the cure more than the illness. Most of us prefer the plausible lie that we cannot be cured to the

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with a congregant, April 30, 2014.

<sup>51</sup> Revelation 21: 4.

fantastic truth that we can be.”<sup>52</sup> At *Trinity*, acknowledging that we have a story to be told remains an immense challenge. We need to engage the task of prophetic ministry and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the dominant narrative.<sup>53</sup> Walter Brueggemann reminds us that criticism of reality begins in the ability to grieve, because hope arrives in and through weeping.<sup>54</sup> It is through the process of telling our stories about the “what is”<sup>55</sup> and the “what could be,” that we can engage suffering and death. *Trinity’s* story during the project and our biblical story tell us, as Savage and Presnell say: “...that only anguish leads to life, only grieving leads to joy, and only embracing endings permits new beginnings.”<sup>56</sup> Our beautiful messy stories matter; we need to tell them!

I believe we desperately need to tell our stories in sure and certain hope. In my experience, the birth of hope almost always happens without our intention. No one chooses to be born. True transformation is not about trying harder, building bigger or faster, but it is often about allowing oneself to discover reality in a new way. Birth is transitioning from one place to the next, just as an infant moves from womb to the world. New birth is about fully entering the story, as we move from one place to the next.

In the project I saw that it is in seeking to discover a new place that we can proclaim the hope of our story, as congregational consultant Kennon Callahan says: “hope is stronger than memory. Memory is strong. Hope is stronger. Hope is stronger than change. Change is strong. Hope is stronger. Hope is stronger than conflict.

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<sup>52</sup> William Sloane Coffin, *The Courage to Love* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 13.

<sup>53</sup> Brueggemann, 3.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>55</sup> Savage and Presnell, 87.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

Conflict is strong. Hope is stronger.”<sup>57</sup> I believe that it is in and through embracing grief and proclaiming hope that a preferred future of love might arrive for *Trinity*.

The love song from Colossians<sup>58</sup> is about being the Body of Christ together. The song is about relationships and community. When the first Christians sang these words they were attempting to describe, in their encounter with Jesus Christ, a relationship, a relationship that was life changing and world altering. I hear these words as an invitation for us at *Trinity* to enter into that same relationship. The Colossians’ love song invites us to be transferred from one realm to another. This early community reminds us that truly encountering Jesus Christ is life changing and story altering. At *Trinity*, our preferred future is to build a relationship with Jesus. Jesus knows our pain, our suffering, and our past, and still calls us into relationship with Him and with each other. One congregant at *Trinity* in response to the dancing (Holy Motion) and interaction with symbols of our faith said: “we are the Body of Christ. We are all called to be part of Jesus in the world. It used to mean that the Body of Christ was the church – loving , humble and caring. Now, I’m not so sure.”<sup>59</sup> Being the Body of Christ calls us again and again to be transferred from darkness into the reign of Christ. As God’s family, we need to embrace our history and the present moment, knowing that it is Christ alone who gives us peace and hope through the cross and resurrection. Paul reminds us that we are meant to be part of the family of God, what Paul calls the Body of Christ, where we care for, encourage

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<sup>57</sup> Kennon L. Callahan, *The Twelve Keys Leaders’ Guide* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 63.

<sup>58</sup> Colossians 1: 11-20

<sup>59</sup> Interview with a congregant, May 29, 2014.

one another and grow in our self-understanding as beloved children.<sup>60</sup> As we rest in the grace and love of God, we grow toward wholeness and may become freed to love others as unconditionally as we are loved. We can acknowledge honestly our own weaknesses and strengths, confident that God can work through all aspects of our lives.

Being the Body of Christ requires us to practice ourselves into being followers of the Living God. The language we use about our faith, the stories we tell, shape an understanding of who we are: who we are in relationship to God, and where this journey of faith is taking us. A focused and intentional use of words and stories is part of the task of speaking and teaching the faith. It is through the reclaiming and transforming of stories that we can hope to be transformed ourselves in life and faith. In order to revision ministry we need to live into a new future. While the sting, messiness and grief of death is still palpable at *Trinity*, I hope and pray that someday in the future we will be able to tell the story of our history as one of perseverance, redemption and hope. In my role as leader, I am reminded that I need to live hope and help lead us from Good Friday through Holy Saturday and into Easter Sunday:

... leaders need to pay attention to the stories that they tell (and that congregational members share) about conflict and its impact on the congregation. If the stories that we tell ourselves about past conflicts all have horrible endings, that reality will shape our response to current and future conflicts. We will become conflict avoidant and fearful—a toxic mix that encourages anxiety to flourish and conflict to become destructive. Leaders in such systems will need to re-narrate these stories, shaping a congregational narrative of resilience and recovery (not just disaster and decline). If we want our congregational future to have a different ending, we need to change the endings of the stories we tell ourselves. God helping us, we have the power to do so.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> The notion that we are the ‘Body of Christ’ is a biblical principle based on the following passages: Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 3:6, Colossians 1:18, Colossians 1:24.

<sup>61</sup> Brubaker.

We are not only a people of the cross. At times we get so preoccupied with the cross that we become stuck. We get ourselves up on the cross – sick, dying, dead. Currently one of the ways *Trinity* finds itself sick, dying and dead is related to the physical location of the cross. While the secretive in and out movement of the cross was at first possibly playful, it is now derogatory. The concealed nature of its location, and the manipulative power and control that someone is holding by moving the cross under the cover of darkness is deplorable. The physical location of the cross is a shadow script related to my ministry as the current pastor, eroding trust and distracting us from living fully as Easter people. The movement of the cross is unholy motion. Focusing on the cross is only living a portion of the Gospel story and someone in the congregation wants us to be preoccupied with the cross, rather than with the open tomb. As we have learned well at *Trinity*, life is at moments about death; however, we also need to know there is more to the Good News story than simply the cross.

A community of women walked to a tomb on the first day of the week. At the tomb they expected to encounter death. Instead they discovered the open tomb is stronger than the bloodied cross. At *Trinity* we are called to discover, as Kennon Callahan proclaims: “the Risen Lord is stronger than the dead Jesus; Easter Sunday is stronger than Good Friday. We are the people of the open tomb, the Risen Lord, and new life in Christ. We are the people of hope. We are Easter People.”<sup>62</sup>

The beautiful thing about stories is the person who encounters life narrates that experience. Stories are a primary account of events from the perspective of one person.

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<sup>62</sup> Callahan, *The Twelve Keys Leaders' Guide*, 72, 186.



In this sense all stories are true, some of them actually happened!<sup>63</sup> A story's truth emerges from the lived experience of the storyteller and gets codified in the telling and re-telling of the narrative. At *Trinity* we need to tell ourselves and invite others to come and see a new story.

As we stand on the threshold of tomorrow may we be bold enough to step forward into new uncharted territory and may we be humble enough to step gently and softly in reverence and awe. May we be stirred to a new openness and willingness to let God be God, and seek to encounter and proclaim the wonderful mystery, love and wholeness of God in Jesus Christ at all times and in all places. I believe that I am called to walk among and beside people who are journeying on the path of love, people who are deep in the midst of love, hurting people who are willing to open themselves up to see God alive in their neighborhood and people who are willing to join God in the sacred messiness of love.

Our being and life can often be grasped only in re-understanding and re-visioning how we live our story (our lives) on a daily basis. If we encounter life with eyes and hearts wide open, looking for the holy and thinking with the mind of our hearts, then we may gain insights that allow us to provide a deep hope, not only for ourselves, but more importantly for others. This future oriented imaginative task may cause us to explore a consciousness and realization different from the reality we currently see and hear around us.<sup>64</sup> This preferred future is grounded in the stories of our lives, both those that may seem extraordinary and most importantly the stories from our normal ordinary everyday

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<sup>63</sup> Hester and Walker-Jones, 46.

<sup>64</sup> Brueggemann, 1-6.

lives. This visionary task may cause us to encounter the future and fall in love all over again, thereby inviting us to begin anew, even before we are ready.

**EPILOGUE**  
**COME AND SEE**

“You know when you were up there talking today, and said that line about nothing good ever being able to come from Nazareth, well I wonder if anything good can come from *Trinity*.”<sup>1</sup> I wonder if anything good can come from *Trinity*? This question spoke power and truth about aspects of the recent history at *Trinity* Community. The question posed by a member of our worshipping community lingers. It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand a person, a place or a thing without hearing a story, often a bigger story. After hearing a bigger story about *Trinity*, it might now be possible to grasp, why someone would ask such a question. Especially given *Trinity’s* challenging last seven years and an inability to honestly deal with how manifestations of the past are appearing in the present. Further, we cannot begin to understand the profound hope of *Trinity’s* response to these words, without knowing the love song for our Savior, which was the winter and spring of 2014. It might be possible now, to know why someone would ask a question that requires a response – a question that invites a future. You are invited to join in our future and “come and see”<sup>2</sup> the emerging story of *Trinity* Community Presbyterian Church.

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<sup>1</sup> The words spoken to the minister by a member of *Trinity Community Presbyterian Church* after worship on Sunday morning referring to a sermon about John 1: 43-51 in which Nathaniel asks Philip: can anything good come out of Nazareth.

<sup>2</sup> John 1: 46b.

## APPENDIX 1

### PROJECT TIMELINE

**Fall 2013-** We will develop specific methodologies for gathering narratives and choose tools for observing change and discerning transformation. The LAC's work will continue as we develop and prepare to lead the ministry aspects of the project. I will train the LAC to interview, collect and gather narratives.

**January to May 2014-** Throughout the project the LAC and I will collect narratives from members and adherents of the congregation who are eighteen years of age and over and willing participants. We will conduct the interviews at Trinity: both one-on-one and in small focus groups.

**February 2014-** A four part sermon series on love and falling in love: February 2- First Dates; February 9- Falling in Love; February 16- Love Hurts; February 23- Love Actually. Each worship service and sermon will include experiential aspects of story and play (Holy Motion). On February 2<sup>nd</sup> members of the LAC are going to share stories of their first date. On February 9<sup>th</sup> I am going to share my call story about falling in love with Trinity. On February 23<sup>rd</sup> I will lead the congregation in actions set to music from the song *Seasons of Love* from the musical *Rent*.

**March 2014** – During Lent we will invite the congregation to create a communion table for Trinity and continue collecting narratives. The creation of the communion table will be an abductive experience, as we invite congregants to participate in a communal project. They will be aware of the material from the past and present being used to form

an object, but may be unaware until Holy Week, that what is being formed is a communion table.

**April 2014-** During Holy Week, April 17-20, 2014, we will experience communion by participation in the Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday worship services while interacting with the new communion table. After Holy Week, the project will specifically invite congregants who have already been interviewed to interview again. In addition, some people may be interviewed for the first time as well.

**May 2014-** We will continue to collect narratives for the duration of the project.

**APPENDIX 2****HOLY MOTION: SEASONS OF LOVE**

(Music: Season of Love from the Rent Soundtrack)

*Theme:*

This Holy Motion allows us to remember that all seasons are to be spent in love. We are reminded of the powerful love that Jesus has for us and the love that we are instructed to have for our ‘neighbors,’ brothers and sisters.

*Moves to Teach:*

1) Clock

With both hand straight above your head you move your right hand around in a circle in a clock wise direction. Repeat with your left hand

2) Shine

Move your right hand up in the air in slow intervals and hold it straight up in the air.

Repeat with your other arm. Then bring both hands up together your sway your arms as you where painting the sky.

3) Praise

Lift your right arm straight up into the air as you where ascribing praise. Repeat with your left

4) Wave

Wave your arm in front of your both and grab your neighbor’s hand. Repeat with your left hand.

## 5) 'Love'

While holding hands squeeze your neighbor's hand, turn to your right and tell your neighbor Jesus loves them. Repeat to your right. Finally sway back and forth.

*Instructions:*

When the words begin you make your clock and continue for 2 lines of the song.

At the word 'measure' you bring your arms down to your side and get ready to shine.

At 'in daylight' you shine with both arms individually and then both arms together. Then paint the sky until the next verse begins.

At 'how about love' you praise with your right arm and then repeat with your left

On the third how about love you wave to your right and then your left.

Finally the 'love' sequence, turn to the person on your right and then Jesus love them and then to your left. Finish by swaying while still holding your neighbors hands

Repeat from the beginning once.

### APPENDIX 3

#### HOLY MOTION: MAY THE ROAD RISE TO MEET YOU

*May the Road rise to meet you*

Right arm from side, making a road in front

Left arm joins it

*May the wind be always at your back*

hand pointing up, twisting around like snakes, moving upward (kind of like a fire move)

hands on back, over shoulders

*May the sun shine warm upon your face*

arms up, palms out, stretch up and out and down

on “warm” turn hands in and do same

*May the rain fall soft upon your fields*

Right arm makes rain, fingers moving, arm moving down

Left does same.

*And until we meet again*

Right hand, two fingers pointed up at side; Left hand does two little circles as it crosses

body to make a cross with two other fingers.



*And until we meet again*

same thing other way

*May God hold you in the palm of his hand*

hands side by side, moving up in front of body, reach up, and hold

then bring down slowly to a “prayer” position and hold

**APPENDIX 4**  
**INTERVIEW SCRIPT**

A) Welcome

Thank you for participating in an interview related to my doctoral studies at Drew University. I am conducting interviews that focus on gathering narratives (stories) from as many church members as possible. I have a series of questions for you. Some of the questions many feel silly, not applicable, or uncomfortable. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions.

B) Permission

You are free to interrupt, ask clarifying questions, or to not respond to a particular question. You are also free to stop the interview at any time.

Your responses will remain anonymous in any written reports growing out of my studies and your responses will be treated with the strictest confidence.

I am hoping to take notes and digitally record our conversation; do you provide me with permission to do so?

C) Questions

- 1) What activities/experiences in your life would you describe as play?
- 2) Share a story about your earliest memory of God?
- 3) Share a story about a first date?
- 4) Share a story about falling in love?
- 5) Share any stories about falling in love with God?
- 6) Tell me about signing the call (if applicable)?

- 7) Describe your experience of Holy Motion (May the Road & Seasons of Love) in worship?
  - 8) What does the phrase 'Body of Christ' mean to you?
  - 9) Do we play together as a community at Trinity?
  - 10) Any other stories or comments?
- D) Thank You

I am grateful for your time today and your willingness to participate in this process. Do you have any questions of me?

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