

EVERY MEMBER A MINISTER?
(RE)CLAIMING THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

A professional project submitted to the Theological School of
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requirements for the degree,
Doctor of Ministry

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To Suzy, Yates, and Lennon

ABSTRACT

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Who is a minister? What is ministry? This project explores conceptions of ministers and ministry among the laity of Earle Street Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina. More specifically, the project investigates how laypeople may or may not understand themselves as ministers, and how they might stay connected with others who understand themselves or conceptualize ministry differently.

The paper offers a definition and description of ministry based on an overview of Biblical and historical understandings, paired with cultural expectations and assumptions voiced by a Local Advisory Committee (LAC). The paper also explores the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, from its conception by Martin Luther through the Baptist tradition to the contemporary church context.

To examine the questions of interest above in an intentional and focused manner, the author and LAC coordinated a one-day lay ministry retreat utilizing narratives from participants' experiences, as well as film clips and biblical texts. The author also preached two sermons – one before the retreat and one after – which emphasized the ministry of the laity and encouraged participation in the retreat and subsequent ministry opportunities (for example: serving communion to homebound church members, leading worship at a local homeless shelter, writing notes to inactive church members).

Looking for signs of transformation in narrative patterns and relationships, the results seemed to indicate that the shortfall in lay ministry could be due to a lack of encouragement and empowerment. That is, people seemed to understand conceptually that all Christians are ministers but did not seem to think of the services they performed as ministry, *per se*. The results also suggest that there may be a discomfort with laypeople's taking on certain ministry responsibilities, not only on the part of the laity but on the part of the clergy, as well. The most poignant result of the project, however, was the personal transformation experienced by the author regarding his own ministerial identity, even as he sought to explore that of others.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTIONS TO MINISTRY: STORY AND CONTEXT

My Story

It was my first church; my first job as a full-time, professional, ordained clergyperson. Five years ago, fresh out of divinity school, I came to Earle Street Baptist Church to serve as their Associate Pastor. I filled the vacant position after the church called their former Associate Pastor, Stephen, to be the Senior Pastor when the previous pastor left to serve another church. About two years into my tenure at the church, however, I was almost ready to quit my job and abandon the call to parish ministry.

Stephen and I meet monthly to discuss the life of the church, including areas of concern and opportunity. During one such meeting three years ago, Stephen informed me of two couples in the church who had expressed concerns to him about my ministry and about me, personally.¹ In particular, these couples were concerned that I spoke too openly about the struggles of working at a church, and they felt my wife, Suzy, and I were too transparent in that regard. They were also bothered that I did not abstain from alcohol, mentioning their concern that I drank beer at a Sunday School class Christmas party. The couples even brought up a gossiped rumor: they had heard that Suzy had been downtown in our city drunk and out of control – a complete falsehood! Furthermore, both couples took issue with the way I do ministry. They felt as though I were trying too hard to prove myself, making too many changes at the church, particularly in the young adult group of which they had been a part for the previous half-decade or so. (Admittedly, this last concern may have been true.)

Stephen encouraged these two couples to speak with me, but they wished to remain anonymous. I expressed my strong desire to speak with the couples directly, to hear their

¹ The names of the characters, other than those of Greg, Suzy, and Stephen, have been changed.

concerns for myself and respond to them, but the couples were reluctant to break their anonymity and Stephen was hesitant to break confidence. After much back-and-forth over the next few days, with Stephen acting as a type of go-between, the couples finally agreed to speak with me in person.

When I learned who these two couples were, I could hardly believe it. The Taylors and the Yorks are the same age as Suzy and me, and in our Sunday School class no less! Suzy and I had been to Matt and Christy Taylor's house for dinner and shared a bottle of wine they offered to us. Just a month earlier, Robert and Beth York hosted the class Christmas party in their home, serving beer and wine they apparently expected me, as one of their pastors, and my wife, not to drink. In these and many other situations, I was and still am always careful to ask if my partaking of alcohol would offend anyone. Neither Suzy nor I was reckless or indiscriminate as we chose to divulge personal information, even though we have been more honest and open with our peers than anyone else in the church. Needless to say, the revelation of the identities of these two couples surprised me.

I was able to set up times to speak with each couple individually. In both conversations, the couples were able to be honest with me and I with them. They expressed their belief that I should be held to a higher standard than other Christians because of my vocation; that I should be "above reproach."² I resisted this a model of a minister and pushed back against it in our conversations. I explained how and why I differed with them, but because of those differences we could reach no real resolution. Ultimately, their concerns were not about whether I drank alcohol or my transparency with them. These were merely symptoms of the real issue: my not fitting their expectations of the traditional model of a Baptist minister.

² 1Timothy 3:1-7, NRSV. This passage offers criteria by which bishops (or "overseers") are to be judged.

It was my first church; my first job as a full-time, professional, ordained clergyperson. It was my introduction to ministry.

Earle's Story

Allow me to introduce you to Earle Street Baptist Church, affectionately known as "Earle." This nickname came from an older man who would call the church office on a regular basis. As soon as he got the pastor on the phone, he would say, "How 'bout Earle?" – not "Hi," or "Hello," or "This is Harry." – just "How 'bout Earle?" It was his way of saying, "Tell me about the church. What's going on? Give me the *real* story." This is my attempt to do just that.

Earle's culture, much like the neighborhood in which it is located, is homey. In fact, the words "home" and "family" are often used to describe the church and congregation. Earle Street Baptist Church's unofficial slogan is "Welcome home," which has now supplanted the spoken "Amen" previously used to officially vote on people who come to join the church. Members of the church often speak of it as a warm and caring place, "a home to all who would enter" (a phrase from the church's mission statement). Yet this neighborhood church, as it was originally conceived, is no longer such. For the past thirty years, the church has grown steadily from the point of near death. Whereas Earle was a *Cheers*-church – "where everybody knows your name" – it has now reached a point at which this is not possible. And because much of this growth has happened very recently, many members have had difficulty making the shift from a smaller church mindset and culture to that of a larger church. Although the growth of the church is celebrated and spoken of proudly, many members do not want Earle to change with growth. In my experience, most members continue to think of Earle as a smaller church than it actually is and would like the church to operate in the same ways as it has in the past (i.e. knowing most, if

not all, church members; personal calls from the pastor; etc.).³ Alice Mann uses the analogy of a twelve-foot fly in a horror movie that was created from a housefly enlarged in exact proportion to explain the structural impossibility of this wish: “When organisms change significantly in size, they must also change in form.”⁴

Earle’s growth over the past few decades, and particularly over the past few years, has been interpreted widely as a sign of the health and vitality of the church. And yet this dominant narrative script eclipses a tradition of sublimation and avoidance. For instance, the pastor, Stephen, as well as a number of others in lay leadership positions, often speak of the unity in the church. Yet this unity can be the result of ignoring differences between church members, avoiding potentially controversial topics that would highlight such differences, and attempting to confine and control any conflict that may arise when those differences do emerge. I have heard Stephen say on numerous occasions that a church often takes on the personality of its pastor, and I believe that may be true of Earle. Both Stephen and his predecessor are self-admittedly conflict-averse and the two men represent almost thirty years of pastoral leadership at Earle Street Baptist Church. The man who pastored the church before these two, from 1967 to 1987, experienced a significant decline in church membership and attendance, almost leading to Earle’s death during his tenure. Granted, these were turbulent times in American religious life, but this pastor, too, was conflict averse. According to those who knew him, one of the most common phrases in his sermons was, “Now don’t hear me saying...,” almost as though he did not want to be interpreted in any way that might give rise to conflict.

³ See Appendix 1 of Alice Mann, *The In-Between Church: Navigating Size Transitions in Congregations* (Herndon, VA: Alban, 1998), 78-91 for descriptions of effective ministry and pastoral expectations in different size churches.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.



Figure 1. The current pastor of Earle Street Baptist Church, Stephen Clyborne (far right), and his two predecessors, Jim Wooten and Harold Killian. Photograph by Bill Lynch, March 18, 2012.

In this same vein, in my estimation, Earle values stability highly and is wary about change. Stephen and his two living predecessors account for almost fifty years of the church's leadership, over half of the church's life. What's more, when the previous pastor left to serve another church, the congregation at Earle voted unanimously to suspend the by-laws of the church, which stated that a pastoral search committee must be formed when a pastor leaves, and instead called the associate pastor (who had been at the church for seven years already) to become the senior pastor. In a Baptist church, a unanimous vote is practically unheard of, much less a unanimous vote to suspend the rules of order to call a pastor. As one member of the church put it, "Even if we were voting on giving everyone in the church a bar of fourteen-karat gold, you'd only get ninety-three percent...max!"⁵ The desire for stability is also reflected in the ministerial staff. With a tenure of five years, I am the junior minister on staff, the rest of whom

⁵ Drew Pearce, conversation with author, Greenville, SC, May 2009.

have been at the church for ten, eleven, twelve, and nineteen years, respectively.

Both of the couples who voiced concerns about me and my ministry at the church had been at Earle for several years before I arrived there. They were inculturated to the church and its ethos of consistency and stability. They were accustomed to their relationship with Stephen and his way of doing things, especially when *he* was in the Associate Pastor's role. And although both couples told me they were not asking me to do anything differently, I assumed they wanted me to change my ways or else they would not have voiced their concerns. I felt that I did not meet their expectations of a minister – to always be available; to care deeply for every single person in the church; to be meek and passive, never upset or angry; to be present whenever called upon, whether a church member's second cousin was having an intensive tooth-cleaning or a member was in intensive care; and to do all of this with a smile on my face and seemingly little effort, even if it meant putting in sixty or seventy hours per week.

Stephen had modeled this notion of a minister during his time as the Associate Pastor and also in his role as the Senior Pastor, and I suspect that previous pastors have, too. In fact, in conversations with Stephen following the incident described above, I asked him how he thought I should have handled the situations about which the couples complained. He responded, "Well, I just wouldn't have done that." Also in those conversations, I expressed my hurt over what I perceived as a lack of support from him. I believed that by not explicitly defending me, he tacitly validated these couples' concerns and, by extension, their tactics. I openly disagreed with his method of handling the situation, and with his (and the couples') understanding of who and what a minister should be.

And yet in our Baptist tradition, *all* Christians are ministers. Historically, *the priesthood*

of all believers is a principal principle for those within the tradition.⁶ And yet I have rarely observed a Baptist church in which this principle is widely practiced. In my experience, rarely do large numbers of laypeople in a church, even in a Baptist church, function in their roles as ministers. Conversely, rarely have I experienced clergy who attempt to reduce distinctions between themselves and laity or who release certain ministerial functions (e.g. preaching, teaching, etc.) to lay ministers. Often, therefore, there seem to be distinctions between ordained professional clergy and volunteer lay ministers, maintained and reinforced by both parties, and manifested in worship and ministry practices. With these distinctions, there also seem to be expectations about how ordained clergy (as opposed to laity) are supposed to act, speak, and even dress. Where might such assumptions and expectations come from? How do Baptist clergy and laypeople alike perpetuate these distinctions in practice, even though we may claim to believe in the priesthood of all believers? And what could change if a church, both professional clergy and laypeople, were to (re)claim the priesthood of all believers; the notion of “each member a minister”?⁷

Joseph’s Story

Reflecting on my experiences with the senior pastor and the two young adult couples, I hear echoes of the stories about Joseph resonating in my mind.⁸ As mentioned above, a common image used at Earle Street Baptist Church, by both our clergy and laity, is that of “home” and “family.” And yet when the two couples, peers from the group of church members with whom I was closest, challenged me; and when Stephen, my friend and colleague, did not support me, I

⁶ See Chapter 2 for definition and explanation.

⁷ Dr. Hardy Clemons introduced this phrase during his pastorate at my home church, First Baptist Church of Greenville, SC (c.1989-2000) as a slogan for the congregation. The full phrase is “A Community of Believers, Each Member a Minister,” which still appears on the header of the church’s website, www.firstbaptistgreenville.com (accessed July 20, 2014).

⁸ Genesis 37-50.

felt betrayed by those who were supposed to be my family of faith. I felt as though I had lost my sense of place, my home in the church, among my peer group and among my colleagues. And for a period of time following, I was stuck in the pit and prison of despair, feeling trapped and enslaved by the expectations projected on me.

And yet, as I emerge from these events, I have begun to find my own ministerial identity, apart from this so-called church “home” and “family.” Even as I look toward the potential changes that may take place in my ministry context, I am aware of my own transformation. This personal growth and transformation has been and will be a slow, continual process. When the narrative I shared above initially took place, I felt like Joseph: betrayed by those close to him, trapped in a pit, sold into the slavery of a life that was not his own. Even so, I have grown into my role and found ways to care for others in the midst of my circumstances.⁹ And I hope I will be able to look back on this time in my life and say with Joseph, “What others intended for evil, God intended for good.”¹⁰

⁹ Cf. Genesis 37-50.

¹⁰ This is the author’s paraphrase of Genesis 50:20.

CHAPTER 2

FOUNDATIONS FOR MINISTRY: DEFINING AND DESCRIBING

Describing the Person and Practice

“Who is a *minister*?” and, “What is *ministry*?” These questions guided the Local Advisory Committee’s discussions and planning of the project from the very beginning, as well as the entirety of the project itself. Being a good Protestant and a life-long Baptist, I turned first to the Bible to seek answers to these questions and to better understand these terms.

The concept of *ministry* is rooted in both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. When the verb *to minister* and related words in English appear in the Old Testament, they most often come from the Hebrew root שרת (*šrt*).¹ This root refers to ministerial service, often cultic service in the context of worship, but also higher forms of domestic service. When English words from the “minist-“ cluster appear in the New Testament, we may derive their roots from one of two Greek verbs and their related noun forms: διακονέω (*diakoneo*, from which we derive our English word, “deacon”) or λειτουργέω (*leitourgeo*, from which we derive our English word, “liturgy,” often translated as “the work of the people”). The former usually refers to active service to others at someone’s behest, and more specifically, service around the table.² The latter primarily refers to a cultic or ritual service performed by an individual that makes a significant and publically

¹ *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 11th ed., s.v. “שרת” (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 1058.

² *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, s.v. “διακονέω” (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2000), 229-230.

recognized impact on the community.³ If one were to collapse these Biblical perspectives into a single concept of *ministry*, we could form a common definition that would be rendered as service, often with some type of religious meaning attached, which benefits another person or group of people.

While the biblical usage of the Hebrew and Greek verbs meaning *to minister* and their related noun forms offer a starting point for what it means to do *ministry* or to be a *minister*, centuries of practice have shaped these concepts, especially among ordained and professional clergy.⁴ As one member of the local advisory committee shared, a rector at the Episcopal church in which the committee member grew up described his vocation in this way:

As long as there are people who are hungry, as long as there are people who are homeless, as long as there are people who don't know Christ, then I have a job in this town.⁵

Furthermore, because of the traditionally prominent role of clergy in the life of communities, there exists a cultural understanding of ministers. Societal representations of ministers in media and literature, as well as actual living persons serving in this role – both famous and lesser-known – seem to constantly shape this understanding. One of the earliest discussions of these concepts by the Local Advisory Committee made such representations clear, particularly when I asked them to share images that they associate with the word “minister.”⁶ Collectively, they described a man wearing a suit, standing behind a microphone or a pulpit, with slightly-graying but well-styled (slicked-back?) hair. One member of the committee went on to

³ Ibid., s.v. “λειτουργέω” 590-591.

⁴ E. Brooks Holifield, *God's Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007) illustrates the historical shaping and often widely varying understandings of the office and functions of Christian clergy, even as his work is limited to the past 400 years in America.

⁵ Bill Smith, discussion with the author and Local Advisory Committee, Greenville, SC, September 9, 2013.

⁶ Author's discussion with the Local Advisory Committee, Greenville, SC, September 9, 2013.

say,

...I hate to say this and I wouldn't say this around Lucy or Paula or Janice, but I think when I think of a minister, I think of a preacher. They're not always the same, but when you talk about the minister at such-and-such church, you think of the preacher and not the minister of music or whatever.⁷

Later in our conversation, this same person called the pastor of a church a "mini-celebrity."⁸ In the course of the discussion, another member of the committee said that she sometimes pictures a woman when she hears the word "minister," and more specifically one who is robed and in the act of preaching, although she seemed to recognize that this image is probably not the norm.

Another committee member, Blaun, shared that she first thought of me when she thought of a minister.

I've been in churches with wonderful ministers all my life, but Greg is the minister that will always stand out to me, with such compassion, and the fact that you listen, and you listen so carefully... You don't give pat answers. You don't sluff things off. You listen, and your compassion comes through.⁹

She also spoke of her Uncle Robbie, an ordained Baptist minister.

He never married, so he and my parents and my sister and I, we all lived with our grandparents... So I grew up with a minister all my life whom I adored. And I never remember him talking to me too much about the Bible. However, when I was in nursing school I attended his church, and he would come and get a group of student nurses before he had to go back and preach at this big church in Charlotte. So he always made time for me. And I never remember him being judgmental, not about anybody or anything. But he lived – he just really lived his faith...

I recall one time we were living in Pensacola, Florida and we were going to this beer joint – Rosie O'Grady's – where you run around the tables and eat peanuts and sing racy songs... And I said, "Uncle Robbie, we're going to Rosie O'Grady's. Will you go with

⁷ Russell Young, discussion with the author and Local Advisory Committee, Greenville, SC, September 9, 2013.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Blaun Bennett, discussion with the author and Local Advisory Committee, Greenville, SC, September 23, 2013.

us?” He said, “Blaun, I don’t know what Rosie O’Grady’s is, but if it’s fun for you, I’ll go!”¹⁰

More intriguing than these associations, however, were the committee’s interpretations of their significance. When asked how these associations might reflect on those who are called ministers, or at least our assumptions about such persons, the committee responded with the following dialogue:

Greg: I think one [assumption] is that, preaching is kind of the primary focus.

Bill: The “face of the church.”

Greg: The face of the church. But we’ve also heard “comforter,” “encourager,” “teacher.”

Wendell: I think, too, that when I think of ministers, often there are so many variations of what people in the pew think. And it’s almost impossible to measure up. The standards are incredibly high. I think of that.

Barbara: I think of... you know, I used the example of a woman preacher, but I think that we limit the word – the person – minister, when we just think of it being the pastor. Even though all the things we said are true of the pastor, that ministering is just one of the functions of the pastor.

[Group]: Uh huh. I agree. Yeah.

Bill: Day-to-day kinds of things, I’m a minister to my kids...

Barbara: Yes.

Bill: (I teach high school.)

Barbara: Oh yeah! *[Laughs]*

Bill: I hear it all the time. And I know you [Greg] do.

Russell: I think just the amount of responsibility, right? Because, in a corporate world, or in a school or something, you work for your boss and you may have – I mean, I have ten people that work for me – but your responsibility as a minister is, in a big church, you’ve got hundreds or thousands of people that you are, that you’re on the hook for.

¹⁰ Ibid.

- Greg: *[Exaggerated sigh of despair]*
- [Group]: *[Laughs]*
- Greg: Yeah. Yeah.
- Russell: I mean, there's a – just like Wendell was saying – there is a giant sense of, you're not gonna please everyone. So kind of balancing that responsibility of how to keep everybody, you know, content. Right? I don't think you can always keep everybody happy, but just keep them content.
- Greg: *[Jokingly]* "Not mad," right? Keep 'em *not mad!*
- [Group]: *[Laughs]*
- Libby: And I think there's a public – I mean, I was thinking of pastors and ministers in the, um, kind of like the public sphere, like in the community? You know, they're leaders in the community, for better or worse. I mean, some do a better job than others at that, but there's, you know, people who wouldn't probably darken the door of a church have a certain expectation of a pastor's behavior and that kind of stuff. So then that all comes into play.
- And people have funny ideas, like, I'm sure somebody says a swear word in front of you and they're like, "Oh! I'm sorry!" 'Cause you're, you know, supposedly like this...
- Greg: Until I say, "Hell, I don't care."
- [Group]: *[Laughs]*
- Libby: No, I think I'd stay up all night if I – but, um – So there's all kinds of popular images besides what we, who are the people in the congregation, want and hope from our pastors, ministers...
- Greg: There's kind of a cultural identity?
- Libby: Yeah. Yeah.
- Bill: And especially in the South.¹¹

This conversation was the entry point for the Local Advisory Committee and me to begin exploring conceptualizations of ministers, and what that word entailed. Although their

¹¹ Author's discussion with the Local Advisory Committee, Greenville, SC, September 9, 2013.

associations and interpretations were not exclusive to clergy, their thoughts seemed to focus more on full-time, professional ministers and less on lay ministers or laypeople in general. In fact, when I introduced the idea of the project and the focus on laypersons as ministers, there seemed to be some tension, or at least some discomfort, in the conversation. As I explained the tension I felt of being a full-time, paid clergyperson in a tradition that holds the belief that all Christians are ministers, several members of the committee joked, “So why do you get paid and not us?” and “How do we get on the payroll?” I responded by pointing out the poor or non-existent lay ministry that I perceived in many churches, saying, “The flip side might be, Why aren’t y’all pulling your weight? Why are we [i.e. the staff ministers] doing everything?”¹² Thus, even the LAC, at least initially, seemed to hold the notion of a minister as a religious professional, one who performs duties – many of which can be done by anyone – and who is trained and paid to do them.

We viewed a short clip from a 1964 film based on Tennessee Williams’ play by the same name, *The Night of the Iguana*, to further explore these questions of “What is ministry?” and the corollary, “Who does ministry?”¹³ A defrocked, alcoholic and womanizing Episcopal priest, the Reverend Dr. T. Lawrence Shannon, is a tour guide in Mexico who suffers a mental and emotional breakdown as he struggles with his weaknesses for women and alcohol.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ John Huston, dir. 1964. *The Night of the Iguana*. Warner Bros. DVD, Warner Bros., 2008.



Figure 2. Richard Burton as the Reverend Dr. T. Lawrence Shannon and Deborah Kerr as Hannah Jelkes in the 1964 film, *The Night of the Iguana*. Image from Lasso the Movies, accessed August 19, 2014, <http://www.lassothemovies.com/the-night-of-the-iguana-1964-john-huston/>.

In a scene called *Playing God*, Hannah Jelkes, a chaste itinerant painter, ministers to Shannon by sitting with him, talking to him, and calming him.¹⁴

- Shannon: Who's the person you told Maxine you'd helped through a crack-up like this?
- Jelkes: Oh, that... Myself.
- Shannon: Oh, you?
- Jelkes: Oh yes. I had a spook like yours once. I just had a different name for him. I used to call him *The Blue Devil*. And oh, we had quite a contest between us.
- Shannon: But you were... But you won?
- Jelkes: I couldn't afford to lose.

¹⁴ The Wikipedia entry on the film uses the phrase “ministers to” to describe Miss Jelkes’ actions with Shannon. “The Night of the Iguana (film).” 2014. Wikipedia. Last modified May 9, 2014. Accessed August 15, 2014. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Night_of_the_Iguana_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Night_of_the_Iguana_(film)).

- Shannon: How did you...how did you beat this Blue Devil of yours?
- Jelkes: I showed him I could endure him, and made him respect my endurance.
- Shannon: How?
- Jelkes: Just by enduring. Endurance is something that spooks and Blue Devils respect. And they respect all the tricks that panicky people use to outwit and outlast their panic.
- Shannon: Like taking a few deep breaths?
- Jelkes: Mmm hmm. Or rum cocos. Or even beach boys. Anything. Everything we do to give them the slip and so, keep on going.
- Shannon: To where?
- Jelkes: *[Sighs]* To somewhere like this, perhaps. After long and difficult travels, subterranean travels, that the spooked and bedeviled take through the unlighted sides of their own natures until, finally, they see a faint grey light and keep climbing towards it.
- Shannon: You still following that faint grey light?
- Jelkes: Oh, any light's a good light to see by at the end of a long dark tunnel that you thought would be never-ending, that only God or death could put a stop to. Especially when you... Since I was far from sure about God.
- Shannon: You still unsure about Him?
- Jelkes: Not as unsure as I was.

I asked the Local Advisory Committee to consider which person in this scene is the minister, and which is ministering. Their responses suggest that they noticed the distinction between the position of minister (i.e. clergy) and the practice of ministry.

In order to further explore the practice of ministry – differentiated from the role of clergy – at our next gathering, the Local Advisory Committee shared stories of times when they felt that someone ministered to them and times when they felt they had ministered to someone else.¹⁵ One

¹⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all of the following narratives in this section come from the author's discussion with the Local Advisory Committee, Greenville, SC, September 23, 2013.

member of the committee, Wendell, offered an experience that occurred when he was minister of music at a church, with a role reversal similar to that in the scene from *The Night of the Iguana*. Wendell's son, Jonathan, had spinal meningitis as an infant and continues to have special needs as a young adult. (In fact, Jonathan came to almost all of our committee meetings and participated in the retreat, partly because he needed his father's supervision, but – I like to think – also because he found our work meaningful.) Here's how Wendell described his experience of being ministered to:

It was when Jonathan was so ill with spinal meningitis at seven months, and we were going back and forth to the hospital... And they had told us, "Jonathan will never come home from the hospital. What you see is what you get..."

So I sat in church one Sunday when I was told, "There's no hope. What you have seen is what you are taking home, *if* you are able to take him home." And I remember sitting in church that Sunday, unable to lead the music – I just called on the Minister of Education to do that for me because he was a musician – and I was sitting on the front pew and this big, gentle giant of a man came up and sat beside me. And it was almost like the people of the church didn't know what to say, so the best thing to do was just to stay clear. That's sort of the way it felt...

The pastor got up, and he didn't know exactly what to say, but he did the right thing: he said, "I look down and I see Wendell" – and at that time I just completely lost it – and he said, "I just think the best thing we can do is pray." So the church and the pastor began to pray, and I was just coming unglued. And this big, gentle giant threw his arm around me without a word, and it was just like the presence of God was in that hug.

Another member of the committee, Russell, shared a similar story of the staff ministers from our church – particularly Stephen and myself – coming to visit him and his wife at the hospital where they stayed with their daughter, Emma, born with *spina bifida* and several other physical disabilities.

When Emma was in the hospital for eleven of her first twelve weeks, I honestly don't – and I hate to say this – I don't recall what advice Stephen and Greg and Sylvia [Stephen's wife] and others. I don't remember what they told us... I can't tell you one conversation of what you guys said to us. But I know on the day your grandfather passed away, you still came and visited us. I know that. I don't know what else you told me, but I know you told me that.

As the discussion continued, he noted the strength a minister must have, allowing the conversation to become a dialogue.

Russell: I think there's some calmness... When these examples of ministers go through these situations with these other people, you have to put on a – I don't know if it's a front – it's a calmness, but it's a toughness, as well... If you just come in and start crying with them, I don't know if you always associate that with being a minister. And I'm not saying I never saw anybody shed a tear. I did. But there was still a toughness, in a good way. There was a strength there.

Greg: Like a calm presence?

Russell: Yeah. Absolutely.

Greg: The night that I came over to see y'all when my grandfather died, I distinctly remember being there and coming in, and Mary Beth asked me, "How's your grandfather?" And I said, "He passed away." And I cried. And it was as much for him as it was for y'all and y'all's situation.

This interaction allowed us to discuss the notion of the *wounded healer*,¹⁶ as well as ministers caring for themselves so they can care for others, particularly in the face of the emotionally charged situations into which ministers are often called.

Bill, who didn't grow up regularly attending church (a self-proclaimed *Chreaster*),¹⁷ told of moving back home after college and living in a converted barn-apartment behind his grandparents' house. He struggled with depression, and during one particularly difficult episode his psychologist referred him to a psychiatrist, who then prescribed anti-depressants. Bill felt embarrassed that he needed a prescription, pulling down his mood even further. He sat on the porch that afternoon talking with his grandmother, telling her about his doctors' visits. After a

¹⁶ The idea put forth by Henri Nouwen that the fundamental woundedness of our human nature can serve as a source of strength and healing for others as we minister to them. See Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1972).

¹⁷ The term *Chreaster* is slang for people who only attend church on Christmas and Easter.

brief pause, she said, “Hell, Bill. I’ve been taking anti-depressants for forty years. There’s no shame in it. And if you need help, just remember: you’ve got family here.”

As we discussed these various and divergent experiences of ministry, common themes emerged. In most cases, committee members did not remember what was said in the ministerial moment, or if anything was said at all. In fact, one member of the committee noted that they might have remembered what was said if the minister in the situation had said the *wrong* thing. But because a person was calm, present, and listening, bringing comfort to the person in need, the words were not as important as the shared experience of that moment. Another committee member noted that all of the situations shared were sad and difficult. She went on to observe that it is precisely at these times of pain or vulnerability when ministry is most needed and most effective.

The Local Advisory Committee had much more to share about experiences in which they were recipients of ministry than they did about experiences in which they felt they had ministered to others. This may suggest their reluctance to think of themselves as those who minister to others. Nevertheless, they offered stories that touched on the same themes of availability, presence, a shared experience or pain, and listening or silence. Even so, from our discussions, at least, there were neither apparent nor clear definitions of what a minister is or does. Instead, these narratives form a cluster of images that describe the work of ministers and ministry without defining them – serving as illustrative examples, but certainly not exhaustive ones.

Excursus: Expanding Ministry?

As the Local Advisory Committee and I shared our stories of ministry and sought to describe the concept, obviously, we were biased. We are all active participants in the life of a

local church, and so we come preconditioned to view the notion of ministry through an ecclesial lens, even those of us who shared stories of laypersons or people outside of the church. Two experiences, however – both of which took place during the course of this project – offer a different perspective.

Sam and April are friends of mine from college who now live in the same city as my wife and me. I officiated their wedding four years ago, even though they are not particularly religious and do not participate in the life of any faith community. They have visited Earle Street Baptist Church only a few times in the five years I have been on staff at the church, primarily around Christmas with their parents, who visit from out of town. In the midst of this project, April (eight months pregnant at the time) asked to borrow my pickup truck to haul a load of mulch she planned to spread in their yard while Sam was at work. Since it was my day off anyway, I offered to simply drive her in the truck, pick up the mulch, and help her spread it. As we entered the landscaping store to purchase the mulch, the man at the counter asked if the baby would be our first, implying that April and I were a couple. She corrected him, saying something like, “Oh... No. This is mine and my husband’s first. He’s [referring to me] got one already and his wife is pregnant with their second. We’re not married. He’s my minister.”

Another friend of mine, Adam, is not religious at all. He does not claim any faith and



Figure 3. The author (right) and his friend, Adam, at the U.S. Open. Photograph by the author, June 14, 2014.

is not connected to any church. He is a large and intimidating person, often rude and crude in his language, cussing like a sailor, and he likes to drink alcohol in large volumes. Over the past two years I have gotten to know Adam by working on projects around our houses together and watching and playing sports, especially golf. Several weeks after I met Adam's father, Larry, for the first time, the following conversation took place at a family dinner:¹⁸

Larry: What'd you do this weekend?

Adam: I played golf with Greg. You remember him? You met him over at our house a couple of weeks ago.

Larry: Yeah. What does Greg do [for a living]?

Adam: He works at a church. He's a minister.

Larry: Are you serious? Is that why you didn't invite me to play with y'all? You getting too good for me – embarrassed of me? He trying to convert you?

Adam: You need to shut up! You don't know what the hell you're talking about! He's not like that. He wouldn't do that. And he's been more of a minister to me than anyone in the church.

What was it about my interactions with April and Adam that compelled them to see me as a minister? Given their backgrounds, the situations in which I usually interact with them, as well as the situations in which they used the word *minister* to describe me, I did not believe they associated that title with my occupation. Perhaps, like the observations offered by the Local Advisory Committee, they noticed instead someone who met them at a point of need or vulnerability; someone who offered shared experiences, a calming presence, and a willingness to listen, rooted in a faith that calls him to serve.

These characteristics are not limited to those who are ordained, full-time, professional ministers, but may be found in Christians – clergy and laypersons alike – who are part of the

¹⁸ Adam's wife recounted this conversation to me after the fact, and what appears here is a paraphrase of her retelling the story.

priesthood of all believers.

CHAPTER 3

EXTENSIONS OF MINISTRY: THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

The Priesthood of All Believers in the Bible

The *priesthood of all believers* (sometimes called *universal priesthood*) is a Christian doctrine held by almost all Protestant denominations. Generally, the doctrine acknowledges that every Christian has the rights and responsibilities of the clergy, even though there exist many different understandings of what, exactly, those rights and responsibilities are. First introduced by Martin Luther in the first half of the sixteenth century, less than one hundred years later, early Baptists affirmed the doctrine and gave it a prominent position in their beliefs and polity; a position it still holds today.

We find the traditional biblical reference for this doctrine, cited by both Luther and the early Baptists, in the second chapter of First Peter.

Like living stones, let yourself be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.¹

As the writer of First Peter describes the church as the new people of God, utilizing images from the Old Testament, he also speaks of his audience as priests. The author portrays Christians as the counterpart of the Jewish priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices (v. 5) rather than the sacrifices offered on the altar of the Temple. Similar to Paul's speech in Romans 12:1-2 about the believer presenting him or herself as a "living sacrifice," the writer of First Peter seems

¹ 1 Peter 2:5, 9 (NRSV).

to consider this offering to be holy living in the service of God.² The sacrifice offered by the Christian is “the whole shape of the faithful life.”³ Furthermore, the duty of Christians as priests is to proclaim the wonderful deeds of God (v. 9), a proclamation that is to be as much practical as it is oral.⁴ If this imagery were not enough, the author of the epistle turns to a passage from the book of Exodus (19:6) to explicitly name the Christian community as a “royal priesthood.” Thus, Peter seeks to shape both the identity and vocation of the Christians to whom he writes. They are the new priestly people of God, called to offer sacrifices of holy living and to proclaim the power and grace of God in word and deed.

Although this passage seems clear and straightforward in titling Christians a priesthood, a closer examination reveals some unanswered questions. For instance, does the author mean for this identity to be collective or individual? Peter confers the title previously given to the Hebrew people on the new Christian community, reconstituting them as the people of God. And yet the ancient priestly people had a tribe, the Levites, set apart for cultic service. Furthermore, Peter does not denote specific responsibilities for his new priestly people. Clearly, all of the members of the community are meant to live in ways that speak to the mighty acts of God and the changed nature of the Christian person (i.e. holy living). But are there certain individuals in the community who are expected to carry out specific functions, such as preaching, teaching, or prophesying? Or would those in the church share these responsibilities and privileges? While questions such as these are not clear, the writer of this scripture undoubtedly conceptualizes the Christian community as the priestly people of God, even if modern readers (and perhaps ancient

² Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, vol. 37, *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 91.

³ David L. Bartlett, *The First Letter of Peter*, in vol. 12, *The New Interpreters Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998), 265.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

ones, too) are left to wonder what, exactly, those people are supposed to do.

In addition to this focal passage on the identity of the Christian person, the writer of Ephesians notes the ways in which various (all?) persons in the Church could receive the gift to do the work of ministry.

But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift... 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.⁵

Most commentators agree that the author is reproducing Paul's teachings in First Corinthians and Romans on the variety of spiritual gifts needed to ensure that each person plays his or her role in the life of the church.⁶ And yet even within the model the writer of Ephesians offers (in which every Christian is gifted), there are still various offices listed that seem to imply special roles or functions. Scripture commentator Thomas Slater suggests that this passage refers to functions more than to offices, downplaying the primacy of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers over others in the Christian community by focusing on the ministries rather than the ministers.⁷ Ultimately, though, the focus is on the purpose: the building up of the body of Christ. All parties – a regular ministry of ordained and/or appointed leaders as well as the rank and file of members – work toward the desired goal: building up the body of Christ.⁸ In fact, biblical scholar Markus Barth (son of orthodox theologian Karl Barth) states quite plainly that

⁵ Ephesians 4:7, 11-12 (NRSV)

⁶ Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, vol. 34A, *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 435; Jaime Clark-Soles, "Ephesians 4:1-16: Exegetical Perspective," Year B, vol. 3, *Feasting on the Word*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 305; Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1991), 49; PHEME PERKINS, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, vol. 11, *The New Interpreters Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2000), 424; Thomas B. Slater, *Ephesians* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2012), 109.

⁷ Slater, *Ephesians*, 112-115.

⁸ Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 52-55.

although the word “church” is not used in Ephesians 4:1-16, the entire passage deals with its life, order, and purpose. As the Church moves toward this intended purpose, any sharp distinction between clergy and laity is inappropriate, and it seems Markus Barth even finds the distinction of ordination unnecessary, citing the baptism of Jesus as his ordination to ministry.⁹ The task of the special ministers, then, such as those mentioned in verse 11, is to be servants in the ministry entrusted to the whole church, running counter to the danger of thinking that professionals create the church.¹⁰

These two passages from First Peter and Ephesians, in particular, touch on the identity of all Christian persons as priests or ministers, as well as the ability of these persons to do ministry. And yet there are also many other examples of biblical narratives in which a recognized (God-ordained, perhaps) religious leader works in concert with other non-ordained, so-called ordinary people to do the work of God. For instance, Aaron and Hur minister to Moses by supporting him physically in order for Israel to prevail in battle with the Amalekites.¹¹ Shortly thereafter, Moses takes his father-in-law’s advice to equip judges from among the people so the entire responsibility will not fall only to him.¹² Later in the wilderness wanderings, under the direction of Yahweh, Moses appoints and ordains the Levites to assist the priests in the service of God.¹³ Similarly, from the stories of the early Church in the New Testament, the apostles equip deacons to serve some of the most vulnerable people in the Christian community.¹⁴ Earlier, in the

⁹ Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 430, 451, 481.

¹⁰ Perkins, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 425.

¹¹ Exodus 17:8-13.

¹² Exodus 18.

¹³ Numbers 8:5-26.

¹⁴ Acts 6:1-6.

Gospels, Jesus sent out disciples, during his own ministry as well as after his ascension, to carry on his work.¹⁵ Of course, the central referent for each Christian person's priestly nature and vocation is Christ, whom the writer of Hebrews calls the "great high priest."¹⁶ Christian persons follow in his life of service to others, as he commanded.¹⁷

Despite these numerous references to the right and responsibility of every Christian person to do ministry, even from a biblical perspective there are some who are set apart for a more official form of ministry or service. For instance, even though the Levites served in the tent of meeting, Aaron and his sons were still the officially recognized priests for the Israelite community.¹⁸ When the apostles appointed deacons, there still existed a distinction between the roles of each group (i.e. serving food and serving the word).¹⁹ Furthermore, although mutuality characterizes the work of ministry for which the saints are equipped, it is still the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (i.e. recognized leaders) who are equipping and the saints who are working. Or, to put it another way, "In order that the 'one' ministry entrusted to all the saints be fulfilled, 'several' specific ministers are given by Christ to the church."²⁰ The *Didache*, a late-first century Christian collection of teachings, identifies the offices of bishop and deacon, "persons honored by God among [the Christian community]" (15:1-2). Clearly these persons are set apart by their title and office, and yet they are also to be chosen from among the

¹⁵ Matthew 10; Luke 10:1-16; Matthew 28:16-20.

¹⁶ Hebrews 8.

¹⁷ e.g. John 13:1-16, in which Jesus washes the disciples' feet and instructs them to do the same.

¹⁸ Numbers 8:5-26.

¹⁹ Acts 6:1-6.

²⁰ Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 452.

people based on qualities that any person in the church could possess.²¹

Thus, there exists a tension between the notion that all Christians are a priestly people and the concept and practice of ordained, set-apart clergy. As teacher and ecclesiology researcher Robert Muthiah has pointed out, the New Testament does not establish a separate ministerial priesthood, but a single priesthood of all Christians. Nevertheless, as the early Church developed and as the Church continued to grow over the centuries, a separate priestly caste came into existence: the clergy. The ways in which Martin Luther and the early (and later) Baptists interpreted these scriptures and the resulting doctrine of the priesthood of all believers will only further highlight this tension.

Luther and Baptists (and Catholics? Oh My!)

Based on the passages from First Peter and Ephesians in particular, as well as other similar passages of scripture, Martin Luther first introduced the concept of the priesthood of all believers in 1520 in two treatises: “On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church” and “On the Freedom of a Christian.” In the former, Luther asserts broadly that “as many of us as have been baptised are all priests without distinction,” and boldly follows, “therefore we are all priests, as many of us as are Christians.”²² Commenting on 1 Peter – from which he draws most of the evidence for his idea that there is no essential distinction between clergy and laity – Luther continues to conceptualize the broadest possible priesthood: “It would please me very much if this word ‘priest’ were used as commonly as the term ‘Christian’ is applied to us. For priests, the

²¹ Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache: A Commentary*, trans. Linda M. Maloney, ed. Harold W. Attridge (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), 200-202.

²² Martin Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” accessed September 7, 2013, <http://www.lutherdansk.dk/Web-babylonian%20Captivitate/Martin%20Luther.htm>.

baptized, and Christians are all the same.”²³ The great reformer clearly equates Christian identity with priesthood (or ministry, to use the more common Protestant term). More specifically even, Luther draws a parallel between baptism into the Christian Church and ordination into Christian ministry.

But what of the priestly function? What do Christians do by virtue of their priestly office? In his second tract from 1520, Luther recapitulates and expands his argument put forth in the first, noting believers’ responsibilities and rights.

Nor are we only kings and the freest of all men, but also priests for ever, a dignity far higher than kinship, because by that priesthood we are worthy *to appear before God, to pray for others, and to teach one another mutually the things which are of God*. For these are the duties of priests... Christ has obtained for us this favour, if we believe in Him, that, just as we are His brethren, and co-heirs and fellow kings with Him, so we should be also fellow priests with Him, and venture with confidence, through the spirit of faith, to come into the presence of God, and cry "Abba, Father!" and *to pray for one another, and to do all things which we see done and figured in the visible and corporeal office of priesthood*. (emphasis added)²⁴

In another of his works, Luther stated that “the first and foremost duty we Christians [and therefore, priests] should perform is to proclaim the wonderful deeds of God.”²⁵ In fact, to him it was a duty of the Christian person to teach the word of God, and “he [or she] fails to do so at the risk of his [or her] own salvation.”²⁶ In addition, drawing again from First Peter for support, Luther writes of the “true priesthood” having three primary functions: “to offer spiritual

²³ Martin Luther, *The Catholic Epistles*, vol. 30, *Luther’s Works*, trans. Martin H. Bertram (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1967), 63.

²⁴ Martin Luther, “On the Freedom of a Christian,” Fordham University, Modern History Sourcebook, updated October 1998, accessed November 11, 2013, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/luther-freedomchristian.asp>.

²⁵ Luther, *The Catholic Epistles*, 65.

²⁶ Quoted in Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1966), 315.

sacrifices, to pray for the congregation, and to preach. He [or she] who can do this is a priest.”²⁷

Obviously, we cannot make the anachronistic claim that this passage from First Peter supports Luther’s idea of the priesthood of all believers, since Luther was reacting to an established Christian priesthood in the sixteenth century that did not exist in the historical context of First Peter. Or, as New Testament scholar Richard Vinson put it,

We cannot imagine, when 1 Peter calls all the Christians a priesthood, that he meant all of them were clergy, or that there was no distinction between clergy and lay, since we do not know that those categories existed for him.

But 1 Peter probably does mean that all these readers are priests – if collectively they make up a priesthood, then individually they are acting as priests when they “announce the mighty deeds of the one who called you” and when they offer “spiritual sacrifices” [i.e. prayer, praise, preaching, etc.]...

All the recipients are empowered and expected to do this by virtue of being set as stones upon the Living Stone, by virtue of being made into a spiritual house, by virtue of being named God’s people. If that’s what we mean by “priesthood of believers,” then once 1 Peter got his head around the anachronistic language, I think he would have agreed.²⁸

Although Luther resisted the special privileged status of Catholic clergy and held that every Christian had direct access to God, he still maintained the role and office of ordained clergy. “For though it is true that we are all equally priests, yet we cannot, nor, if we could, ought we all to minister and teach publicly.”²⁹ In fact, ecclesial researcher Robert Muthiah summarizes,

Luther’s view of the priesthood of all believers did not rule out church office. In fact, Luther saw the ministerial office as essential; office is one of the signs of the church’s presence. Yet the ministerial office is not completely distinct from the priesthood of all believers. It actually does not differ in content and authority from the priesthood of all believers. What *is* different is the public character of the ministerial office. While all Christians are to proclaim the word and to offer forgiveness, Luther held that those in

²⁷ Ibid., 55.

²⁸ Richard B. Vinson, “1 Peter” in *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2010), 132.

²⁹ Luther, “On the Freedom of a Christian.”

ministerial office do this on behalf of the entire community.³⁰

The early Baptists of the seventeenth century picked up on Luther's line of thinking and placed great emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. Although they – like Luther – did not dismantle the office of pastor, they further downplayed the distinctions between clergy and laity, and extended many of the functions of ordained ministers to laypeople. For instance, one of the earliest Baptist confessions, written in 1611, reads:

That though in respect off CHRIST, the Church bee one, Ephes. 4.4. yet it consisteth off divers particuler congregacions, even so manie as there shallbee in the World, every off which congregacion, *though they be but two or three, have CHRIST given them, with all the meanes of their salvacion. Mat. 18.20. Roman. 8.32. I. Corin. 3.22. Are the Bodie off CHRIST. I. Cor. 12.27. and a whole Church. I. Cor. 14.23. And therefore may, and ought, when they are come together, to Pray, Prophecie, breake bread, and administer in all the holy ordinances,* although as yet they have no Officers, or that their Officers should bee in Prison, sick, or by anie other meanes hindered from the Church. I:Pet. 4.10 & 2.5. (emphasis added)³¹

Less than a century after Luther rejected the need for a priestly intermediary between the individual Christian and God, Baptists began to extend the notion of the “priesthood of all believers” to the relationships between Christians in service to one another. In fact, they affirmed the wholeness of a body of believers and the ability to function completely even if the church did not have ordained or elected leaders (i.e. Officers in the text above). Evidently the Baptists’ belief in the priesthood of all believers was known even among those not belonging to this emerging Christian group. Daniel Featley, an Anglican cleric in 1640s England, offered his understanding of the teachings of the “Dippers,”³² one of which was “that there ought to be no distinction by the Word of God between the Clergy and the Laity but that all who are gifted may

³⁰ Robert A. Muthiah, *The Priesthood of All Believers in the Twenty-First Century: Living Faithfully as the Whole People of God in a Postmodern Context* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009), 19.

³¹ Article 11 of the “English Declaration at Amsterdam,” in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, ed. William L. Lumpkin (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1959), 120.

³² This name for early Baptists refers to their practice of baptism by immersion.

preach the Word, and administer the Sacraments.”³³ One of the earliest Baptists, Thomas Helwys, contended that the power to celebrate the ordinances rests with the congregation, not clergy; the community of believers mediates the authority of Christ, not a presbytery, synod, or episcopacy.³⁴

In the centuries that followed, however, issues of ministerial authority and ordination continued to arise, particularly regarding who could administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. And in some ways, Baptists have found a middle ground (or hedged) on the issue of ministerial authority and lay-clergy distinctions by utilizing lay preachers and licensing individuals to Christian ministry as a half-step toward ordination.³⁵ Perhaps Baptists, too, have felt the historical tension between the doctrine and practice of a universal priesthood. In his extensive history from the beginning of the tradition to the current day, Baptist historian Bill Leonard notes the ever-present emphasis on the priesthood of all believers,

insisting that each individual may encounter God’s grace directly, without clerical or ecclesiastical mediation. They contend that every believer is a minister in service in the church and in the world...³⁶

And yet, as Leonard also points out, congregations still select and appoint certain persons as clergy.

At the same time, Baptists set aside certain individuals for specific ministry in and through the community of faith... In one sense, all are ministers; in another sense,

³³ Daniel Featley, *The Dippers Dipt, or, The Anabaptists Duck’d and Plung’d over Head and Eares, at a Disputation at Southwark* (London: Nicholas Bourne and Richard Royston, 1646), cited in Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2003), 2.

³⁴ Leonard, *Baptist Ways*, 54.

³⁵ See Leonard, *Baptist Ways*, 53-55, 94-95, 160, 416 for discussions of these issues in 17th and 18th century England, 19th century United States, and in the latter half of the 20th century worldwide. See also Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*, vol. 13, *Studies in Baptist History and Thought* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 83-106 for a discussion of authority and the relationship between pastor and people.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

pastoral leadership is entrusted to a specific group of duly ordained ministers.³⁷

The *Baptist Faith and Message (1963)*, a confessional document of the Southern Baptist Convention, plainly names the priesthood of the believer as a doctrine “that Baptists believe, cherish, and with which they have been and are now closely identified.”³⁸ Although the doctrine itself has never been denied within the Baptist tradition, its meaning and application have been debated. For instance, in 1988 the Southern Baptist Convention passed the *Resolution on the Priesthood of the Believer*, which interprets the doctrine and scriptures in a way that actually solidifies the responsibilities and rights of church leadership within a special class of ministers (elders or pastors, according to the resolution) rather than the traditionally Baptist movement to share responsibilities and rights across the whole people of the church.³⁹ As we can see, then, even one of the most vocal traditions regarding the priesthood of all believers still utilizes set-apart, ordained ministers in their ecclesial practice, sometimes even promoting their special status.

Perhaps ironically, the very ecclesiastical body and model against which Luther protested in the sixteenth century has arguably best mobilized laity to serve in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Especially since the Second Vatican Council and the document *Lumen Gentium* (The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church), the Catholic Church has and continues to emphasize the importance of the laity to the life and work of the Church. Yet their accent on the priesthood

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁸ “Preamble to the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message,” *Baptist Faith and Message*, Southern Baptist Convention, 2000, accessed September 18, 2014, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp>.

³⁹ *Resolution on the Priesthood of the Believer*, Southern Baptist Convention, 1988, accessed September 15, 2014, www.sbc.net/resolutions/872. For a response to this resolution, see Timothy George, “The Priesthood of All Believers,” *Criswell Theological Review* 3 (1989): 283-294. For a countering interpretation of the doctrine, see Walter B. Shurden, “The Priesthood of All Believers and Pastoral Authority,” in *Proclaiming the Baptist Vision: The Priesthood of All Believers* (ed. Walter B. Shurden; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1993), 131-154.

of all believers has not changed the hierarchical nature of the Church's polity or power. For instance, in Chapter Two: On the People of God of *Lumen Gentium*, we read:

The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man [or woman] they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light.⁴⁰

Yet, reinforcing the distinctions between laity and clergy, we read in the same article of the document:

Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless related: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ.⁴¹

Thus, those in the body of Christ – Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran, and all Christians – live in a tension. We are all a part of one spiritual priesthood in Christ, but there still exists a hierarchical priesthood in the Church. We are all ministers, but we are not all clergy. I live in this tension daily. I am an ordained, professional, full-time minister on staff at a church whose tradition places high value in the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Although there is a broad biblical and traditional basis for this doctrine, and although many of the stories of ministry shared by the local advisory committee and others do not necessitate an ordained clergyperson, and although many churches may claim that this doctrine is central to their understanding of theology and ecclesiology, in my experience, most churches do not practice the priesthood of all believers in the life of the church. Apparently I am not alone in such an experience. A former

⁴⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, The Second Vatican Council, November 21, 1964, accessed September 17, 2014, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

⁴¹ Ibid.

professor of mine quoted to me, “The priesthood of all believers is one of the great unfunded mandates of the Church,”⁴² and one commentator on Ephesians 4 (discussed above) notes,

Celebrating the gifts given to a particular congregation goes beyond noting the number of “professional Christians” that arise from their number to become “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers” (v. 11). Many bulletins list “All the members of the congregation” as “Ministers.” It’s clever, but what does it really mean?⁴³

The LAC and I developed the methodology of the project to ask that very question; to explore precisely this gap between theology and practice, as well as the potential differences between individuals’ understandings of what it means to be a minister and/or to do ministry. It is to the methodology of the project that we now turn our attention.

⁴² Conversation with B. Diane Lipsett, September 26, 2013, original source unknown.

⁴³ Richard F. Ward, “Ephesians 4:1-16: Homiletical Perspective,” Year B, vol. 3, *Feasting on the Word*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 307.

CHAPTER 4

EXPERIENCES WITH MINISTRY: HOW DID WE DO IT?

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to explore the long-held Baptist principle of the priesthood of all believers in the context of Earle Street Baptist Church. The LAC and I examined whether or not laypeople within the church understand and practice this principle. My hope is that the project will empower Earle's laypeople to claim or perhaps reclaim their identity, role, and function as ministers in their own right. If not, perhaps the project will elucidate how congregants understand themselves as ministers, or maybe even why they do not.

The underlying question guiding this project comes from Richard L. Hester and Kelli Walker-Jones.¹ To paraphrase their question, "How might laypersons (i.e. volunteer lay ministers) define themselves, and how could they stay connected to those who disagree with them?" This is the same question I have wrestled with since the events described in Chapter One, and, because different self-definitions may emerge for different participants throughout the course of this project, it is a question that could be important for participants, too. In other words, how might a layperson come to understand him or herself as a minister, and how might that person stay connected to others within the larger church, especially if others may understand themselves differently?

Scope and Timeline

¹ Richard L. Hester and Kelli Walker-Jones, *Know Your Story and Lead with It: The Power of Narrative in Clergy Leadership* (Herndon, VA: Alban, 2009), Kindle Location 1285.

Preparation for the project began in the fall of 2013, as the LAC and I reflected on understandings of ministry, ministerial identity (or identities?), and the priesthood of believers,



Figure 4. Bulletin board publicizing the *Experience Ministry* retreat. Photograph by the author, February 3, 2014.

in both theology and practice.

The experiential portion of the project took place between January and May 2014. The project revolved around a one-day, in-town leadership retreat on March 1, 2014 that the LAC and I titled, “Experience Ministry: Transforming Service.” We invited participation by anyone in the church who would like to come, but the LAC and I attempted to identify certain laypersons and invite them to take part in the event. I asked

each member of the LAC to identify three people in the congregation that they would personally invite to participate in the retreat: one person serving in an official leadership capacity (deacon, committee chair, etc.), one person who serves in the church in a different capacity (serves on a ministry team, teaches Sunday School, etc.), and one person who attends worship but is not

serving actively. Other retreat participants self-selected, choosing to be involved in response to publicity within the church about the retreat.

In addition to this central event, I framed the retreat with two sermons on the priesthood of all believers and how individual Christians can minister to one another.² I preached the first of these sermons on February 9, 2014, focusing on the Christian call to serve, as well as our identity as servants (i.e. ministers). I preached the other sermon on March 9, 2014, focusing on how Christians are sent forth to do the work of ministry. In this latter sermon, I integrated comments made by participants at the retreat, weaving their thoughts about ministry with the biblical narrative and reflecting their own stories back to them.

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, the LAC and I facilitated a series of six service opportunities throughout the season of Lent, allowing laypeople in the church to experience ministering to others first hand. These opportunities entailed serving communion to homebound church members on the afternoon of Maundy Thursday, visiting nursing homes and assisted living facilities with members of our visitation team, assisting ministerial staff in leading a worship service at a local homeless shelter, greeting church-comers at the doors of the building on Sunday mornings, writing a reflection on a passage of scripture to share on the church's blog, and reaching out to inactive members of the church with handwritten personal notes. All of these opportunities consisted of activities that are already a part of the church's programmatic ministries.

² See Appendices One and Three for text of these sermons, as well as links to audio recordings of the worship services in which they were preached.

Methodology

In order to explore the question that lingers in the background of the study, “How might laypersons come to understand themselves as ministers, and how might they stay connected to others within the church, especially if others may understand themselves differently?” the LAC and I employed a variety of methods in this ministry project.

Sermons and Service Opportunities

Before each preaching event, the LAC and I selected, studied, interpreted, and reflected on the scripture(s) upon which I based the sermon. Their insights and input, along with my own, shaped the form and content of each sermon, thereby modeling the priesthood of all believers even in the function of preaching. In fact, in the first of the two sermons, a member of the LAC – Bill – actively took part in the preaching event. As a part of the sermon, Bill shared a narrative that he had previously revealed with the LAC in one of our first meetings: a story from his own experience that represented ministry to him.³

After each preaching event, the LAC stood near the exits of the sanctuary and church to collect any brief comments or reflections about the sermon from parishioners as they exited. During the following week, the LAC and I contacted those who were willing or whose comments were of particular interest. We then conducted unstructured follow-up interviews over the phone.⁴ I emailed the LAC a sample outline of what such an interview might entail.

Introduction:

Tell them who you are, why you're calling, how you got their name (i.e. "Greg noticed you seemed engaged in the service on Sunday"), and ask if you can ask them a few questions.

Questions:

³ See Appendix One for the narrative in the context of the sermon.

⁴ Colin Robson, *Real World Research: A Resource for Users of Social Research Methods in Applied Settings*, 3rd ed. (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley and Sons, 2011), 278-280, 288-290.

What stood out to you/What did you notice during the worship service and/or sermon?

Why do you think *that* stood out for you?

Was there anything particularly meaningful to you in the service?

Why do you think *that* was meaningful for you?

What do you think of/associate with *minister* (images, words, phrases, etc.)?

Have you ever had the experience of someone ministering to you? (Ask them to share the experience.)

Conclusion:

Invite them to participate in the retreat on March 1st.

Thank them for taking the time to answer the questions. Invite them to contact you or me if they think of anything else they'd like to share with us.⁵

I also contacted directly some members of the congregation whom I noticed seemed engaged and/or responsive during each sermon. Of course, there were also some unsolicited narratives which various laypeople offered (as they often do after a sermon), and I attempted to collect any pertinent data from emails, phone calls, or conversations about the sermon that occurred after each of the preaching dates. We utilized the same basic methods to collect narrative data after each service opportunity, and LAC members greatly assisted in collecting these reflections or comments. LAC members also gathered pertinent data during the service opportunities in the role of *participants as observers*.⁶

Retreat

The retreat involved several research methods. See the outline of the retreat format below, with descriptions of the methods used:

⁵ Email from author to LAC. February 10, 2014.

⁶ Ibid., 322-323. See also Mary Clark Moschella's brief descriptions of qualitative interviews and participant observation in *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 2008), 66-72.

The Space

The LAC and I held the one-day retreat in the lower level of Brick Street Café, a restaurant in downtown Greenville, SC. The particular space we used consisted of a large room set up with approximately eight round tables with seven chairs around each table. The room had the appropriate media equipment (microphone, speakers, video screen,



etc.), giving us the ability to project images, play movie clips with sound, etc. We covered each table with butcher paper, and on each we placed several pads of sticky notes, as well as pens, pencils, markers, and crayons participants could use to write or draw. We also placed Bibles on each table for participants to use, and made available a few concordances, if needed. Serendipitously, as we set up the space on the morning of the retreat, Libby, one of the LAC members, realized that the room had numerous mirrors on the walls (see Figure 5, above). We employed a mirror as a visual element on the bulletin board to promote the retreat, connoting that one need only look in the mirror to find out who is a minister (see Figure 4). Providentially ironic, especially given the narrative of concern that prompted the

Figure 5. Lower level of Brick Street Cafe during the *Experience Ministry* retreat. Photograph by the author, March 1, 2014.

clips with sound, etc. We covered each table with butcher paper, and on each we placed several pads of sticky notes, as well as pens, pencils, markers, and crayons participants could use to write or draw. We also placed Bibles on each table for participants to use, and made available a few concordances, if needed. Serendipitously, as we set up the space on the morning of the retreat, Libby, one of the LAC members, realized that the room had numerous mirrors on the walls (see Figure 5, above). We employed a mirror as a visual element on the bulletin board to promote the retreat, connoting that one need only look in the mirror to find out who is a minister (see Figure 4). Providentially ironic, especially given the narrative of concern that prompted the

project, as we prepared the room for the retreat, we discovered that the wallpaper in the restrooms consisted of a collage of various labels from wine bottles.

The LAC

Before the retreat, the LAC and I went through an abbreviated version of the retreat as if we were a table of participants, so each LAC member became familiar with the retreat format and content. During the retreat, each LAC member functioned in the role of a participant as observer throughout the day. We facilitated discussions in the small groups around the tables, and recorded brief notes while discussing and during short breaks. After the retreat, we collected and analyzed the data from the table coverings, sticky notes, and evaluation forms, and we conducted follow-up interviews with participants who were willing and for whom the retreat seemed to be a transformative experience.

9:00 a.m. – Abduction

I opened with a prayer for the retreat participants, spoken to all participants as a group. Immediately after I prayed, I invited participants to gather in groups of two or three and to ask each other how they can pray for one another (concerns, praises, etc.). I then asked participants to pray for and with one another. Afterwards, I asked for reflections from the large group regarding the two experiences of prayer.

9:30 a.m. – Introduction

The LAC and I introduced the concept of the retreat (i.e. laypeople ministering to one another) and gave a brief outline of the day's schedule. We also encouraged people to use the pens, pencils, crayons, and markers to write or draw on the butcher paper table-coverings and sticky notes.⁷

⁷ Robson, *Real World Research*, 346-348.

9:45 a.m. – Deconstruction

The large group split into smaller groups around tables, functioning much like a focus group,⁸ with one LAC member at each table. Meanwhile, I served as an observer for all of the groups. The LAC members asked individuals in each group to share their associations with the word minister (words, images, cultural representations, etc.) and to describe the life experiences through which their association has developed. The LAC members then asked individuals in each group to share an experience when they felt someone had ministered to them and/or an experience when they felt they had ministered to someone else, and to discuss what aspects of that particular experience stand out to them. We invited a few people to share any particularly powerful stories with the larger group.

10:45 a.m. – Relaxation

We provided light refreshments for participants. During this time, the retreat participants could fellowship and talk casually, as well as record any notes they would like to on the table coverings, sticky notes, or for themselves. The LAC and I also made some notes during this time.

11:00 a.m. – Exploration

We asked the group of people at each table to think of scriptural texts that relate to their previously shared stories of and associations with ministry, using the available Bibles and concordances. LAC members facilitated a discussion of the texts identified by the group in light of people's own experiences, exploring intersections, similarities, and differences between the stories of scripture and the participants' stories. The LAC then asked someone from each small group to share insights and reflections with the larger group.

⁸ Ibid., 293-298.

12:00 p.m. – Gustation

The LAC, participants, and I shared a catered lunch at the venue. During this time, the LAC and I observed how participants interacted with one another informally to see if any of these interactions might constitute “ministry” as defined thus far on the retreat.

1:00 p.m. – Abstraction

We showed three brief movie clips as vignettes⁹ that model some aspect(s) of ministry, but from a non-religious perspective in a non-religious context. The first was a scene from the 1980 film, *Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back*. Luke Skywalker has been attacked by a wampa (see Figure 6), only to escape the creature’s den and become stranded in deadly bitter cold on the ice planet Hoth. Luke’s friend, Han Solo, risks his own life to venture out and search for his friend, saving Luke’s life by stuffing him inside the carcass of his then-dead tauntaun (see Figure 7).¹⁰



Figure 6. A *wampa*: a predatory creature native to the ice planet, Hoth. Image from Wookieepedia, accessed November 20, 2014, www.starwars.wikia/wiki/wampa.

⁹ Ibid., 367-368.

¹⁰ MrGranamae, “Adywans – The Empire: Revisited – first-16-minutes-sneak-peek.” Uploaded March 31, 2011, accessed October 22, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjfECy6kW2Y>. Start the clip at 7:55 and end it at 15:00.

The second clip came from the movie *Hoosiers* (1986), the underdog story of a small town Indiana high school basketball team that contends for a championship.

In the scene we used, the new coach, Norman Dale, offers Shooter Flatch – the father of one of his players and the local drunk – a position as his assistant coach. Dale’s is a generous and



Figure 7. Luke Skywalker riding a *tauntaun*: an omnivorous creature native to the ice planet, Hoth, domesticated and used for transportation. Image from Wookieepedia, accessed November 20, 2014, www.starwars.wikia.com/wiki/tauntaun.

gracious offer, but not without expectations of conduct; expectations that Shooter rejects, along with the offer.¹¹

The third and final film clip we used was the clip I showed to the LAC in our first meeting from the 1964 film, *Night of the Iguana*. The scene is titled *Playing God*, and in it Hannah Jelkes, a chaste itinerant painter, ministers to the defrocked and distressed Reverend T.

Laurence Shannon by sitting with him, talking to him, and calming him.¹²

After each clip, the LAC members facilitated a discussion around the tables about ministry as expressed in that particular video clip, in addition to any reflections or connections with the participants’ own experiences or the biblical texts explored earlier. The LAC had predetermined questions to open and guide the discussion of the videos, and they used the same

¹¹ “Coach Offers Shooter a Job.” Movieclips Beta, accessed October 28, 2014, <http://movieclips.com/Mt5h6-hoosiers-movie-coach-offers-shooter-a-job/>.

¹² See pgs. 14-16 in Chapter 2 (above) for description and transcript of this scene.

questions for each clip shown. They asked participants to respond to the following prompts after each clip:

What stood out to you in this clip?
 How might it inform us about what ministry is, or what it means to do ministry?
 Who is the minister in the clip? What is the ministry?

After the discussion of each movie clip, the LAC asked the small groups to share any observations with the larger group.

2:00 p.m. – Summation and Reflection

We attempted to summarize the retreat, using some of the very phrases participants used during the day. We also asked participants to share with the large group their reflections from the retreat. The LAC and I facilitated a closing liturgy (i.e. work of the people) experience and benediction that involved some aspect(s) of a commissioning and included comments and stories shared throughout the day of the retreat.¹³

2:45 p.m. – Evaluation and Departing

Before they left, we asked participants to fill out evaluation forms for the retreat, consisting of several open-ended questions related to their understanding of and active involvement in ministering to others. We included the following questions:

Why did you attend this retreat?
 Did it meet your expectations?
 Has your understanding of being a minister changed? If so, how?
 Which part of the retreat was most meaningful to you? How so?
 What do you need to help you minister?
 Comments?
 Name (optional)?

We also gave participants the opportunity to sign up for one or more of the upcoming service opportunities during Lent, to further experience doing ministry.

¹³ See Appendix Two for the text of this liturgy.

After compiling the artifacts from the retreat (sticky notes, writings on butcher paper, etc.), the narrative snippets collected after the sermons, service opportunities, and any follow-up interviews that resulted, as well as any other information informally gleaned through the project experience, the LAC and I looked for patterns and themes within the narrative data. The next chapter will focus on these evaluations and the results of the project.

CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES FROM MINISTRY: WHAT HAVE WE DONE?

Evaluation

When analyzing the qualitative data collected during the project, I looked for signs of transformation across the three dimensions of self, the Christian tradition, and the current context.¹ I assessed the project through the lens of Carl Savage and William Presnell's postmodern research evaluation, observing change and discerning transformation.² In particular, I used the functionalist and structuralist approaches, observing changes in the narratives or narrative relationships, and/or discerning new patterns or different nuances to existing patterns.³ In each section of this chapter, I will examine the results the LAC and I obtained after each part of the project (i.e. first sermon, retreat, second sermon, ministry opportunities). I will then attempt to take a more holistic viewpoint to evaluate the overall outcomes, including the transformation and change I have experienced (and am still experiencing!) through this project process.

Sermon One⁴

¹ Stephen Pattison, "Some Straw for Bricks: A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward and Stephen Pattison (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), 135-148.

² Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville, KY: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 123.

³ *Ibid.*, 128-129.

⁴ See Appendix One for text of this sermon, as well as a link to an audio recording of the worship service in which it was preached.

As I noted in the Methodology section above, after each sermon, members of the LAC stood near the doors of the sanctuary to collect any brief responses to the sermon. The LAC and I also called various members of the congregation who seemed particularly engaged in the sermon to conduct short, unstructured follow-up interviews. Of course, some members of the congregation contacted me, either in person immediately after the worship service, or later by phone, email, or written note. I have considered all of the feedback obtained in these ways in the discussion below, even if I have not included every comment.

Some of the comments the LAC collected after the worship service reflected a basic understanding of the priesthood of all believers, comments like, “Everybody is a minister,” “Ministry is...accessible,” and “Everybody ought to [minister].” And yet other comments suggested a deeper or renewed understanding that all Christians can minister to others. For instance, one congregant spoke to me and said, “I’ve been thinking about this for a while. I’ve been thinking about what I do (i.e. helping others because of my faith). But I had never thought of that as *ministry* before.” He seemed empowered simply by giving his actions that particular title. In fact, later in our conversation, he asked me about an elderly lady from the church who was in the hospital, and mentioned that he wanted to visit her later that afternoon. Similarly, another church member, Holly, wrote me a note later in the week saying,

I wanted to write and let you know how awesome your sermon was on Sunday. I have thought about it all week, and there have been several situations I have reached out to people and I thought if a seed has been planted, great.⁵

People seemed most impressed by the narrative one of the LAC members, Bill, shared as a part of the sermon. Many of the brief comments collected by the LAC on the day of the sermon mentioned his story as an aspect of the service that stood out to them. One person even suggested that we include more personal testimonies like Bill’s as a part of the sermons, which would

⁵ Note to the author, February 15, 2014.

model the priesthood of all believers in the very public context of worship (which is exactly what we were attempting to do!) rather than the typical model of clergy preaching and laypeople listening. In fact, while debriefing the service with the LAC, Bill himself commented that even the fact that he had to come from the congregation and walk up to the pulpit reflected the idea that each person sitting in the pew could speak in the same way (i.e. as a minister). At least one congregant noticed this, as well, noting, “Everyone has a story of a time when they were ministered to at a significant point in their life.”

As the LAC and I conducted follow-up interviews with people who seemed particularly interested during the sermon, the interviewees shared such stories when we asked if there was a time when they felt like someone ministered to them. For instance, Ted told of a time when his father-in-law had an aneurism and was in the hospital for 150 days, an episode from which many people never recover. Ted told of a doctor who “was there for the long haul,” and others who ministered to him “well and not-so-well.” Debbie shared how, after her father’s death, a group of women who are in a small group with her at the church brought food, visited with her, and stayed at the home during the funeral. Will spoke of the many phone calls and notes he received after his grandmother’s death. Linda’s narrative came from her experience as a highly stressed graduate student and involved a friend, sensitive to her needs, who offered rides, meals, and encouragement. Another congregant, Helen, shared a particularly poignant story (which she later shared at the retreat and which I later used, with her permission, in the second sermon).

I was a Sunday School teacher in a previous church when I was pregnant and experienced a miscarriage. I thought I would just go on and I tried to act like nothing had really changed. I was back teaching Sunday School the next week. One of the ladies in my class – younger than me; in fact, I often offered her advice and counsel – she came to my house that Monday. She had flowers for me when I opened the door, and she said, “You

need to acknowledge this loss.” And I broke down. It was like she gave me permission to grieve.⁶

I find it interesting that in most – if not all – of the stories interviewees shared, the person performing the ministry was not a clergyperson. In Helen’s story, in particular, even the expected roles of ministering and receiving ministry were reversed: the older teacher, mentor, and leader was ministered to by the younger student, learner, and follower.

Perhaps the most interesting feedback we received after the first sermon were the recurring comments on mine and Bill’s “transparency,” “vulnerability,” and “willingness to share personal pain” in our experiences of receiving ministry. This openness seemed to resonate with most respondents, and may even be one reason why some interviewees shared some of their own experiences in which someone ministered to them. One church member, Frank, emailed me the next day to share a story from another congregation with which he was familiar:

At a previous church that will go unnamed, whenever the pastor mentioned the on-site counseling center, he hastened to add that he was just visiting the minister in charge of the center. That sent a negative message to those, including me, who were utilizing the counseling services. Earle Street’s openness is part of its healthy, healing environment.⁷

In a circuitous way, such a willingness to share the need for help and support (i.e. ministry), even from clergy, may have empowered others who feel unqualified to offer ministry to others. One church member, Chris, sent me an email later the same day with just such an empowered response.

I struggle with thinking I’m not in a position to minister to others because I’m not always a great Christian but you made me think about things differently. I appreciate that. I also think the inclusion of Bill was outstanding! I see that my downfalls may be opportunities not only for myself to learn from but to help others in their struggles.⁸

⁶ A paraphrase of Helen’s story, constructed from an LAC member’s notes from the follow-up interview and her retelling at the retreat.

⁷ Email to the author, February 11, 2014.

⁸ Email to the author, February 9, 2014.

I find these responses intriguing, especially given my experience recounted in my narrative of concern (see Chapter 1). How open or transparent can a (staff) minister be? Is there a line one must walk between enough openness to seem approachable to church members but not too much to offend or upset anyone? It certainly seems to be the case. Or perhaps some members of the church desire more transparency, while others prefer a more comfortable emotional distance from their clergy. Regardless of the various responses and the potentially varied expectations of church members, I believe the congregation experienced the sermon as significant and meaningful in some way. As one congregant responded when asked about the sermon, “It was a message that needed to get out to the congregation; one that all need to hear.”⁹ He may not know how right he is.

Retreat

The LAC and I employed several methods of collecting narrative data at the retreat, and we also obtained feedback and observed results both during and after the retreat. The evaluation forms we asked participants to complete at the end of the retreat exhibited an overwhelmingly positive experience from the participants. Retreat participants expressed that the retreat either met or exceeded their expectations. Yet it was more than just a good time. For instance, when responding to, “Has your understanding of being a minister changed? If so, how?” retreat attendees responded,

Somewhat. It has been better defined and expanded. The challenge of ministry has been reissued.

Yes. We all have gifts. How do we use those gifts to minister?

Expanded upon. Helps when [I] hear others’ views and experiences. Hear/learn new things.

⁹ Phone conversation between church member and LAC member, February 11, 2014.

Yes. I am thinking more about my role as a minister in my everyday life. How can I make a difference in others' lives? How can I meet the needs of others?

More fleshed out anyway. Lots of fresh ideas.

I am to be a minister every day. Many things I normally do are a ministry to others. I still feel uncomfortable with face-to-face witnessing.

Ministering is not always about doing but can be just being there and listening.

Opened my eyes to the thought to be open to opportunities that God presents.

Expanded. We can be ministered to many times. When we make ourselves available to minister to others, opportunities are all around us if we make ourselves available.

Yes. It has made me aware that it can be much more challenging than I thought.

More open minded. Feel like I may recognize opportunities better.

Yes. We all are called to be ministers.¹⁰

Even some of those who responded that their understanding of ministry did not change still offered feedback that was positive. For example, one such respondent wrote,

I think we should have more of these type (*sic*) of conferences. It lets us know that we are all in the same place and can help each other to complete our mission.

Once again, a sense of collaboration in ministry, as well as the personal connections people can make with one another while doing ministry together are benefits of the priesthood of all believers. In fact, retreat participants consistently noted on their evaluations that the most meaningful part of the retreat for them was the discussion around the tables, during which time they shared stories and heard others' opinions and views. In summation, then, it seemed as though retreat participants agreed with the idea that all Christians are ministers, and the retreat seemed to encourage them in this. Perhaps, though, what they are lacking are the resources to actually carry out their ministry. In other words, laypersons at Earle Street Baptist Church – or at

¹⁰ These are just some of the responses from the evaluation sheets, meant to be illustrative but not exhaustive.

least those who attended the retreat – may feel encouraged and empowered to do ministry, but not equipped.

As I observed the retreat attendees during the day, I noticed the energy around these discussions at the tables. I must admit, however, that sitting off to the side, watching the LAC members take the primary roles in leading the retreat, and watching and listening to the participants while the retreat was taking place was a little unnerving for me. It felt strange for me to be so inactive and not to be in the front of the room. I also felt some anxiety about the execution of the retreat itself by the LAC. And yet, despite this nervousness, I also felt freer to talk to the attendees, to help in other ways (i.e. making sure lunch was going to come on time, coordinating with the wait staff at the venue, etc.), and to observe people as they participated. It was precisely because I had this freedom that I was able to see how people ministered to one another even during the retreat. For instance, people served each other coffee and water and cake. During the time of prayer at the beginning of the retreat, when participants prayed with one another, I noticed many of them leaning in to one another, and there was lots of physical contact (e.g. holding hands, hands on shoulders, etc.). I noticed one woman, Kay, comforting another woman, Gigi, who had recently lost her husband and had begun to cry. Later, Kay asked me about the Grief Support Ministry of the church so *she* could make sure Gigi knew about it (instead of asking me to speak to Gigi). My passive participation also allowed me to overhear comments from participants and make notes, not only for the purposes of this project but also so I could incorporate their stories and words into a closing liturgy for the retreat. Although none of the attendees commented on the use of these narrative snippets in the liturgy, I could see expressions of pleasant surprise on participants' faces as the LAC and I spoke their words spoken back to them.

Thus, as uncomfortable and out of character as I felt letting laypeople take the lead in conducting the retreat, I believe it led to a more effective experience. Ironically, by offering a general prayer at the beginning of the retreat and then asking the participants to pray for and with each other, this idea is exactly what we were trying to communicate! Apparently I needed to learn the lesson, too. As I reflect on my feelings from that day, perhaps I should ask myself why it made me uncomfortable when I was not leading the retreat? Did I crave the control or the focus on myself? Was I nervous that it would not be done to my liking? Or am I, too, guilty of affirming the priesthood of all believers while resistant to practicing it?

During the retreat, the LAC encouraged participants to write or draw on the butcher paper on the tables, which we later collected. These artifacts from the retreat could provide some insight into the thought processes and understandings of laypeople who attended. Regarding the opening prayer exercise (meant to highlight the differences between a general prayer offered by a clergy person and a more specific prayer offered by a fellow layperson), people jotted down words such as “vulnerable,” “intimate,” and “personal” to describe the layperson’s prayer. One person noted of the experience with a fellow layperson, “More personal. Able to do more. Can be more uncomfortable.” Perhaps one of the reasons for a resistance to lay ministry is, despite the potentially meaningful and effective experiences of service, the vulnerability and openness required is uncomfortable for many people. Such a resistance might even translate to the same discomfort when a clergy person is too vulnerable or open, which may explain some of the narrative of concern (see next chapter for further exploration of this notion).

Overall, the comments written down by retreat participants seem to reflect a deep(er) understanding of the concept of the priesthood of all believers, and of notions of ministry as well. The participants’ reflections on and understandings of ministry grew from stories they shared

which often exhibited laypeople ministering to one another in seemingly ordinary ways. Some of the most common themes embodied in these stories and comments were those of empathy, compassion, listening, and presence. Take these scribblings, for example, that somehow describe ministry for the attendees:¹¹

Ministry is meeting needs of others, which sometimes requires a sacrifice of self. It is not always natural for some people (like me), but it does come naturally for others. For someone for whom it does not come naturally, it requires you to be more intentional.

God does not waste our experiences.

The dictionary definition of minister is an administrator; a secretary of; a manager; one who manages and dispenses, distributing a resource or service. From a Christian perspective, that which is dispensed/distributed/managed is good news, spiritual gifts, physical and emotional needs.

Empathy comes with experience. Can my pain help heal someone else? Am I the minister in the mirror?

The position of ministering to those within our circle of influence.

Lay ministry is crucial. As Greg said, “We’re all able to do more than we think we can do.”

Ministry is asking yourself, “What does this person need? How can I help? We use our spiritual gifts to see *how* we can minister, but do we sometimes have to go beyond our comfort zone?

We are Christ to people who we come in contact with everyday. Therefore we must be intentional with our ministry... Minister is a verb and a noun. We all are ministers.

I’m a minister. If I am doing ministry, I’ll notice it.

Jesus called people out of where they were. It’s not always Gospel to say “Where you are is OK and I’ll be there with you.” Sometimes we need to call people out and be there with them... We can’t underestimate the desire of people to be ministered to by *the* minister. We do all have to be ministers. It can’t be that the minister is the only one... How could I/we get past the point of thinking, “My [Sunday School class, friends, deacon, etc.] came to see me, but I didn’t hear a thing from the preacher.”? The point

¹¹ I have paraphrased these comments to make them more easily understood (i.e. words, bullet points, symbols, etc. into phrases and sentences), while maintaining the key words and elements to hopefully communicate the intended meaning as clearly as possible.

isn't what the pastor *did*; it's that they know and care. Can we make the pastor's care and concern more tangible *through* us?

Our obligation in ministry is almost always unilateral. The outcome is not our business. People do not care how much we know until they know how much we care.

Transparency is needed to minister. We can use our difficult times through which God has comforted us to help others and give comfort.

We don't always know the outcome of what we do. Sometimes it is about asking the right questions... We minister when we allow someone to minister to us.

Ministering is/involves:

1. Helping others
2. Learning from others
3. Witnessing
4. Sharing time, materials, and money
5. Sacrifice
6. Stewardship
7. Higher standard
8. Humor
9. Humble
10. Unique to the individual
11. Mentoring
12. Grace

Minister is a job for everyone to do.

Minister as a person (noun) is clergy or a vocational minister. Minister as an action (verb) is something that Christians do... Sometimes it is important just to let someone know that you care. What you do or how you do it is less important than *why*... When there's a need, there should be nothing that is beneath you.

Ministry includes everyone, not just the pastoral staff. It can be little things that add up to a big thing. We are like branches on a tree and the church is the trunk.

Giving time is the most important ministry. It shows you care. It's not necessarily about what you say... Ministry is sharing your God-given gifts with others; being transparent; sharing our

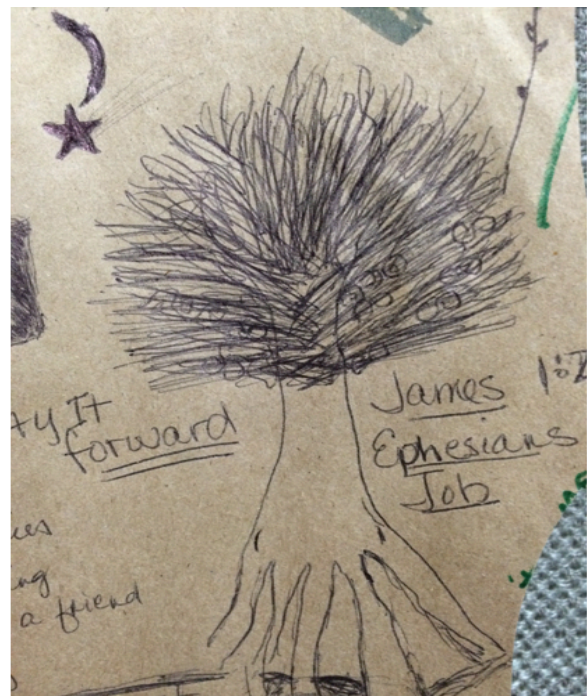


Figure 8. Tree doodle by retreat participant. March 1, 2014.

experiences to encourage others. God wastes nothing we go through, and can use it all for his kingdom.

One of the fullest yet most concise descriptions came from the son of one of our LAC members, Wendell – “Simple expressions of Christ’s grace extended through us.”¹²

In almost all of these notes, retreat participants described ministers and ministry more in terms of actions and qualities rather than by the office or title. That is, people seemed more comfortable using the word *minister* as a verb than as a noun. These comments also reflected a high usage of first-person language, suggesting that these laypersons do, indeed, see their actions and qualities as being those of a minister (even if they are less-inclined to apply call themselves a *minister*). I will explore further implications of this ministerial identity in the following chapter, in terms of my own experience and those of lay ministers.

Sermon Two

I preached the second sermon in a worship service one month after the first sermon and one week after the retreat. The LAC and I collected narrative feedback from members of the congregation as we did after the first sermon. After LAC members stood near the exits of the sanctuary to gather congregants’ responses this second time, one person mentioned to an LAC member that we the church should have people (clergy?) available to talk with church members after each service. Although this comment seems to be more about the methodology of the project, it may pertain to the content of the project, too. Perhaps this individual desires more involvement in worship, in which the typically passive laypersons have a more active way to participate in the preaching event. Although I may be over-interpreting this particular response, it

¹² This quote was attributed to “Jonathan C.” on the butcher paper collected from his table. Interestingly, the circumstances surrounded Jonathan’s birth and his special needs occasioned Wendell’s story of a time when he felt like someone ministered to him (see chapter 2).

could be a subtle commentary on the dearth of ways for a congregant to engage actively in worship.

Such subtlety also pervaded other responses, as many respondents noted the power in stories that seem, at first glance, common and unimportant. Holly spoke of small acts of ministry, comparing them to planting seeds, in which we may not see the results of our efforts.

Jumping to another legume image, she recalled a recent episode in her life:

Joyce and I had been trying to reach out to Amy, to show her we care; just to be her friends. But she never really responded, you know? Joyce said, after the last time we tried to do something, that she didn't think anything we said or did meant *a hill of beans* to Amy.

She continued on a hopeful note, however, saying, "If we all did something little, imagine the impact."¹³ Another person commented, "I'm not responsible for anyone else's life," a comment that might be self-centered, but more than likely reflects the understanding that people of faith are called to be faithful, not necessarily successful.

Don, a highly-involved lay leader, mentioned that he often thought of being sent by Christ as something glamorous, not as something common, and certainly not common to us all. He continued,

I wish some of the stories of the seventy-two [disciples who were sent out] had been recorded. They probably would have been better than some of Paul's! I was also thinking, I wonder what kind of people they were. Were they like us? And when Jesus sends us, we may not have to go somewhere, but just go about our life in a different way... Maybe the kingdom comes near – maybe it's right in our hands – but we miss it because we are expecting something more.¹⁴

One member of the church simply quoted a phrase I had heard her use before: "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one." She means that she would rather see someone – perhaps anyone, not just a clergyperson – *do* ministry rather than simply talk about it. And, as if practicing what she

¹³ Paraphrase of a phone conversation with the author, March 10, 2014.

¹⁴ Paraphrase of a phone conversation with the author, March 10, 2014.

herself was preaching, later in our conversation she offered to bring a meal for our family since my wife was on doctor-ordered rest during her pregnancy. Another layperson, Sharon, mentioned the import of finding a ministry that is one's own, and allowing it to flow through your life. Her daughter, who was in a destructive situation, was at church with her that day, and Sharon said she felt like her daughter could sense "the kingdom coming near" in her own life's story, even though it was a mess.¹⁵ This focus on ordinary people and pedestrian acts of service suggests the common (in all senses of the word) ministry of every believer.

One respondent offered a vast and deep reflection on the sermon, in particular, as well as the worship service as a whole. Noel, who is himself a minister with a Ph.D. in Homiletics and Liturgics, happened to be present in worship on the day of the second sermon, visiting his parents who are members of Earle Street Baptist Church. I called him several days later, explaining my own doctoral work and focus, and asking for his feedback on my preaching in particular, and on the service, in general. He commented on the fact that a layperson led the call to worship, which was responsive in nature and invited participation from the congregation. From the beginning, then, congregants not only participated in the worship service, but also led in worship. Two children – sisters – were baptized in the worship service that day, and Noel mentioned two aspects of the ordinance that reflected the doctrine under consideration.

It was moving to see the candidates' family members standing at the front of the congregation as "witnesses" to the baptisms. It was also meaningful to have the brother of the candidates light a candle for each as a symbol that the light of Christ shines in them and is to shine through all of us in the world as well. It was especially powerful when each young candidate voiced a profession of faith in Christ in her own words. This embodied the priesthood of all believers in a dynamic way.¹⁶

In consideration of the sermon itself, Noel commented primarily on the vignettes I shared.

¹⁵ Phone conversation with the author, March 10, 2014.

¹⁶ Email to the author, March 12, 2014.

...the real genius of the sermon was when the preacher told several consecutive stories of various church members' ministry to others. This illustrated how the kingdom of God comes near in real, everyday life through the witness of members of Earle Street Baptist Church. Surely this functioned to encourage the congregation by showing they were already engaging in kingdom mission work. It also instructed the congregation that mission work takes a variety of forms, from saying or doing something kind to giving a person permission to grieve. This section of the sermon championed the priesthood of all believers in a compelling way and exhorted every Christian to be a kingdom missionary in daily life... In summary, I found the worship service meaningful, the sermon strong, and priesthood of all believers alive and well at Earle Street Baptist Church.¹⁷

This focus on narrative came across in others' feedback, as well. Wes suggested that the entire function of "shepherding" [i.e. ordained ministry] is to lead people to understand their own ministry; letting people tell their stories and helping them make the Biblical story their own.¹⁸ The power of such stories also affected the LAC members themselves. For instance, Bill, who teaches high school, mentioned how a lesson is much more effective when connected with a story, and felt as though the narratives in the sermon accomplished the same outcome.¹⁹ Barbara commented that she thought the sermon was very good, but wondered if her evaluation was due to the fact that she was involved in the process of developing the sermon.²⁰ Her feedback suggests that laypersons' full participation in ministry may make the ministry itself more effective for those who receive it, as well as those who participate in shaping the ministry. Wes, mentioned above, is ordained and was serving in a prison ministry at the time. He shared, "As I went into the jail to preach and minister to the inmates, I felt a renewed sense of being 'sent out' on mission with the message of Jesus."²¹ Thus, such narratives may make worship and ministry

¹⁷ Email to the author, March 12, 2014.

¹⁸ Telephone conversation with the author, March 12, 2014.

¹⁹ Email to the author, March 9, 2014.

²⁰ Email to the author, March 12, 2014.

²¹ Email to the author, March 9, 2014.

more meaningful, not only for congregants, but also for those who participated in shaping the worship or ministry, and perhaps even for ordained clergy, too.

The most direct commentary on and clear understanding of the sermon and the underlying doctrine came from Bill, another congregant who had responded to the first sermon (but not the person by the same name who is on the LAC). Bill told me he had been thinking about this idea of laypeople serving as ministers before I even said it outright. He had recently spoken with an Episcopal rector in town whom he knows, and the rector told him that he realized he spent most of his time with people who were already a part of the church, and much of that time was actually spent on the church property. The rector told Bill that he had to rely on the laity to “get out there” to do ministry beyond his reach.²² This clergy person not only recognized the ministry available to laypersons, but also his own limitations as well as the benefit of empowering others to do such ministry.

Ministry Experiences

The LAC and I led six different ministry opportunities in which laypersons could participate throughout the season of Lent in 2014. People who participated in the retreat could sign up at the conclusion of the retreat, and the LAC personally invited other laypeople to experience ministry. I also publicized the ministry opportunities through announcements from the pulpit on Sunday mornings, as well as articles in the weekly church newsletter.

As noted above, the six ministry opportunities consisted of the following: (1) serving communion to homebound church members on the afternoon of Maundy Thursday, (2) visiting nursing homes and assisted living facilities with members of our visitation team, (3) assisting ministerial staff in leading a worship service at a local homeless shelter, (4) greeting church-comers at the doors of the building on Sunday mornings, (5) writing a reflection on a passage of

²² Conversation with the author, March 9, 2014.

scripture to share on the church's blog, and (6) reaching out to inactive members of the church with handwritten personal notes. All of these opportunities consisted of activities that are already a part of the church's programmatic ministries, and each member of the LAC served as the leader and representative for each opportunity. We also listed "Other" with a blank space beside it on the sign-up sheets at the retreat, inviting participants to list other ways they are already doing or would like to do ministry. I also included this seventh option in my articles in the church newsletter.

Serving communion

Bill – the LAC member who spoke during the first sermon – served as the leader and LAC representative for this opportunity. Bill grew up Episcopalian, and although he is highly involved in the life of Earle Street Baptist Church, he has never officially joined. Interestingly, Bill spoke with a rector at his home church regarding the process for becoming commissioned (ordained?) to serve communion as a layperson. When I asked him why he wanted to do that, he said that he knew he did not *need* to be an official lay minister, but he felt as though the process and the affirmation would be meaningful to him. In the end, he did not go through the process – primarily because he did not have the time to do so – but his comment and intention impacted me. So, when about twenty people gathered at the church for this ministry opportunity on the afternoon of Maundy Thursday, before they carried the Lord's Supper to homebound members I offered a commissioning prayer and words of blessing over them. At my suggestion, the church did something similar months later on World Communion Sunday. At the end of the worship service that morning, the Senior Pastor spoke a commissioning prayer as the benediction for those who would be serving communion later that afternoon.

Many of the people who participated in this ministry opportunity had served communion

to homebound members on World Communion Sunday in previous years. Thus, they did not share any narratives suggesting their experience was novel or particularly significant. Several of the participants, however, commented that they felt a greater sense of being commissioned and sent out in the name of Christ. Bill, the LAC member who led this opportunity, had not participated in serving communion before. He went to see a very talkative and sometimes tiring church member, but despite the wearying conversation, he said that his visit was very meaningful. When I asked him what stood out about it, he mentioned that this church member just seemed to need someone with which to “unload all her stuff.” He felt as though he offered that presence to share her burden, and in doing so, ministered to her.²³



Figure 9. Communion kit used to serve homebound church members. Photograph by author, December 6, 2014.

Ironically, there were not enough laypeople to serve communion that afternoon, leaving me – the lone clergyperson – to visit one homebound member. As I walked out to my car with a communion kit in my hand, another car pulled up in the church’s parking lot. A couple was arriving late and wanted to take communion to someone. I gave them the communion kit I had, along with a printed liturgy and directions to the home.²⁴ As I was doing so, the wife expressed some anxiety about she and her husband going by themselves, without a staff minister or a deacon

²³ Conversation with the author, April 17, 2014.

²⁴ These kits include grape juice in a vial, small disposable plastic communion cups, and a container for the wafers.

with them. I reassured her that they did not need us, and sent them off. When I spoke to her at the Maundy Thursday service later that evening, she told me how wonderful her visit was, and how meaningful it was for her to not only visit with someone (she already made visits to homebound members as a part of the church's Homebound Ministry Team), but to share communion.²⁵ I find it intriguing that she expressed some trepidation about serving communion by herself. Did she feel as though she was not properly sanctioned or prepared? I also find it quite interesting that this particular visit, when she did share the Lord's Supper with a homebound member, stood out to her more so than her other visits. Perhaps her function in a more explicitly ministerial role added this sense of extra meaning to her experience.

From this experience, several members have requested that we serve communion to homebound members more than once a year, on World Communion Sunday, as we have in the past. One ministry team of the church – the Spiritual Care Team, led by LAC member Barbara – has offered to work with the Homebound Ministry to take on this task. She plans to serve homebound communion at least twice a year (on World Communion Sunday and Maundy Thursday), if not quarterly, which would mean that homebound members would be able to partake of the Lord's Supper as often as congregants who can come to the worship services would.

Visiting

Barbara was the LAC representative for this particular opportunity. Only a handful of people participated in this ministry experience, which consisted of visiting an assisted living facility where several members lived. None of these participants shared any narratives about their experience, maybe because each one of them had made similar visits before. Barbara, who also serves as a part of the church's Grief Support Ministry, mentioned that she and Jerry, who

²⁵ Conversation with the author, April 17, 2014.

helps lead a team of volunteers who prepare meals for the families of deceased church members, connected in a way they had not done previously. In fact, the smaller group of participants allowed Barbara and Jerry to find points of connection and overlap between their respective places of service, and even begin talks about collaborating in their ministries.²⁶ Thus, shared ministry experiences may lead to new ministry opportunities or more effective ministries when the people involved find new and better ways to serve others in the name of Christ.

Worshipping

This opportunity consisted of participating in worship at the Greenville Rescue Mission, a homeless shelter where the church leads a chapel service once a month. Although I preached the sermon for the service, Wendell oversaw this ministry experience as the LAC representative. Church members offered a prayer, sang as part of an ensemble, read scripture, and played piano for the service. Other church members simply participated in the service as congregants, and we encouraged all church members to arrive early and stay after to interact with the residents of the mission.

One member of the church, David, had never come to one of these services before, and yet he was deliberate in speaking to as many of the residents as possible. In fact, he interacted with more of the chapel participants than anyone else, including me. I was concerned that he would not find his role very meaningful, since it was not an up-front leadership role in the service. But when I spoke with him after the worship service, he expressed how much he enjoyed being there, and that he wanted to come back.²⁷ Another couple, Lamar and Harriett, led the singing and played the piano. They shared with me how much they enjoyed serving in this capacity, and they continued to offer music when Earle Street Baptist Church led services at the

²⁶ Conversation with the author, March 16, 2014.

²⁷ Conversation with the author, April 3, 2014.

mission. In fact, one evening when I was supposed to preach at the mission, I was detained by a crisis and could not get there in time. I called Lamar, who said that he and Harriett would lead some music and he could offer a reflection on some scripture. Their ability and willingness to serve as ministers and lead worship (by themselves, no less!) allowed me to focus on the crisis at hand, while simultaneously allowing them to minister to the men whom I could not reach. In fact, it was the most participatory – and maybe the most effective – worship service our church offered at the mission, since all the residents could sing the songs instead of having to listen to a sermon.

Greeting

Joe functioned as the LAC representative for this ministry opportunity, which was one of the least significant, it seems. Only five people signed up to take part in this ministry, which consisted of greeting at the doors of the church on a particular Sunday morning with a member of the Greeters Team. Three of the five who signed up were already serving as greeters on Sunday mornings. Even though no narratives emerged from this experience, one layperson who attended the retreat and signed up to participate in this ministry opportunity (and who had not served in this manner previously) ended up serving regularly on the Greeters Team of the church.

Blogging

The LAC and I thought some people might need more reflective and less extroverted ways to experience doing ministry, and therefore we thought it wise to offer an opportunity that didn't involve personal interaction. Therefore, we decided to include a writing opportunity and invited participants to write reflections on a passage of scripture. We planned that I would post the reflections on the church's blog, which I manage, and so I served as our LAC representative for this particular opportunity. This blog was a part of the church's emphasis called *God's Story*,

Our Story. As a church, we were reading, teaching, and preaching through the Bible in the 2013-2014 church year. At my request, various church members submitted reflections engaging with the scheduled scriptures each week.

Only one person from the retreat participated in this ministry opportunity, and she had previously written an entry for the blog. However, throughout the year over forty different church members wrote reflections on scriptures, with approximately twice as many people following the blog on a regular basis.²⁸ Interestingly, the church staff studied and discussed the scheduled scriptures in our weekly meetings, and on numerous occasions, staff ministers commented on how meaningful they found the layperson's reflection for that particular week. It seemed clear, then, that the laity's interpretations of and reflections on scripture were meaningful and edifying, even for the ordained, theologically-educated staff ministers.

Writing notes

Libby was the LAC representative for this ministry experience, and she organized a note-writing event on a Sunday afternoon, complete with refreshments. I provided her with the names and addresses of inactive members and a sample of what a note could say. Approximately a dozen people attended, ranging in age from their forties to their nineties. One participant commented that she enjoyed getting to know other members as they did ministry together, and she would like to do something similar again.²⁹ As did those who participated in the visiting ministry opportunity, this person found value in the fellowship of serving alongside others over and above the actual ministry they performed together.

Several of those who participated in this event are, in fact, continuing in their efforts. Pam, the leader of the church's Inreach Team, tasked with reaching out to inactive members,

²⁸ Statistics from Wordpress platform, www.godsstoryyourstory.com.

²⁹ Email forwarded to the author, May 4, 2014.

participated in both the retreat and in this opportunity. At least three of the people with whom she wrote notes at this event are now continuing to do so through the Inreach Team. The staff and deacons formed this team within the past year, precisely because there existed such a large number of inactive members that the staff could not stay in touch with all of them in an effective way. Thus, the Inreach Team itself is a wonderful testament to the need for and purpose of lay ministry.

Lasting Effects

In each section, I have alluded to some ongoing, lasting results of the project. In some ways, I hoped for farther-reaching and more noticeable changes, such as lay leaders taking on new ministries, or operating in a more independent, self-motivated fashion as they carried out the work of the church. However, I did not see such dramatic results. The most visible transformation I discerned was in me, but I observed other changes that may lead to transformation in due time. For instance, one major change that took place shortly after the project was my departure from Earle to become the pastor of another church. Several of the committee chairs and team leaders I worked with have taken on greater leadership roles in my absence to ensure that the ministries themselves do not suffer and can continue. Surely this change will cause other consequences that I cannot anticipate, nor that I may ever know. Also, from the project, now the Inreach Team has three new members who are writing notes to inactive church members, one retreat participant volunteered to become an usher and greet people on Sunday mornings, and homebound church members will now receive communion at least twice a year, if not four times a year (instead of only once a year). From both a functionalist and structuralist perspective, then, change did occur in the ministry context. Perhaps only time will tell whether or not transformation takes place.

What, then, do these results say about the practice of the priesthood of all believers at Earle Street Baptist Church? Even with this intentional focus on a better praxis of this doctrine, was I still driving the process? What of the personal transformation I experienced during the course of this project? It is to questions such as these that I will turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

ANTICIPATIONS OF MINISTRY: LIVING WITH *ANAMNESIA*

Almost every modern version of the Bible translates the Greek word ἀνάμνησις (*anamnesis*) as “remembrance.”¹ If I was translating the word, however, I would opt for a more literal translation such as “non-forgetfulness,” or a paraphrase like “calling to mind.”² Yet *anamnesis* is more than simply a recollection of the past. As a professor in divinity school defined *anamnesis* for our class,

We gather up in the present moment the happenings of the past and the hopes for the future. We pay attention to our history – *all* of it (the good and the bad) – and what has been bequeathed to us, then we work to see who we are and work towards who we could be... The past lives on in us whether or not we want it to, both in what we remember and what we may not but shapes us nonetheless. The future, too, lives in us this way.³

Thus, *anamnesis* gathers the past and the future into the present. In fact, of the four times the New Testament writers use the word, three of those instances are in reference to the Lord’s Supper, a meal of remembrance that is also a foretaste of the eschatological banquet. As this project and paper and program draw to a close, I feel as though I am living with *anamnesis* – reflecting on the past and the ways it has formed and transformed me, but also looking to the possibilities of the future. I am realizing how my past experiences have shaped me as a minister

¹ See, for instance, Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25.

² *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, s.v. “ἀνάμνησις” (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2000), 68. The English word *amnesia* comes from the root ἀμνησία, and the alpha privative (i.e. the prefix ἀν) denotes negation or absence, thus producing a meaning akin to “non-forgetfulness” or “a lack of forgetfulness.”

³ Jill Crainshaw, paraphrase of a lecture in Homiletics class, Wake Forest University School of Divinity, March 19, 2009 (reconstructed from the author’s class notes).

and brought me to the present moment, even as I continue to realize and move further into the unfolding future before me. Consider, for example, the question underlying the project from the beginning (or at least a paraphrase of the question that better pertains to my personal transformation), “How might I define myself, perhaps differently than before this project, and how could I stay connected to those who disagree with me?”⁴ Or to put it another way, “How might I have come to understand ministry or myself as a minister, and how could I engage others within the church who might understand ministry or the concept of a minister differently?” These questions grow from my past experiences, and yet they also impact my present circumstances as I move toward the kind of minister I am becoming and hope to be.

Throughout this project process, in a more acute way than ever before, I have sensed the difficulties that face all ministers. E. Brooks Holifield, writing a history of clergy in America, claims that vocational ministry has represented (borrowing a phrase from Reinhold Niebuhr) an “impossible possibility.” He explains further,

The tension at the center of Christianity called for priests and ministers to work within the culture and yet to offend it repeatedly. They were to adapt themselves to its forms while proclaiming that the Spirit makes all things new and renders every form merely provisional. They were to attract large crowds but not measure their success by such worldly standards. They were to allow themselves normal human goods and pleasures - and the financial means to attain them - and yet represent the norm of self-sacrificial love. They were to adapt themselves to cultural and technological innovation and yet remain aware of the potential for exploitation and self-promotion in every adaptation.⁵

Although Holifield writes as a historian (i.e. in past tense), his words could easily apply to present and future clergy, including me. Holifield’s observations directly relate to my experiences several years ago, recounted in the narrative of concern (see Chapter 1). But to add

⁴ Richard L. Hester and Kelli Walker-Jones, *Know Your Story and Lead with It: The Power of Narrative in Clergy Leadership* (Herndon, VA: Alban, 2009), Kindle Location 1285.

⁵ E. Brooks Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 7-8, Kindle.

another example to his list, a similar irreducible tension is also present in this project. That is, in my own experience and from what I can tell of other ministers I know, most clergy affirm the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, and some (including me) even claim that churches need to do a better job of putting this theology into practice in the life of the Church. Some clergypersons (again, myself included) may even go so far as to try to enable and empower congregants to function in more ministerial roles and to find their own ministerial identity. I wonder if this is a fight we clergy cannot win, though – not because the laity may not be ready, able, and willing to take up the ministerial mantle, but instead because the clergy may not be ready, able, and willing to let it go.

As I began this project, I was under the impression that if the laypeople of Earle Street Baptist Church – any church, really – could come to see themselves as ministers, and could realize that the work of ministry was something they could do, then there would be no obstacles to a fully functioning lay ministry. Throughout the process of this project, though, I have found myself uncomfortable with letting go of certain ministerial tasks, or releasing too many responsibilities. I have realized my own resistance to the practicing priesthood of all believers. And why? Some of it has to do with my personality. I am a recovering perfectionist, meaning that I am reluctant to give up a responsibility or task I value if I do not believe it will be done to the standard to which I would do it. Obviously, related to this need for high-quality effects is a need for control. And following not-too-far after this need for control is the desire for status. Even in a denomination in which a pastor is not supposed to have any more authority or status than anyone else in the church, pastors still do – if not in the culture at large (which they do in the South), then at least within the church culture. And given my experience and the common feeling among many ministers I speak to that their lives are under the microscope of their

parishioners, I think some clergy are avoiding the impression that they are not doing what the church pays them to do, or that they are not working hard enough.⁶

Despite these traits that hinder my own practice of the priesthood of all believers, throughout this project I have found great meaning in lay ministry when I have been able to step aside and allow it to happen. Interestingly, these lay ministers often end up being more effective than I could ever be. And yet their effectiveness in doing ministry is not as threatening as I may have previously thought or felt. When I hear about or see people in the congregation ministering to one another, or – even better – when I encourage them to minister to one another and they do, I find myself feeling even more excited and often more fulfilled than if I had been the one doing the ministry. For instance, one week, I received an email from an older couple who expressed interest in visiting our church but did not have transportation. I pondered if I should just give them a ride myself, thinking it might be easier than trying to find someone willing and able to bring them to the church and take them home afterward. In an attempt to practice what I had been preaching through this project, though, I asked Rob, one of the deacons of the church who had told me to call him if I ever needed help with anything. Rob gladly offered his assistance to the couple. In doing so, not only were they able to visit the church, they were also able to meet a church member in the process – someone to help them find their way around the building, someone to sit with them in worship, etc. Rob was able to offer this kind of personal attentiveness, something that I (or any other staff minister) would not be able to do during a typical hectic Sunday morning. Thus, Rob's ministry to this couple allowed me to be more effective in other ministries, such as speaking with people in the congregation before the services, getting updates on prayer requests from members and welcoming visitors, making sure

⁶ Interestingly, the Personnel Committee at the church has expressed this sentiment to me since the completion of this project (see below). In a special meeting with me, they asked if I would be willing to work more (than my current average of fifty hours per week), questioning whether or not I was working at full capacity.

we have enough deacons to serve communion, and addressing any other last minute issues that may come up before the service. In this way, the entire ministry of the church is more effective. That is, while Rob is providing a personal ministry to one couple in particular, I am then able to express care and concern, extend hospitality and welcome, and ensure that worship is effective and hopefully meaningful for many more people in the congregation.

In some cases, laypersons doing ministry have ministered to me directly. My grandmother spent weeks in the hospital and eventually passed away in May 2014. In the last few days of her life, I was attempting to plan an event with our College Ministry Team to welcome home the college students of the church and kick off our summer activities. I was the driving force behind this event, doing much of the preparation and publicity myself. When I texted Libby, the College Ministry Team leader (and also a member of the LAC) to let her know my grandmother had died, she immediately took over all of my responsibilities, mobilizing the team to contact the students, bring food and supplies, and execute the event. Her leadership in this ministry of the church ministered to me. I felt free to grieve and take time to be with family without the distraction or anxiety of unfinished work looming over me.

I must admit, however, that I would likely not have realized the power and effectiveness of lay ministry had I not taken on this project. As I mentioned above, I felt compelled to put into practice that which I am studying and purport to affirm, namely, the priesthood of all believers. I believe that I, like many ministers I know, get caught in a cycle that is difficult to break. We are anxious about handing over ministerial responsibilities to laypeople, the reasons for which are varied, some of which are valid, and some of which are mentioned above (i.e. concerns about quality, desire for control or authority, worries about congregants' perceptions, etc.). Because of such anxieties, often clergy do not release ministries that could be done by laypersons, and so

clergy (and laity) never experience just how meaningful and effective such ministry can be. I have only begun to realize the import of lay ministry through this program of study and specifically this project, not only for the body of Christ and the local church, but also for myself as a minister. I appreciate the irony of this: that in exploring how laypeople in the church might grow in their ministerial identity, I have grown in my own. The kind of minister I want to be and am becoming – one who is a vision-caster; who empowers and assists others to find their identity and purpose as ministers of Christ – cannot be one who tries to do everything the church asks or expects on his own. If the laity is never given opportunities to experience doing ministry because the clergy are always doing everything themselves, how can laypeople come to see themselves as ministers and carry out the work of the Church to which all are called?

As I grow in my own ministry and more fully realize the kind of minister I aspire to be, I feel many of the conflicting assumptions Holifield mentions in the quote above. And yet such unrealistic expectations are not limited to his examples but seem to pervade almost every aspect of a minister's existence. This may be why Holifield later comments that "self-doubt appears to have been the vocation's constant companion."⁷ This has certainly been true in my own experience. Just a few months before my narrative of concern occurred, I felt as though I was coming apart at the seams, doubting my calling into ministry, wondering if I could or should continue in the vocation. I clumsily tried to hold together the only models of congregational work I had ever known or seen, even though those models did not feel authentic to my own sense of calling. At the tipping point, pent-up frustrations and accumulated anxieties spilled forth with my tears, as I sat in my office – in my place of *work* – about ready to let go of my vocation. Much of this angst grew from the expectations I put upon myself, and expectations that I now realize were implicit in the church culture of Earle Street Baptist Church. Many of these

⁷ Ibid., 10.

expectations are embodied by the Senior Pastor and through his ministry at the church. But as I emerged from the ensuing disillusionment and depression, I began to realize I did not have to conform my calling to my job (in fact, the reverse is true). I became aware that I was confining myself to a ministerial identity and method that were not my own; that I was attempting to be the kind of pastor I thought people expected me to be, and that I thought I had to be.

Journeying through this program of study, though, I believe I have been able to begin the process of differentiation. Less and less do I feel the need to be the kind of minister that others expect or want me to be, especially when those expectations are unrealistic or unnatural for me. Rather, I am finding more and more of the kind of minister I want to be and living into that preferred future. Of course, this has led to some anxiety and tension in some systems of relationships in the church, in particular my relationship with the Senior Pastor and the Personnel Committee. Thus, the second part of the question guiding this project and my reflections – how I might stay engaged with those with whom I disagree – has become extremely important. Throughout an exhausting process of numerous meetings with the Senior Pastor and just as many with the Personnel Committee (although never together, as I repeatedly requested, to hopefully de-triangulate the situation), I have attempted to stay connected with them. I have tried to keep lines of communication open and foster dialogue while simultaneously differentiating myself from their unrealistic expectations and living more fully into my own understanding of who I am as a minister. I can only hope that I will continue to grow in this and other ways, that I might serve alongside other ministers – both clergy and laity – who may understand themselves and their ministry differently than my own, but with whose varied gifts we may build up the body of Christ.⁸

⁸ Cf. Ephesians 4:11-12.

EPILOGUE

“But sometimes the future is latent in us without our knowing it...”¹

What might be next for me? I do not know. I am currently in the process of searching for another church in which to serve. In fact, in just a few weeks I have interviews with two area churches that are searching for a senior pastor. As I prepare to take the next step in my vocational journey, I do so with new and deeper understandings of who I am as a minister as well as the ministry into which God calls all Christians. In fact, even though “results are results,” as my doctoral advisor Dr. Dan Kroger likes to say, this one result stands out above the rest. The most meaningful outcome of this project is not a better understanding of the priesthood of all believers, or how laypersons might form a ministerial identity, or why the laity might or might not function as ministers, or even how to enable lay ministers to serve to their fullest capacity. The most meaningful result of this project is the personal transformation I have experienced. This process, now over, continues to work within me, preparing me for the future. Will I encounter the same issues in future ministry settings? What are the narratives of opportunity (and concern?) that are not yet in view, just over the horizon? And how will I respond?

I do not know what lies ahead. There is no way that Joseph could have known when his brothers sold him into slavery, when he was carried off into Egypt, or when he was imprisoned for years how he was being formed and transformed for the future awaiting him. That future was

¹ Marcel Proust, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, vol. 4, *In Search of Lost Time* (New York, NY: Random House, 1999), 53.

latent within him, and yet he slowly moved toward it in the providence of God. To quote my own words from earlier in this paper:

[My] personal growth and transformation has been and will be a slow, continual process... And I hope I will be able to look back on this time in my life and say with Joseph, "What others intended for evil, God intended for good."

In fact, I am already able to make this affirmation. I feel confident that I am a better minister because of my experiences throughout this project process. And because of this hindsight, I can claim with foresight that even in a yet-to-be future, God is at work for good in all things.² I only hope that God will continue to work through me and through my ministry, and through the ministries of all of God's people.

² Cf. Romans 8:28.

APPENDIX ONE

Called: A Sermon on Matthew 4:18-23¹

¹⁸As Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea – for they were fishermen. ¹⁹And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers for people.” ²⁰Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

²¹As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them.

²²Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

²³Jesus led them throughout Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and every sickness among the people.²

I hear this scripture and others like it, and I almost immediately start wondering, *Could I do that? Do I have what it takes to follow Jesus? If a clear call came to me this afternoon, could I get up out of my chair and walk out the door without taking my keys or turning off the lights? Could I leave supper on the plate and my family at the table and go off to God-knows-where, without so much as a word or a wave?* That’s more-or-less what these first four disciples did.³

Jesus is strolling along the edge of the Sea of Galilee (more of a lake, really), the shoreline of which is dotted with small fishing camps and villages. As he looks out over the lake

¹ An audio recording of this sermon is available at <http://www.esbcgreenville.org/listen-online>, uploaded February 9, 2014.

² Matthew 4:18-23, author’s translation.

³ These images borrowed from and inspired by Barbara Brown Taylor, “Miracle on the Beach,” in *Home by Another Way* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 38.

and down the rocky beach, he sees them: two men, fishing, waist-deep in water, casting nets with a skill that only comes from years in their trade.

As he walks by, Jesus tosses out an invitation from the shore. “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men and women,” he says, with an accent not of this world. And like the fish in their nets, Simon and Andrew are caught, tangled in the web of welcome Jesus has thrown over them. They wade out of the water and fall in with this stranger, now a friend and leader, as he continues to walk along.

At the next camp down the beach, the three men meet three more – two brothers and their father, working on the nets in their boat, doing the tedious maintenance required to keep the family business running. Jesus invites them, too, although we’re not exactly sure how (maybe with the same words as before?). In any case, Jesus calls, and the two brothers follow, leaving their father and their boat behind.

None of these men asked Jesus about the salary or vacation days or health benefits of their new people-fisher role. And neither did Jesus ask for them for their employment history or educational background or a resume with references. It wouldn’t have done him any good anyway. Simon and Andrew and James and John wouldn’t have been educated, probably not even able to read. I doubt they’d ever been more than a few miles from home, and likely didn’t have more than a few shekels in their pockets. They would have had a hard time getting references, too. The ancient writer Cicero described fishermen as “vulgar,” listing them last in his ranking of occupations.⁴

But Jesus does not seem bothered by their calloused hands, their crass speech, their grimy fingernails, or their wet, foul-smelling clothes. In fact, no sooner had their clothes begun to dry

⁴ Cicero, *De Officiis*, ed. Walter Miller, Loeb Classical Library 30 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1913), 1.150.

out and air out than they are plunged into Jesus' ministry of compassion and care, making clean and whole the broken, the infirmed, the despairing, and the downtrodden. Right away, these four former fishermen are alongside Jesus, teaching and proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom and healing all kinds of disease and sickness.

You might not think it, though, the way the scripture reads. Right after he called these first four disciples, "Jesus *went* throughout Galilee..."⁵ Is that how your translation reads in verse 23? It almost sounds like he's by himself, doesn't it?

But that Greek verb, while it can mean "to go around," primarily means "to *lead* around."⁶ Has the Gospel writer already forgotten that Simon, Andrew, James and John are with Jesus; that they've become participants in his ministry by responding to his invitation to discipleship? We're just a few verses after these new followers have left their nets and responded to Jesus' call, and yet they seem to fade out of sight and out of mind as Jesus ministers to the people of Galilee.

It could be easy for us to forget about these first four disciples who are now with Jesus, having joined him in his ministry, experiencing ministry for themselves.

Then again, maybe we would prefer to forget about them. Wouldn't it be easier if Jesus called disciples, and then went ahead and did his ministry on his own? Wouldn't it be simpler if he called disciples to watch him do ministry, to observe him as *he* serves? It would certainly be much easier on those of us who consider ourselves his followers.

But they were there – right there with him, sharing good news with people who desperately needed to hear some good news; healing people from debilitating disease and

⁵ Matthew 4:23, NRSV.

⁶ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, s.v. "περιάγω," (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2000), 798-799.

sickness, both spiritual and physical; teaching people and showing people what God's reign on earth would look like.

And when we recognize their presence with Jesus, then we may recognize our own accountability to participate in Christ's ministry. After all, the life of following Jesus – the Christian life – “is not a matter of going limp in God's arms,” as Barbara Brown Taylor put it.⁷ Following Jesus means a life of active and intentional discipleship; loving and serving and healing and forgiving in his name; doing his work. If we answer the call to follow, we answer the call to minister.

And haven't we? Haven't we answered the call of Jesus, those of us who call ourselves “Christian”?

Well, yeah. Sure. Of course.

But not like those first disciples, the poster boys of Christian faith and enthusiasm who dropped everything and went with Jesus to serve the people of Galilee, working miracles and restoring people's bodies and souls and embodying the presence of God in the world. We could never do something like that, could we?

Could we?

We often hold up those first disciples as models of what it means to follow Jesus and participate in his work; of what it means to do ministry. We sometimes even do the same with modern day missionaries and contemporary clergy. But when we do, we might be excusing ourselves from fully joining in Christ's work, letting ourselves fade away into the background. It

⁷ Taylor, “Miracle on the Beach,” 37.

can be easy for us to forget that Jesus called *extra-ordinary* people right in the midst of their *extra-ordinary* lives to do *extraordinary* things. And, he still does.⁸

In part, this is what I have been exploring in my doctor of ministry work. I've asked various people to share their memories of a time when they felt like someone ministered to them, to try to understand how we all can minister to one another. And I'd like to share one of those with you this morning. But because it is his story and not mine, I'm going to ask Bill Smith to come up and share his experience of ministry.

Bill: Hi. For most stories you need a little bit of context.

For those of you that don't know me, my name is Bill Smith and I am a science teacher here in Greenville County. I love what I do, and I love what I effect. But I was not always a teacher, or very happy for that matter. I did not grow up with a minister as a friend. My minister was my grandmother. When my mom, dad, and I came home from the hospital forty-four-some-odd years ago, we lived in an old converted barn behind my grandparents' house. I was trouble, early. My grandmother used to tell of me stealing away from my mother and bursting through her back door, announcing, "Don't tell her I'm here." I was the first son of her first son, and I was her favorite. (Just ask my brothers.)

Twenty-one years ago I found myself back in the barn after going to Clemson and moving back to Greenville. Things soon began to fall apart. I quit my job. I pushed my girlfriend and most other friends and family away. I spiraled down further than I had ever been before, or since. I remember one afternoon – over a year after I had imploded and then exploded – sitting with my grandmother on the steps of her back porch. It was warm again. We hadn't talked – really talked – for a while. Because twenty-somethings, at least in my experience, are as dumb as a bag of hammers. I was anyway. So she asked me how I was, and I knew what she meant. She had seen it in me. I talked about how I was, how I had been down for months, sunk under the muck that was inside of my head. But it was clearing. It was lifting, and I could feel it. Then Ina Rose opened: she had been on anti-depressants for forty-odd years and had been fighting depression for many more.

"There's no shame in it," she said. "It is part of you, as it is part of me. If you ever need anything, we are here. If you ever need a hug, I'm here."

⁸ David Lose, "Fishers of People," Dear Working Preacher. Updated January 20, 2014, accessed February 12, 2014, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3018>.

That afternoon, my grandmother ministered to me just by letting me into her life... She's been gone now almost three years, and I see her fearlessness and her tenacity in my daughter every single day. And I miss her.

So, did Bill's grandmother do something *extraordinary*? It might not seem so. Two people on a back porch. A conversation. It seems pretty ordinary to me. And yet Bill remembers that experience, a moment of pain shared and grace extended.

That's ministry. It's something that any of us *could* do. It's something that many of you are doing already.

Like when you were greeting people on Sunday morning, offering a smile and a warm welcome to people as they come into this place, when you noticed a woman who looked like she'd been crying. When you asked her how she's doing, if she's OK, she told you she recently found out that her brother is dying. And even though you'd never really spoken with her before, the two of you stepped aside while you prayed with her.

Or when you sat with the family during that four-hour surgery, going straight to the hospital after a long day at work; when you let them talk through their anxieties, when you helped them to laugh, when you went downstairs and got them coffee so they wouldn't have to leave the waiting room. And then you celebrated with them when the surgery was successfully over.

And how about the time when you were here all the time – opening and closing doors, turning lights on and off, setting up tables, chairs, and partitions; making sure the sanctuary is clean and the trash from the kitchen is taken out; practicing hospitality and creating an inviting space for people to grow closer to God and to each other.

Or when you come in after your paying job to do your unpaid work, writing checks and checking contributions, making sure the church is running smoothly.

And those times when you visited members who can no longer come to this place, going to see them in their homes or nursing homes, not just because you are on a committee or a team, but because you have relationships with these people. And when they pass away, Stephen and Janice and I⁹ are at the funeral to lead the service, and you are there, too, to grieve our collective loss.

Or when you were calling and writing notes and sending emails to the hundreds of church members we haven't seen in a while, many of whom have ongoing needs in their lives; when you let them know they are missed, that we have not forgotten about them, that our church cares about them. And even when a staff member thanks you for doing this and you say, "Oh, it's nothing. I can do this kind of clerical work. I just can't imagine doing real ministry." And like I told you that day, "That *is* ministry."

And of course, there was that time when I was slipping into the depression I have and had struggled against, and you called to check on me; you cancelled plans and made time to have lunch and talk; you invited me to go for a walk with you on a sunny day, to get me out of the house and out of the office; you supported me and encouraged me and showed me grace, even when I couldn't offer it to myself. Who was the minister then?

I'm often asked, when meeting people for the first time, what I do for a living. And usually, with some reluctance (because you never know how people are going to respond), I'll answer, "I'm a minister."

And if that person doesn't completely shut down and stop talking to me for fear that I will condemn them to hellfire and brimstone; and if they don't tell me their entire life story and

⁹ Stephen, Janice, and I are the three ordained ministers on the church's ministerial staff, and the three that most regularly participate in funeral services.

confess every sin they've ever committed in an impromptu counseling sessions; they will usually ask me, at some point in our conversation, "So how many ministers do your church have?"

What if I said to that person, "About a thousand."? Can you imagine their response?

"What?! A thousand ministers?! How many *members* does your church have?!"

"About a thousand."

Brothers and sisters, fellow followers of Christ and ministers with him:

We have been called – all of us; each of us. Christ calls us to follow, and not only to follow, but to participate in his work. The possibilities for how we carry out his ministry are almost endless. But in the end, we have been called. *You* have been called. How could you respond?¹⁰

*I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in deepest sin,
My hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?*

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

*I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain.
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone;
Give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?*

¹⁰ At this point in the service, the choir sang the anthem, "Here I Am, Lord" (words and music, Dan Schutte; arr. Craig Courtney), the text of which is printed here.

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

*I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them,
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide,
'Til their hearts be satisfied.
I will give my life to them,
Whom shall I send?*

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

Have you heard God's call upon your life? Have you heard Christ calling you to follow him? If so, we want to invite you to respond – to begin your journey of faith in Christ, or to recommit yourself to live as his follower, or maybe to join this community of faith as we do our best to fulfill the ministry Christ has given us.

Whatever your response today, we want to support you and encourage you. If you would like to make a public response of faith or join this church, a pastor will be at the front to receive you as we sing together.

APPENDIX TWO

Closing Liturgy from the *Experience Ministry Retreat*¹

- Libby:** Jesus has called us to follow in his way,
- Wendell:** He has sent us to carry out his ministry.
- Joe:** And he has taught us many things in parables, saying
- Blaun:** “Those who have ears to hear, let them hear;
- Bill:** those who have eyes to see, let them see;
- Barbara:** those who have mouths to speak, let them speak;
- Russell:** those who have hands and feet to do, let them do...”
- Greg:** And to what shall we compare this ministry of the kingdom?
- Libby:** It is like someone who pushes a non-believer, “dropping heavy blows,” only to realize he is planting seeds, and God is doing the work of growth.
- ALL:** *The kingdom of God.*
- Wendell:** It is like risky sacrifice; being interrupted with an inconvenient ministry; knowing our gifts and our limitations; unexpected opportunities to minister with “the least of these,” even when we may not realize we are doing it!
- ALL:** *The kingdom of God.*

¹ This litany is partially borrowed from one Dr. Dan Kroger wrote and shared with the Drew University Global/Online Cohort, August 2, 2013.

Joe: It is like a woman who is lonely and dealing with family struggles, who calls someone almost everyday, and even though she doesn't know what else to do, she listens.

ALL: *The kingdom of God.*

Blaun: It is like a woman who experiences a miscarriage and tells herself she doesn't need to mourn, only to have someone bring her flowers, call her out, and give her permission to grieve.

ALL: *The kingdom of God.*

Bill: It is like caring enough to let them know that you know they are hurting, and a lot of little things that represent and add up to A BIG THING.

ALL: *The kingdom of God.*

Barbara: It is like a 1000-piece puzzle of colored pencils—the variety of which is wonderful!—each piece offering a different gift to meet a different need.

ALL: *The kingdom of God.*

Russell: It is like being there, even if I don't remember what you said, but remembering that you made us feel loved and supported.

ALL: *The kingdom of God.*

Greg: It is like the most “insignificant” thing that can be the most meaningful, because we do it in the name of Christ.

ALL: *The kingdom of God.*

Greg: Brothers and sisters – fellow ministers – on behalf of Christ I commission you to do the work of Christ as the body of Christ, to do the ministry of the Kingdom of God as citizens of that Kingdom.

Go, then, to love and serve the Lord by loving and serving others in His name.

And may God give you the grace never to sell yourself short;
grace to risk something big for something good;
grace to remember that the world is too dangerous for anything but truth,
and too small for anything but love.

So, may God take your minds and think through them;
may God take your lips and speak through them;
may God take your hands and work through them;
may God take your hearts and set them on fire.²

AMEN.

² William Sloane Coffin originally wrote this benediction, later adapted by Steve Shoemaker.

APPENDIX THREE

Sent: A Sermon on Luke 10:1-11¹

Today, on the first Sunday in Lent, we stand just inside the threshold of this holy season of self-examination, self-denial, and self-sacrifice. And today we stand with Jesus at the beginning of his journey – and our journey with him – to the cross. At the end of chapter nine of Luke’s Gospel, Jesus has “*set his face to go to Jerusalem,*”² marking the beginning of his movement toward the Holy City. From that, we might get the impression that his journey will be arrow-like – no pausing; no relaxing; that the path has been chosen.

And yet, all along the way, Jesus is still carrying out his ministry. He shares food around the table, he proclaims the kingdom of God, and he cares for the needs of those he meets. Even as Jesus moves deeper and deeper into the shadow cast by a cross on the horizon, he continues his preaching, teaching and ministering. In fact, in our scripture for today, just a few verses after Jesus has “set his face,” he sends out his followers “before his face,” ahead of him, to do what he has already been doing while they have been with him.³

I invite you to follow along as we read from Luke, chapter ten, verses one through eleven. And as we do, may we each hear a good word from God for us today.

¹After this, the Lord commissioned seventy(-two) others and sent them, in pairs, ahead of him, to every town and place where he was about to go.

¹ An audio recording of this sermon is available at <http://www.esbcgreenville.org/listen-online>, uploaded March 9, 2014.

² Luke 9:51, NRSV.

³ Luke 10:1, author’s translation (see below).

²He said to them, “The harvest is great, but the workers, few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest that he would send out workers into his harvest.

³Go on! See! – I am sending you out like lambs in the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no money-pouch, no bag, no sandals, and greet nobody on the road. ⁵Whenever you go into a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ ⁶And if anybody there shares in this peace, your peace will rest upon them. But if not, it will return to you. ⁷Remain in the same house, eating and drinking what is [provided] for you, for the worker deserves their pay. Do not move around from house to house. ⁸And whenever you go into a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you, ⁹and heal the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ ¹⁰But whenever you go into a town and they do not receive you, go out into its streets saying, ¹¹‘Even the dust from your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off for you. Nevertheless, know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’”

I don’t think I would let Jesus be in charge of recruiting volunteers.

Can you imagine? You hear the chimes, the choir comes in, and Jesus steps to the pulpit to do the welcome and announcements:

We are so glad you’re here today. Just a reminder: we still need about seventy people for a service opportunity that’s coming up. This will be a great way for you to go out into some strange, uncomfortable, and potentially dangerous places. You’ll need to rely only on people’s hospitality, and there’s a good chance people won’t respond very well. Oh, and please remember: don’t to take anything with you that would make it easier or more comfortable. Okay? Great! You can register on the website, or you can sign up on the bulletin board outside of Greg’s office.

No. I know better. I know you’ve got to make it easy for people to get on board with a ministry – don’t make it too much of a commitment; make it sound exciting, better than it is; and always (always!) offer food.

But the way he goes about it, Jesus doesn’t seem to want many disciples. I didn’t hear any promises of dessert, and he certainly doesn’t make the work his followers will be doing sound easy or fun.

It almost sounds like the story Fred Craddock tells of a young American who went to Tibet to become a Buddhist monk. He went to the Abbot of the monastery and said, "I want to become a monk."

"Really?" the Abbot said.

"Yes."

"Well, that means seven years of silence, after which you get two words."

He went through seven years of total silence, then the Abbot called him in and said, "You may now say two words."

"Cold breakfast," he said.

"Are you going to stay?" the Abbot asked.

"Yes."

"Well, that means seven more years of silence, then two words."

After seven more years, the Abbot called him in. "You may now say two words."

He said, "Hard bed."

"Are you going to stay?"

"Yes," the man said.

Seven more years... then the Abbot called him in and said, "You have two words."

He said, "I quit."

And the Abbot said, "It's probably just as well. Ever since you've been here you've done nothing but complain."⁴

I don't know if it's *that* hard, but it is hard to be a follower of Jesus, especially when we know where he's headed. It's hard when he sends us out into our lives, into our areas of

⁴ Fred Craddock, "But If the Answer Is No," *The Collected Sermons of Fred Craddock* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 161-162.

influence, into our world to do his work. And even more so with the kind of instructions he gives:

“Don’t take a lot of extra stuff. You may think you need it. You don’t. All the things you use to make yourself feel comfortable – the soft couch, the name-brand labels, a nice dinner; your schedule, your pride, your guilt, your anger. Leave your baggage – emotional, mental, *and* physical – behind.

As you go out to do this work, don’t go about it lazily or haphazardly. You could stumble into an opportunity for ministry along the way, but I’m sending you with a purpose: to seek out chances to proclaim the good news of the kingdom, in word and deed. Be intentional about it.

And when you go into a place and meet the people, treat everyone them all the same. Offer each a blessing of peace when you arrive, regardless of how they react. Don’t move around town looking for the best food or the softest pillow, either. Whether it’s canned meat from the food pantry or a gourmet meal from the *Fresh Market*, whether they offer you a tiny cot or a king-size *Tempurpedic*, if they welcome you, stay there. We don’t want anyone to get the idea that there are distinctions before God, so you can’t make any either. Got it?”

“Got it, Jesus.”

“And all along, you’ll be telling them the good news, that the kingdom of God has come near – in me, and in you, too, as you do my work.”

“OK. But what if they don’t want to hear about it? What if they won’t give us the time of day?”

“Oh, yeah. That’s a tough one. There will be people who won’t invite you in, who won’t even want to chat over a cup of coffee. But regardless of how they react, you do the same thing.

To those who accept it, ‘The kingdom of God has come near.’ To those who don’t, ‘The kingdom of God has come near.’

Here’s the thing you’re really going to have to get in your head: You aren’t responsible for their response. Leave that to God, and then leave. Move on and seek another opportunity. Dust off your feet and keep walking. It’ll be hard, because you might think you’ve failed; that you didn’t do any good. You may see others who seem to get a better response from people than you do. You’ll probably get caught up in the numbers game, too, counting heads to calculate your ‘success.’ But I’m not sending you to be ‘successful.’ I’m sending you to be faithful to this work I’ve called you into.

OK? OK. So go, taking nothing with you. Have a singular focus with a single message. Stay wherever you can and eat whatever you are given. And there are no guaranteed results. (In fact, you often won’t get results.)⁵

What a sales pitch! Any takers?

And yet somehow, Jesus gets a great turnout. Seventy-something people go out in pairs. (Some ancient manuscripts say seventy, some say seventy-two, but both numbers signify completeness; they both mean “the whole group.”) Jesus sends them out – all of them – “before his face,” as it reads in Greek, to be his face and his hands and his feet and his voice; to carry his presence with them and to carry out his ministry wherever they go. He sends them all – thirty-five or thirty-six pairs of followers who, having followed and observed as bystanders, are now sent into action.

And I wonder what kinds of experiences they had when they went out. Was anyone upset that Jesus himself didn’t come? That he sent these ordinary people instead? And what stories did they have to tell when they returned?

⁵ This paraphrase inspired by Fred Craddock, “But If the Answer is No.”

“One lady had been sick. She had to go to the hospital, and when she got home I brought her a meal. She didn’t *need* the food; she had plenty. But she told me, ‘Just bringing this lets me know that you know I’m here; that I’m hurting. It’s just a little thing, but it represents and it adds up to a big thing. Thank you.’ And I felt like it wasn’t so much about what I did, but simply that I showed her I cared.”

The kingdom of God has come near.

“I became friends with this guy who is a not a person of faith – a non-believer. And I would try so hard to get him to come to church, inviting him to Sunday School, dropping heavy blows on him. But then he had to go in to have a surgery, and when I found out I called him. He was nervous about going under the knife, so I told him I would be praying for him and for the surgery. And he said, ‘Thanks.’ I realized it was God doing the work; that I was just planting seeds.”

The kingdom of God has come near.

“I developed a relationship with a pregnant woman who was like a teacher to me. She was wise. She often gave me counsel. I really admired her. One day I found out that she had lost the baby. I saw her a few days later, and it was like she had decided not to mourn the loss. I knew she was hurting, though. So I went out on a limb, and I went to her house. When she opened the door, I gave her the flowers I had gotten her and said, ‘You need to grieve this loss.’ And she broke down. It was like I gave her permission to grieve.”

The kingdom of God has come near.

“I met a man who had been struggling with depression – beating himself up over the guilt, the fear, the shame. He became an alcoholic to cope. During my time there, we became close. He said he trusted me and confided in me. He seemed to be doing better, but he relapsed

shortly before I moved to the next place. I don't know how he's doing, or even if I made a difference in his life. I just tried to show him, with what I said and did, that the kingdom of God has come near.”

These are our stories – *your* stories. And I can't wait to hear what kinds of experiences and stories Hannah and Lucy Brewer will have as they go along their journey of faith, doing the work of Christ in their lives, ministering to others in his name.⁶ Because we are *all* Christ's ministers – all of us who have passed through the waters of baptism. With our head still wet, Christ sends us into our lives and into our world to carry on his work.

And when we do his work, the kingdom comes near. Walter Rauschenbusch reminds us that the kingdom of God is always on the way, but we can never say it has arrived. It is “always coming, always pressing in on the present, always big with possibility, and always inviting immediate action.”⁷ When we do the work Christ sends us to do, the kingdom comes a little bit closer as we realize God's reign on earth in some small way.

This passage is a reminder to us all that the mission and ministry of Christ and his Church are not the work of only a few specially called professionals. Jesus sends out seventy-something of his followers – representing all of us – and it's no mistake that he sends us out in pairs; in relationship; together; as a community. As David Lose writes,

When one falters, the other can help. When one is lost, the other can seek the way. When one is discouraged, the other can hold faith for both for a while. That's what the company of believers [the body of Christ] does – we hold on to each other, console each other, encourage and embolden each other...even believe for each other.⁸

⁶ These two girls were baptized on the day of this sermon.

⁷ Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York, NY: Cosimo, 2010), 141.

⁸ David Lose, “The Greater Gift,” *Working Preacher*, Updated July 1, 2013, accessed February 26, 2014, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=2617>.

We are all in this thing together, and we need each other. We all have different gifts. “Many parts, one body,” as the Apostle Paul says.⁹

And the body of Christ needs you, too. *This* body of Christ at Earle Street Baptist Church needs you. You have gifts Stephen and Janice and Paula and Denise and Lucy and I don’t have.¹⁰ You can reach people we can’t reach. Those seventy-some ministers Jesus sent out went to places, encountered people, met needs, and transformed lives that Jesus could not have as one man, or even with twelve disciples. And you do, too, as you minister in his name and, in doing so, bring the kingdom a little bit closer.

Brothers and sisters – fellow ministers of Christ and of the kingdom of God – you are sent: into your everyday lives, into the lives of those around you, into the world in which we live.

You are sent: by Christ himself, to do his work, as a part of his Church, his Body.

So how could you make the kingdom come near? How could you do the ministry of Christ in your life? How could you be intentional, sacrificial, gracious, and faithful, in this season of Lent, and throughout your life?

You *are* sent. Will you go?

AMEN.

[After the hymn of commitment, I spoke the following words to send the congregation forth.]

⁹ cf. Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

¹⁰ These are the names of people who are on the ministerial staff of the church.

When Jesus began his ministry, he said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...”¹¹ And as we go to do his work as his ministers, the Spirit of the Lord is upon *us*. The Spirit of the Lord is upon *you*.

So let us love and serve the Lord by loving and serving others in his name.

And may God give you the grace never to sell yourselves short;

grace to risk something big for something good;

grace to remember that the world is too dangerous for anything but truth,

and too small for anything but love.

May God take your minds and think through them;

May God take your lips and speak through them;

May God take your hands and work through them;

May God take your hearts and set them on fire.¹²

AMEN.

¹¹ Luke 4:18, NRSV.

¹² William Sloane Coffin originally wrote this benediction, later adapted by Steve Shoemaker. I used this benediction to close the *Experience Ministry* retreat, in addition to this worship service.

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