

Rooted and Reaching: Liturgically Formed for Mission

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Abstract

This is a project about Second Reformed Church in Zeeland, Michigan at the intersection of missiology, ecclesiology, and leadership—the three main subjects of the cohort, *Leading with God Ahead of Us*. This project explores the liturgy of Second Church as a dynamic influence on the church in mission. The rhythms of our weekly Sunday morning liturgy are formative for the people of Second Reformed Church. Not only are people rooted and grounded in God’s presence through Word and Sacrament, but they are also sent out from worship to engage specific places in God’s world using their gifts and passions to serve others.

The practice of ethnography reveals the ways the liturgy challenges, confirms, and inspires the people of Second Church to engage in mission. The liturgy of Second Reformed Church provides a framework for that service and engagement, whether at home, work, serving on a non-profit board, direct community service, or financial generosity.

The connection between liturgy and mission is not new for Second Reformed Church, yet this focus comes at a critical moment in Second’s story. The building project (completed in 2018) included vision for a different kind of community engagement that we have not yet embraced due to a pastoral crisis followed by a global pandemic. In this season of re-emerging from a global pandemic, Second is poised to explore critical questions around mission. By shaping a house of language around mission, this project demonstrates how liturgy helps Second Church to be “rooted and reaching” in Zeeland and beyond.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In 2015, Second Reformed Church in Zeeland, Michigan¹ began designating a Sunday in Advent as a time for our children and youth to serve as worship leaders. We try to keep the order of worship the same as it is for all Advent Sundays yet substitute the sermon with Scripture or dramatic readings (and interpretation). Each year we invite our young worship leaders to choose how they would like to use their gifts, whether with musical instruments, dance, or simply donning a costume. Coordinating these Sundays is an incredible amount of work yet continues to bear much fruit in the life of Second Church.

It was a great loss during the pandemic beginning in 2020 to not be able to offer the Children and Youth liturgy Sunday during Advent. As church activity slowly resumed in 2021, many of our young families were hesitant to return or, at the least, infrequent in their attendance. Even with encouraged masking and the promise of vaccination availability for ages 5+, Sunday morning in-person participation remains inconsistent at best. Still, we felt we had a critical mass that warranted bringing back our Children and Youth liturgy on the Third Sunday of Advent, December 12, 2021.

With much cajoling via endless texts, emails, and Facebook messages, 38 children and youth (between the ages of 2 and 18) committed to participating. Since our tradition is to plan something that requires very little rehearsal and always leaves room for last-

¹ For ease of reading, I will refer to Second Reformed Church of Zeeland, Michigan as Second Church or Second through the remainder of the thesis.

minute changes, I knew to hold those commitments loosely until the actual day. Our brief Saturday morning rehearsal was surprisingly well-attended and went smoothly. In classic Second Church fashion, Sunday morning arrival times were all over the place, with at least one key player showing up just minutes before everything began. We managed to get everyone in costumes and to where they needed to be before the prelude began.

The sanctuary was abuzz with sound and activity. The pews were the fullest they'd been on a Sunday morning since March 2020. After a piano prelude first offered by a 10th grader and then by a 4th grader, I welcomed the congregation to worship. I reminded the congregation (which included plenty of visiting relatives and friends) that the morning was not a performance, but worship, albeit with their children and grandchildren serving as our worship leaders. The work is the same, and these young worship leaders continue pointing us to God's presence in our midst.

That's exactly how the next hour transpired. Even after almost two years of sporadic worship attendance, these beautiful young children knew what to do. They effortlessly switched from their regular roles of responding in worship to leading worship. Their voices were strong, clear, and intentioned. They were not performative, instead holding themselves with humility and a clear sense of service. They responded in full to the invitation to lead us in worship and did it beautifully.

My heart is still overflowing with joy and hope from that experience. To me it demonstrates the significance of liturgical formation at Second Church. It confirms my passion for the intention and action of communal worship, particularly intergenerational worship. Even when we think the children are distracted or tuned out, they are observing

and participating in the rhythms of worship. The repeated refrains and responses become as natural as breath. The simple sign language we teach for a few songs and prayers welcome the movement of squirmy bodies. Children come forward for communion with hands outstretched and eagerly await their piece of “Jesus-bread” as one 3-year-old calls it, confident and hopeful in the grace and nourishment it offers.

This story is just one example of how the rhythms of our weekly Sunday morning liturgy are deeply formative for the people of Second Church. People are rooted and grounded in God’s presence through the liturgy, and they are also sent out with the liturgy alive in them to engage specific places in God’s world using their gifts and passions to serve others. The liturgy of Second Church forms people for that service and engagement, whether at home, work, serving on a non-profit board, direct community service, or financial generosity.

Discovering a House of Language

This project explores the liturgy of Second Church through a constructivist approach seeking to understand and navigate identity through language. This includes the *language* of litanies, prayers, hymns, and the actions of children, adults, and leaders. Liturgy has been a passion of mine for many years, and I believe firmly in its power to form followers of Christ. Exploring and shaping the liturgy of Second Church will also hopefully strengthen the members of Second Church in their own understanding of liturgy and its connection to the whole of their lives.

The project also explores the ways the people of Second Church engage in and understand mission activity. By shaping a house of language around mission, this project

demonstrates how liturgy challenges, confirms, and inspires the people of Second Church to engage in mission and the call to connect in our local communities. While harder to measure or quantify, the external community benefits greatly from this understanding and action around mission as members of Second Church commit to engagement with neighbors and service agencies through a seamless movement between liturgy and mission.

Context: Second Reformed Church in Zeeland, MI

This project is rooted in Zeeland, Michigan and in the life of Second Church. This project also connects more broadly in Holland and West Michigan where members of Second Church live and work. Zeeland was founded as a Dutch Immigrant settlement in 1847. Zeeland has significant ties to its history, even as the demographics of the community have changed. The Zeeland Historical Society maintains two historic properties, including the Dekker Huis Museum and the 1881 New Groningen Schoolhouse.² While events organized by the society and held throughout Zeeland are most often attended by older, long-term residents, all local elementary-aged children learn early Zeeland history in the public-school curriculum.

Second Church began at the turn of the 19th century. In 1903 a group of church members were determined to initiate an English-speaking congregation. Since 1904, Second Church has been gathering and sending her people out to live the good news wherever they find themselves. From early on in her history Second has been connected

² More information can be found at <https://www.zeelandhistory.org/>

to the business community and significant philanthropic effort. She has also regularly told the story of being a congregation with doors more open than other churches in the community, particularly in welcoming those often rejected in other settings.³

The demographics of the membership of Second Church do not align with the changing demographics of Zeeland. Second skews to highly educated professionals and retirees. The reality of Zeeland is an increasing ALICE (asset limited, income constrained, employed) population with significant needs around affordable housing, transportation, childcare, and food stability. How we tell the story of our community matters. And how we tell this story impacts how we understand and experience who God is and what God asks of us.

Defining Terms

Worship in a Christian context is understood as ascribing worth to God. We do this as a gathered community through the actions of silence and listening; the speaking, hearing, and singing of words; the sacraments of baptism and communion; and collecting and dedicating tithes and offerings. Worship is a participative act that can be seen as receiving from God (scripture and sacrament), communicating with God (prayers and songs), and communicating together about God (prayers, sermons, songs, creeds).

It matters that worship is a communal act. *The Worship Sourcebook* states that “Worship is a first-person-plural activity. It is extremely significant in worship that

³ As of this writing, we have not yet fully engaged a human sexuality conversation in our context. There is some fear that the open doors of the past will not be applied as generously, particularly considering the national political and social conversations.

otherwise remarkably different people nevertheless offer praise together, pray together, listen together, and make promises together.”⁴ This helpfully distinguishes worship from personal devotion. The 1978 photo directory of Second Church states,

Without apology, we believe worship to be central in the Christian experience. The celebration of the Gospel on Sunday incorporates adoration, confession, thankfulness, and dedication. We believe worship takes many forms. Worship services during Advent, Lent, and other seasons of the Christian year appeal to and involve children, youth, and adults. For our life together in Second Reformed Church, worship uplifts and renews us, preparing us for our ministries in the week ahead.

Different traditions may emphasize varying elements of worship (or forms). The Reformed heritage of Second Church prioritizes a three-fold order in Approach, Word, and Response, with primary emphasis on the centrality of Word. Scripture is spoken, sung, heard, and interpreted every week in worship.

Liturgy literally means “work of the people” and has its roots in a broader politic. Alexander Schmemmann writes, “the original meaning of the Greek word *leitourgia*...meant an action by which a group of people become something corporately which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals—a whole greater than the sum of its parts.”⁵ Or as Ruth Meyers says, “Liturgy is the assembly’s work for the common good, for the sake of the world.”⁶

⁴ *The Worship Sourcebook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, 2013), 17.

⁵ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), 25.

⁶ Ruth A. Meyers, “Mission and Worship: Making the Connection,” *Liturgy (Washington)* 31, no. 4 (2016): 3–10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2016.1194671>.

Philosopher James K. A. Smith, writes extensively on liturgies as “formative practices.”⁷ In *Desiring the Kingdom*, he makes the core claim that

Liturgies make us certain kinds of people, and what defines us is what we *love*. [Liturgies] do this because we are the sorts of animals whose orientation to the world is shaped from the body up more than from the head down. Liturgies aim our love to different ends precisely by training our hearts through our bodies. They prime us to approach the world in a certain way, to value certain things, to aim for certain goals, to pursue certain dreams, to work together on certain projects. In short, every liturgy constitutes a pedagogy that teaches us, in all sorts of precognitive ways, to be a certain kind of person. Hence every liturgy is an education, and embedded in every liturgy is an implicit worldview or ‘understanding’ of the world.

Smith includes both secular and sacred practices as liturgies yet emphasizes the formative nature of historic Christian worship “because it educates our hearts through our bodies (which in turn renews our mind), and does so in a way that is more universally accessible (and I would add, more universally effective) than many of the overly cognitive worship habits we have acquired in modernity.”⁸

In this project liturgy refers most directly to Sunday morning worship services at Second Church.⁹ Liturgy is then the movements of a people who are called, gathered, centered, and sent¹⁰ through singing, praying, hearing the Word, feasting at the table,

⁷James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 24.

⁸ Smith, 137.

⁹ In *Desiring the Kingdom*, Smith notes that he uses liturgy as a synonym for worship (25). This flexibility is helpful in a context like Second that is not afraid of the word “liturgy” and is perhaps more likely to use the word “worship.”

¹⁰ Patrick Keifert, *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era* (Eagle, ID: Allelon Publishing, 2006), 28.

giving our offerings, and speaking together. It is the act of remembering, translating, and interpreting faith expressed through worship within a local church.

The word liturgy is often associated with a high church model. A better word to differentiate liturgical style is *ceremony*. High church liturgies are highly ceremonial. At Second we see this expressed through processions, vestments, formal language in prayers and litanies, and other intentional movements around sacraments, furnishings, and traditions.

A *litany* is a call and response series of sentences exchanged between a leader(s) and the gathered congregation. A litany intentionally gives the gathered a participative voice in a service of worship.

In the Reformed tradition, as a member of the Protestant wing of the Christian household, we celebrate two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper (may also be called eucharist or communion). A *sacrament* is a visible sign of invisible grace wherein we experience God's covenant promises. In the sacraments God comes to us first, inviting our participation. In the baptismal liturgy we remind the baptized and the gathered community that we love because God first loved us. In baptism we participate in Christ's death and resurrection as we die to sin and are raised to new life in Christ. This participation continues even after baptism as we daily remember and commit to this new life. The minister declares to the newly baptized, while making the sign of the cross on

their head, “Child of the covenant, in baptism, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ’s own forever.”¹¹

In the communion liturgy we are invited to participate in a “feast of remembrance, communion, and hope.”¹² J. Todd Billings writes,

In the sign-act of the Supper, God gives an instrument to his people to participate in his steady, eternal love. Through the Supper, the Spirit joins God’s people into the life and mission of the Son sent by the Father to show the triune God’s love to the world. The triune God’s love is not a spigot or even a fountain, but a raging waterfall that carries along his people as they are moved and sent into a world parched for life.¹³

In both sacraments, the liturgy, and throughout worship, we participate as God names us and sends us into life in this world to engage in mission.

Catholic theologians Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder write, “Mission takes the church *beyond* itself into history, into culture, into people’s lives, beckoning it constantly to ‘cross frontiers’” and to engage with others.¹⁴ Mission is God’s movement toward the world that reflects God’s heart of love. More than a program of the church, “contemporary theologians understand mission as rooted in God’s identity and purpose, God’s love for the world and God’s desire to restore all things to unity. God is a

¹¹ Liturgy for Baptism in the Reformed Church in America, accessed March 18, 2022, <https://www.rca.org/liturgy/order-for-the-sacrament-of-baptism/>.

¹² Liturgy for Communion in the Reformed Church in America, accessed March 18, 2022, <https://www.rca.org/liturgy/the-order-for-the-sacrament-of-the-lords-supper/>.

¹³ J. Todd Billings, *Remembrance, Communion, and Hope: Rediscovering the Gospel at the Lord’s Table* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2018), 138.

¹⁴ Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, American Society of Missiology Series ; No. 30 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 8.

missionary God, one who calls and sends people to participate in the divine mission.”¹⁵

This project will operationalize *mission* as the multiplicity of ways people participate with God in service to the community beyond the worshiping life of the congregation.

This might mean forming relationships with neighbors, funding local agencies, serving on non-profit boards, or participating in direct service through a local or national agency.

Inherent inheritance refers to the power of liturgical formation over time. We inherit a story and relive it weekly in worship. We wake up years later aware of how what we often took for granted or ignored in an earlier time has a power long beyond its initial action.

In a one-man Broadway show, Bruce Springsteen tells his life story from childhood to the present, punctuated by songs written and performed over several decades. For all his angst with his upbringing in the Catholic Church in central New Jersey, he cannot shake its formation. At a critical moment in the show, he narrates his recent return to his childhood home. He comes upon the yard and discovers the absence of his favorite tree. In that moment he says he falls to the ground where he had once played at the tree’s roots. The only words that come to him in this moment of profound grief and emotion are the Lord’s Prayer, which he recites in full.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ruth A. Meyers, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission: Gathering as God’s People, Going Out in God’s Name*, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies Series (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2014), 18.

¹⁶ As seen and heard at *Springsteen on Broadway* in New York City on August 25, 2021.

We see something similar in the parable of the father with two sons.¹⁷ The younger son squanders all his inheritance upon leaving home. Somewhere between running out of money and living with swine, an assumed memory calls him home. He makes his way back to the home of his inheritance; his father receives him with an embrace of love and grace. This is a father who knows only how to love this son, regardless of pain or disappointment.

Liturgy is our returning every week to the heart of the Father. Worship repeats the promise of the Father's love week after week, so even when the times, seasons, location, and places change, the liturgy grounds us in the non-negotiables of God's love. These are the roots that keep us grounded as we engage in mission. Receiving the promises of God begin with liturgy and find themselves throughout the world. This is an inherited inheritance, occurring in the least likely places, even at the ground of a lost childhood tree.

This kind of *liturgical formation* happens often without any awareness at all. Instead, the "stories seep into us" as Smith says.¹⁸ Regular participation in weekly worship inscribes habits and forms connections with God and God's gathered people. In Lent 2020 we began emphasizing four liturgical gestures at the beginning and end of worship.¹⁹ Although the litanies change with the movements of the church year, these

¹⁷ This parable, often referred to as "The Prodigal Son," is found in Luke 15:11-32.

¹⁸Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 58.

¹⁹ This was inspired by the chapel practices of Western Theological Seminary and their similar opening gestures. The development of litanies for Second Church around these movements is explored in Chapter Five.

confessions root us in key symbols and promises. The service begins with action and dialogue.

We light the Christ candle as the leader declares “Jesus is the light of the world,” and the congregation responds, “the light no darkness can overcome.”

We carry the large pulpit Bible to the lectern as the leader reminds us that Jesus is the living Word—God’s presence come near. The congregation responds inviting the presence, transformation, and life of the Word in our worship and our lives.

We pour water from a pitcher into the baptismal font as the leader names Jesus as the living water. The congregation responds remembering and confirming baptismal identity.

We set the communion table as the leader names Jesus as host. The congregation responds declaring welcome and nourishment for the hungry, the thirsty, the saints, and the sinners.

At the conclusion of the worship service, we rehearse these same phrases in reverse order, beginning with the table. In this moment we focus on the dialogue and anticipated movement of the congregation out of the walls of Second Church. In this sending litany we again root ourselves in the table’s hospitality, the font’s identity, the Word’s invitation, and Christ’s light that we carry with us as we go.

These gestures and phrases are not magic (hocus pocus as Christian history taught us) but find themselves rooted in our bodies for times and events far from the Second sanctuary. Using the example of training for baseball, Smith says, “It is the bodily practices (drills) that train the body (including the brain) to develop habits or dispositions

to respond automatically in certain situations and environments. Our desire is trained in the same way.”²⁰ Whether or not we are intentional, we are formed by the practices of Christian worship.

Rather than be overwhelmed by the lack of control in the particularities of formation in and through liturgy, we trust the work of the Spirit and the long history of liturgical formation among the people of God. The practices of worship are invaluable when it comes to discipleship and formation. Smith is helpful in this also,

Discipleship and formation are less about erecting an edifice of Christian knowledge than they are a matter of developing a Christian know-how that intuitively ‘understands’ the world in the light of the fullness of the gospel. And insofar as an understanding is implicit in practice, the practices of Christian worship are crucial—the sine qua non—for developing a distinctly Christian understanding of the world. The practices of Christian worship are the analogue of biking around the neighborhood, absorbing an understanding of our environment that is precognitive and becomes inscribed in our adaptive unconscious.²¹

Shape of the Project

This project began taking shape already in the program application phase as I dreamed about what questions to ask about Second Church at the intersection of missiology, ecclesiology, and leadership—the three main subjects of the cohort, *Leading with God Ahead of Us*. The cohort advisor, Dr. Kyle J. A. Small, encouraged me to bring my love of liturgy into the conversation. The process of befriending new colleagues (and hearing their possible projects) and devoting time to study in these subjects all

²⁰ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 59–60.

²¹ Smith, 68.

contributed to the decision to explore the relationship between liturgy and mission at Second Church. This project demonstrates the benefits of a dynamic relationship where liturgy challenges, confirms, and inspires the people of Second Church to engage in mission.

Chapter Two describes the methodology of pastoral ethnography. Chapter Three explores the theology of mission and leadership, building on the idea of inherent inheritance and envisioning how liturgy and mission might be understood if the world was *as it should be*. Chapter Four discloses the lived experience of liturgy and mission at Second Church through the thick description of interviews and research and extrapolates beyond current reality to make meaning of Second's house of language around liturgy and mission. Chapter Five explores how our existing and traditional liturgy makes "sense" for how we engage in mission and how we can better formalize a richer house of language around mission for Second Church.

Chapter Two: Methodology

The research approach for this project is pastoral ethnography. This method pulls widely from social science (i.e., sociology, cultural studies, anthropology), while embracing lived theology. Practitioner Mary Clark Moschella describes ethnography as utilizing “research methods [that] teach us rather to slow down and “hang out” for a while in the mud, paying attention and suspending judgment, until we begin to get our bearings.”¹ Ethnography requires observing, listening to, and describing the story of a culture-sharing group. It integrates the eyes, ears, and voices of the community. It is a slow and methodical process. It is a story told one way in a moment and told again in a new way in the next. In this way there is ebb and flow to a story told in and over time.

A Theology of Ethnography

Christians are a storied people who discover God through eyewitness accounts, personal experience, and Scripture (a collection of eyewitness accounts). The Christian religion relies on the stories captured in the books of the Old and New Testaments. Many of these stories existed for generations as oral history before being scribed and enshrined on paper. Some of these stories are shared with other major religions, which both deepens and complexifies their meaning and significance throughout time and culture. The collection of these stories in the Christian canon produces a narrative arc that is critical to shaping and defining those who claim Christian faith.

¹ Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), xiii.

These collected stories have much to say about God, human beings, the world, and the relationships between. As a missiologist I cannot escape the reality that these particular stories have crossed endless boundaries of time, language, and culture. They have been translated into languages and studied by cultures that differ drastically from their original language and context. Yet the stories have continued to hold together, motivating and transforming people and communities. They are as steady as the effortless breath that causes the human chest to rise and fall and as unsettling as an earthquake that can level a town in a moment.

The Christian faith holds a story of grace and acceptance, repentance and renewal, and unending hope. The story has taken root in places of power and influence as well as at the margins of society. The story has traveled with ethnic enclaves who cling to one version of the story and then come face-to-face with a different ethnic enclave telling another version of the story. The lived human experience of the wider story has united some communities and divided others.

In the Reformed tradition we center our worship practices around the Word heard and preached and around stories, lived and shared. Our preachers and congregants listen for how and where these stories connect and intersect with lived experience now—our individual and shared stories of life in this beautiful and messy world. We look for God whose presence and love animate our beings and invite our worship. We seek confirmation and challenge as we relate to God, one another, and the world. We listen for our invitation to join with God in demonstrating love, enacting justice, speaking peace, and living reconciliation.

Why Ethnography?

The multidisciplinary roots of ethnography encourage study in a variety of fields. Missiology brings important historical insight and helps to formulate different definitions and dialogues around mission in the life of the local church. Ecclesiology draws lines from history to current experience which challenges language and purpose in local churches like Second. Ethnography that takes the church seriously benefits by taking the church's historical and contextual language seriously. Engaging these two theological perspectives strengthens the development of perspective.

Ethnographers Chris Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen write “Ethnography is a way to take particularity seriously—to discover truth revealed through embodied habits, relations, practices, narratives, and struggles. And as it is joined with a theological sensibility, our conviction is that each particular life, situation, or community is potentially, albeit only partially, revelatory of transcendent or divine truth.”² This kind of ethnographic work is critical for the church as we continue to engage in imaginative and creative storytelling. These practices help us learn to pay attention, to listen better, to learn more, and ultimately to learn to weave a story that honor varieties of perspectives and points to God's presence among us.

Storytelling assists us in creating a more robust description of not only the past but the present. Doing the harder work of being able to put some sort of pin in the map

² Christian Batalden Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (London: Continuum, 2011), xxi.

that says “we are here (now)” is critical to continuing God’s story here.³ Taking time to engage the many layers of stories present in the life of the church grows our imagination for the story God is writing here among us.

The intersection of liturgy and mission in the life of Second Church is a significant piece of the story this project attempts to uncover. Ethnography is a helpful tool in understanding the past, present, and future of liturgical formation and missional engagement. This method acknowledges that congregational life is made up of individuals with a whole host of influences, all of which impact how we imagine both the present and future.⁴ Using “thick description” we can paint a picture that allows this kind of human complexity.⁵ Like an impressionist painting, through interpretation and categorization, a broader scene unfolds.⁶

Another benefit of this method is the acknowledgment that a pastoral ethnographer is both participant in and observer of a community of faith. I share Moschella’s conviction that “transformative pastoral leadership requires open engagement and attentive listening to the lives of particular people and communities.”⁷ I also agree with Moschella’s perspective that “real community can’t thrive if stories are

³ Keifert, *We Are Here Now*, 23.

⁴ Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, 5.

⁵ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 6, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.01005>.

⁶ Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, 29.

⁷ Moschella, xv.

not told.”⁸ The description of this kind of community engaged in knowing itself and welcoming the stories and voices of all is what I strive for as a pastoral leader. Serving a congregation that is attempting to do the work of telling our stories has been a glimpse into a shift towards a more real community (at least according to West Michigan standards!).

As a pastoral ethnographer I see my role as helping the community of Second Church to thrive. This means seeing, naming, and weaving the layers upon layers of stories in the individuals and the community as a whole. The intersection of our storied faith and our storied lives is rich. The work of ethnography draws out these stories and the imagination that accompanies them – helping people to know and tell their own stories to reflecting on and co-authoring the stories within our community.

Coming to know some of the stories of Second Church and the wider Zeeland community has opened doors to hear other layers of those stories, offered through the lived experience of members. I believe that listening to the painful stories that lay just on the other side of the pristine front doors of Zeeland, Michigan is necessary for the fuller story of the gospel—the very good news of Christ—to be woven into the story told now and into the future. Not just knowing the stories but sharing in the telling of them has built trust, particularly with longer-term members of the church.

The work of ethnography also requires reflexivity (self-study) on the part of the researcher. As I listen for and tell stories, I must name and maintain awareness of my own biases. I clearly hold bias as a pastor over the last seven years. The journey together

⁸ Moschella, 36.

has included significant challenges and joys that shape my prejudices. Through these years and this project, the stories and history of Second have woven into my own story in such a way that I am not always objective.

I also have bias pertaining to study and experience around liturgy and mission. My strong opinions around definitions and purpose can sometimes make it challenging to hear or understand other viewpoints (or lead me to a posture of judgment). If the Holy Spirit leads us through the element of surprise, my fixed perspective counters any desire to live by the Spirit. Intentionally trusting in the work of the Holy Spirit helps me to be open to other's stories without always filtering through my own lens. The gift of reflexivity is that I can name these realities and do my best to set them aside as a participant observer, or at the very least welcome them as dialogue partners in the unfolding story. According to Moschella, "Ethnographic study helps the pastor articulate his or her perceptions of the living faith of the people, their history, and their current longings. When these perceptions are shared and discussed, lively, creative, and intentional new practices can emerge."⁹

Ethnography is a gift that keeps giving for communities that learn to embrace it. As a pastor I am better connected to my own story and the story of the community of faith in which I am called to serve through this method. I will give this project to my congregation and am hopeful that together we can hold our diverse experiences and stories while we celebrate the fullness of God's call to us to serve faithfully in a community whose own story continues to unfold.

⁹ Moschella, 41.

Study Design

My role as a participant observer at Second Church began in August 2014 when I was hired as Associate Pastor for Young Families. One year later, this contract position became an official call. Following a crisis with the lead pastor in August 2018, the leadership of the congregation hired a consultant who helped us as a congregation to describe our painful current reality, even as we longed to move past this crisis. Although I did not know it at the time, the consultant's invitation to describe is similar to the work of my Doctor of Ministry cohort (*Leading with God Ahead of Us*) which began in June 2019. In shaping and exploring research questions around the interplay of liturgy and mission at Second Church, my participant observer status continues to grow and change.

In our first Doctor of Ministry cohort gathering, my professor introduced me to the phrase, "house of language." I knew I was beginning the work with the assumption that Second has a much clearer house of language around worship and less so around mission. Embracing reflexivity I carried this awareness into reviewing written materials (directories, brief histories, bulletins, consistory minutes, newsletters) and deepening my knowledge of current and past community demographics. Reading through various historical documents offers a perspective that perhaps Second's longstanding service partnerships does offer a house of language for liturgy *and* mission. There is clear evidence of financial support, congregational engagement, and community participation in the past and present. What appears to be missing, particularly in recent years, is connecting mission engagement to the overall mission and vision of the church. Even as

worship practices remain clear and strong, they also do not directly connect to an overall mission and vision of the church.

The ethnographic work continued in September 2020 as I began to formulate a qualitative interview process using open-ended questions. The interview component of research offered a direct way to listen for key terms and descriptions based on the varied experiences of Sunday morning worship and engagement in mission.

I struggled to craft questions around worship and mission that did not force a relationship between the two yet invited respondents to reflect on possible connections. I also wrestled to find terminology that would be understood by the various interviewees and create helpful parameters for the stories they might tell, while also giving freedom of expression. My biases around desiring to understand liturgy and mission complicated the truly open-ended intent of my method. Even so, through field-testing and peer-review, I developed questions that invited participants to share stories.

The global pandemic also set an interesting stage for ethnographic interviews focused on questions of worship and mission, which until now were in-person engagements. Was it realistic to ask past/present-oriented questions about worship and mission in the absence of in-person worship and facing an uncertain future? Was it right to ask questions amidst what felt like a pause on our mission activity? Would most story-centered questions be lost to present Covid-related anxiety?

In collaboration and consultation with my professor, I finalized five main interview questions. Using all open-ended questions, I hoped to invite a wide variety of stories. The first two questions centered on mission experiences. The third two-part

question listened for worship experiences and a sense of God. The final two questions attempted to find integration between mission and worship.

I took a risk in my first question by naming Jesus and his summary of the law as a possible definition of mission. “One way to define mission is to quote Jesus who said, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself.’ Tell me about a time when you engaged in mission.” My hope was that pointing to love of God and neighbor would cue the participants to think broadly about the ways they engage in mission and encourage responses within and beyond traditional acts of service (i.e., service trips and non-profit volunteering). By asking each participant to tell of a time they engaged in mission, I knew I was setting up a certain level of expectation or understanding that might influence a definition of mission. My hope was that the word “engaged” might help to spark active and participative stories. For the second question I specified participation with someone else from Second Church. While on the one hand this was limiting, the intent here was to focus the stories in on the life of Second Church (anticipating that some responses to the first question might not relate to Second at all).

Although the word liturgy is also significant to my research question, in determining the best interview questions, worship was a more accessible term. I carried the use of that term through the focused worship question and sub-question, and the two questions investigating a relationship between mission and worship.

One of the biases I carry with me in this research is a conviction that liturgy and mission are connected albeit unattended, and that this connection is necessary for the

flourishing of the local church. The interview questions needed to make space for a respondent to make or not make that connection. I decided to borrow from my first question on mission, asking for how worship demonstrates love of God and neighbor. The final question offered two ways of noticing an interaction between Sunday morning worship and life beyond that, in the hopes that one or both might spark a story where mission and worship collide.

With each question I anticipated needing to listen for those moments where more information or context might be helpful. The interview process also needed to be a time to deeply observe these other participant observers, keeping track of non-verbal cues and reactions.

Data Collection

Churches are great repositories for all kinds of random things, which means that church closets are often a real treasure trove! Second Church is no exception. In my time at Second, I've noticed that upon each death of an older person connected to Second, we are sure to get a box of old directories, a ceremonial plate (or two), and some other valued pieces of history. As we do not have a dedicated church historian (volunteer or staff), these piles end up on shelves or in a rather large storage closet off an upstairs classroom. Nearly all of Second's historical documents are held at the Joint Archives of Holland,¹⁰ and yet I discovered consistory minutes, historical papers, sermons, bulletins, and budgets in our building. I even found original letters from disgruntled members in the

¹⁰ Due to the Covid-19 global pandemic, the Joint Archives were closed during the time I conducted this phase of study.

1920s. Second Church is very fond of her history and celebrating her story, which means there are special booklets and documents for many milestones, especially 50-, 75-, and 100-year anniversaries. These resources were an invaluable source of information in the initial research phase.

The Reformed Church in America (RCA), our denomination, also keeps records of the annual consistorial reports which include statistical data and short essay questions pertaining to the life of the church.¹¹ I was able to access and review the data from 2000-2019.

In all this research, I wrote extensive notes, including direct quotes from several historical documents. I organized these notes chronologically, eventually writing up a brief history. I shared a good portion of these findings during an Adult Second Hour presentation in September 2021. While we often struggle with attendance during this education time, this presentation was well-attended. The larger-than-usual attendance is confirmation of Second's love for her history. Long-time members confirmed many stories and shared others during and after the presentation.

Interviews

In preparing to conduct interviews I generated a list of all active members and adherents.¹² Using a program in Microsoft Excel I randomly selected twelve names. I

¹¹ This data can be accessed via "Church Statistical Data," Reformed Church in America, <https://crf.rca.org/public>.

¹² Adherent is a membership category used in our denomination that denotes someone who regularly participates in the life of the church but who has not officially joined the church via transfer, re-affirmation of faith, or profession of faith.

used the randomizer four times, seeking balance in the following categories: male/female, length of time connected to Second, and age/stage of life. This maximum variation sampling approach, although a smaller sample size, would help to give necessary glimpses into the past while also acknowledging the current reality of liturgy and mission at Second.¹³ As Tim Sensing notes, there are no rules for determining sample size.¹⁴ Based on my own limitations as researcher, I trusted that the quality of data would benefit the project. Heeding Sensing's caution, when it came time to analyze the data I would be mindful to not overgeneralize the findings.¹⁵

I sent an initial email to each potential interviewee, describing the random selection for possible research participants. I also shared that the interviews would be conducted on Zoom and that their responses would be kept anonymous. I concluded with an invitation to remove themselves from the list should they desire and made a commitment to calling to schedule an interview time during the following week. One person responded that they did not wish to participate, at which time I sought another participant whose demographics were similar.

I successfully set up eleven interviews between November 25 and December 1, 2020. The six male and five female respondents ranged in age from upper 20s to late 80s. Three respondents have been connected to Second their whole lives, a male in his 80s and two females, one in her mid 70s and the other in her mid 60s. Two male respondents, one

¹³ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 84.

¹⁴ Sensing, 85.

¹⁵ Sensing, 84.

in his 50s and the other in his late 60s, have been members for over 20 years. One female respondent in her 40s came to Second just over a decade ago. Four respondents in their 20s and 30s (3 male and 1 female) all joined Second in my time on staff. The one adherent I interviewed began worshiping at Second just before the Covid-19 pandemic.

The first interview took place in-person in my office at the church. Our conversation was recorded using the Voice Memos program on my personal iPhone. One interview happened over the phone per the interviewee's request and was also recorded with the Voice Memos program. The remaining nine interviews were conducted via Zoom, an internet-based video meeting software. These interviews were recorded using the built-in mechanism.

Each interview began with a script detailing the nature of the interview as part of my Doctor of Ministry program through Western Theological Seminary. I reviewed my intent to record the interviews. I reviewed my commitment to not using names in the final ethnographic report. I asked for verbal consent with the following questions: Are you still willing to go ahead with the interview? Are you willing to have this conversation recorded? Responses were recorded at the top of their interview form.

One printed paper form was used per interview. The top of the form noted the information shown in figure 2.1.

<i>Consent to be interviewed: Y / N</i>		<i>Consent to be recorded: Y / N</i>	
<i>Date and Time of Interview: _____</i>			
<i>Person Interviewed:</i>	<i>Gender: Male / Female</i>	<i>Age (by decade): 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</i>	
	<i>Membership Years: 0-2 2-5 5-10 10+</i>		
	<i>Respondent Type: Family</i>	<i>Insider</i>	<i>Outsider</i>

2.1.

The remainder of the form listed the questions with space for interviewer notes. These initial notes were taken in a field notes style, noting concepts, non-verbal indications, and implied context when applicable.

I did not initially intend to name Covid-19 in my interview questions, even as it lingered at the edges. Following the first interview I decided to add a sixth question¹⁶ particular to the critical moment of a global health pandemic. While I saved the question of Covid-19 impact until the end of each interview, it certainly cast a shadow over past and present experiences as well as to hope for the life of Second Church.

Immediately after each interview, I reviewed my handwritten notes and made additional notes as needed. I later transcribed the notes into individual Microsoft Word files saved in a private Dropbox folder. Two interviewees sent additional information via email following their interviews. The information was added to their individual interview electronic form. Video recordings were downloaded from Zoom and saved in a private

¹⁶ Describe the impact of Covid-19 on worship and mission at Second.

Dropbox folder. Voice memo recordings were saved in a personal iCloud account. At the conclusion of the thesis, these video and audio recordings will be permanently deleted.

Data Analysis

Once all the interviews were complete and each individual form included all notes and key quotes (using my recordings to get exact wording), I copied and pasted the data into an Apple Numbers spreadsheet organized by question (one question per sheet), with one participant answer per cell (each participant was identified with sex/age/time at Second (i.e., M,3,10+)). I printed each question with the appropriate responses. After reading through each question and its answers several times, I began to note themes within and across the different questions, highlighting in different colors. I used both etic and emic coding to create a new coding spreadsheet to align data points for description and interpretation. I noted the different codes and themes (repeated words, common terms, different definitions of certain terms, similar ideas conveyed), copying and pasting from the different respondents, carrying over the identifying labels. As I continued to read and re-read the data, I organized the codes around mission, worship, and places of connection between mission and worship.

Telling the story of the data is the work of Chapter Four, the thick description of this pastoral ethnography project. There I weave together interview data, historical findings, and my own curiosities about the story they tell about liturgy and mission at this moment in time for Second Church.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the above methodology. Within the field of ethnography there is permission to bracket research to a particular time frame. Due to my inability to access the archived historical records, my research jumped around through a variety of time periods in the life of the church based on the documents I could physically access. While there is certainly great value in seeing a wide historical view, the ability to dig more deeply into liturgy and mission within a particular time frame (i.e., from 1990 to the present) may have offered different results.

Covid-19 not only disrupted access to historical records, it also dramatically impacted the process of interviews and the lived experiences of the interviewees at the time of their interviews. I will tell this story more fully in Chapter Four, although the true impact of a global pandemic on this research may never be fully understood. Arguably the church and world were changing prior to the pandemic, yet the drastic change to activities within and by Second Church particularly in the first 10 months of the pandemic is remarkable.

Another limitation in this ethnographic study is relying on a limited number of interviews. Hearing the stories of five percent of the active congregation only provides a small snapshot of a larger story. More interviews might have changed the story in significant ways, highlighting more, less, or different connections between liturgy and mission at Second Church.

Within the ethnographic field I could have employed surveys to the whole congregation, utilizing quantitative data analysis of results. I might also have analyzed

annual budgets and financial records more consistently, using that data to amplify the story.

As a field of study, ethnography also has limits. As Moschella makes plain, it is a “messy and muddy process”¹⁷ seeking to describe “the communal practice of faith [which] is gritty, messy, even morally flawed.”¹⁸ The story of the church is a flawed, human story, even as it depends upon God for both purpose and life. Participant observers have limited objectivity because of their insider status. Power dynamics may not always be noticed as stories are collected, shaping the collective narrative in ways that ignore key voices and experiences. Individuals are limited to their particularity and spheres of knowledge. Acknowledging the presence and mystery of God and God at work in the world and church cannot always be quantified or qualified. Hopes for neat, decisive categories that are applicable to any and all local churches are unfounded.

Naming these limits still makes room for ethnography to function powerfully for churches and pastors. Rather than expecting our stories to join the canon of scripture or become enshrined in a special history book, the work of ethnography invites placing a “we are here (now)” pin as the map of God and humanity continues to unfold.

¹⁷ Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, vii.

¹⁸ Moschella, 3.

Chapter Three: Inherent Inheritance

In Chapter One I painted a brief picture of “inherent inheritance” through a story of Bruce Springsteen and a well-known parable from the gospel of Luke. On the one hand there is an *inherent* connection between liturgy and mission. They belong to one another in an essential way in the life of the local church. On the other hand, there’s also a kind of *inherited* gift that liturgy offers that perhaps gets noticed in hindsight more than in the weekly rhythms of worship and work. All of this is tied to the deeply formative nature of liturgy. This chapter explores a theology of mission and the church, providing texture to a kind of inherent inheritance alive in the story of Second Church.

Formation

Without dramatic twists or moments of leaving or denying my roots, my own faith story is one of inherent inheritance. My personal experience serves as a key to my understanding of liturgy and mission. When asked about my journey in the church or even towards ordained ministry, I routinely reference my formative years at Grace Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Grace CRC was my first model for a church living out the promises she makes during the sacrament of baptism—promises to love, to pray for (and teach to pray), to instruct in faith, to encourage and sustain in relationship and community. My gifts and presence as both a child and female were welcomed and encouraged in Sunday morning worship. It was here that I learned to lead music and responsive litanies from an early age. Even when my family served for six years in Monrovia, this congregation prayed for and supported us. At Grace CRC the

liturgy connected the church body from Sunday morning worship through the realities of life.

Grace CRC also modeled a commitment to mission through intentional neighborhood connections. The blocks surrounding the church building were the focus of outreach and support as we opened our doors for clothing and food pantries. Our pastor knew the neighbors and their needs personally, and often invited members to join in offering support through relationship and service. While many in the congregation drove from other neighborhoods for worship, there were at least a handful of families from the surrounding blocks involved in worship on Sunday mornings. Mission commitments helped to connect those who might otherwise be scattered. In my experiences of Grace CRC, liturgy and mission were inherent to its life as a church, and after several decades, this practice is my inheritance.

Reformed Worldview

This formative church experience was complemented by experiences in my family of origin and Christian day school community. The language of a Reformed worldview permeates these overlapping worlds. In these places God's sovereignty and providence offers personal and global comfort. The narrative arc of Creation / Fall / Redemption / Consummation (CFRC) evident in Scripture is stated fact and not up for debate.

Reformed philosopher, James K. A. Smith, writes that "worship precedes the formation of the biblical canon ('the Bible')." He goes on to say that "participation in Christian worship precede[s] the formulation of doctrine and the articulation of

worldview. Lived worship is the fount from which a worldview springs, rather than being the expression or application of some cognitive set of beliefs already in place.”¹ In this way, connecting with the stories of God’s worshiping people in Scripture does unfold a CFRC worldview.

Genesis 1 and 2 provide the image of God, the Creator, who is intimately involved with the created order. In these *creation* narratives God’s voice creates and initiates dialogue with a world that is good. God speaks and the world cannot help but respond. This is the same voice that calls and gathers in worship today.

Genesis 3 narrates a massive disruption to the dialogue and relationship between God and humanity. The *fall* is initially imaged through Adam and Eve’s eating of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Yet this forbidden act does not end God’s connection or dialogue. Even though the garden setting changes, our brokenness does not. God continues to initiate connection with human beings. Our pattern of confession after opening praise is a weekly reminder that God makes and keep big promises through human trials, suffering, and hardship.

The arc of *redemption* is rooted in these covenant promises. The Hebrew Bible tells endless stories of human faithlessness and wandering through which God remains faithful in listening and responding to the lives of a covenant people. God provides laws and worship practices (including the sacrificial system) to give people tangible and formative actions for dialogue with God in the midst of brokenness. The prophets repeatedly address Israel’s faithlessness while also pointing ahead to a promised Messiah.

¹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 136.

In Jesus, the redemption story continues, offering insights into old stories while bringing more stories to the canon. As Ruth Meyers beautifully articulates,

In his person and his ministry, Jesus announced and inaugurated the presence of the reign of God, and Jesus' life, death, and resurrection now offer to all creation the possibility of being reconciled to God. Though the redemptive reign of God is not complete, the Spirit moves all things to their eschatological fullness, God's final consummation. Led by the Spirit, the missional church represents or bears witness to the reign of God that was manifest in Christ.²

Jesus Christ is the presence and redemptive action of God and offers the invitation to respond. Hearing the assurance of forgiveness prompts a response of gratitude and a renewed commitment to God's guidance in the law.

Throughout the stories of the growing church in the New Testament, we encounter God on the move through the action of sending both the Spirit and people who carry with them the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, crossing barriers of culture and language. The impetus of the grand narrative is that there is a story to tell the world. This story is the foretaste of the *consummation* and it is a story of reconciliation, love, and grace. We rehearse this story each week at the communion table. From there we are sent out as Jesus sent the disciples to live and proclaim God's presence and action through reconciliation, justice, peace, and hope.

The compelling nature of these stories leads them to be told again and again, inviting others to experience their transforming reality. Each time the story is told, boundaries are crossed. The story is heard in new languages and received by new cultures, each crossing filled with the reality of adaptation and interpretation. And still

² Meyers, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission*, 21.

the story continues to spread. Missiologist Dana Robert summarizes well when she notes: “At its most simple, the spread of the message of Jesus Christ from one culture to another occurs because of intentional human relationships across cultural boundaries. In periods of history that encourage the movement of people and ideas, ordinary Christians who believe strongly in their faith feel responsible for sharing that faith with others.”³

The journey of these stories across countless boundaries over time has indelibly shaped individuals and communities of faith. While there are other possible worldviews formed through these encounters, the CFRC arc resonates deeply for me in a way that invites ongoing participation with God in liturgy and mission.

Further Liturgical Formation

Attending Calvin College for an undergraduate degree solidified in me a Reformed worldview and its way of engaging the world. Some new and more contemporary worship experiences (both as worshiper and worship leader) seasoned my earlier liturgical formation, giving me new language with which to articulate the intentions of engagement with God through spoken word, prayers, and music. From my head to my heart, I learned to bring my whole self into dialogue with God. This formative period helped to solidify what philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff, who also grew up in the CRC, aptly describes: “Through repetition, elements of the liturgy and of Scripture

³ Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion*, Blackwell Brief Histories of Religion Series (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 176.

sank their roots so deep into consciousness that nothing thereafter, short of senility, could remove them.”⁴

Through these varied worship experiences, the stories of Scripture and the prayers of the faithful were and are constants in my world. I have come to know and believe deeply that, “Being a disciple of Jesus is not primarily a matter of getting the right ideas and doctrines and beliefs into your head in order to guarantee proper behavior; rather, it’s a matter of being the kind of person who loves rightly—who loves God and neighbor and is oriented to the world by the primacy of that love.”⁵ Even on days of great frustration with the church or heart-rending challenges of faith, I am unable to disentangle myself from a reality with God and a God who inhabits community and the world.

Further Missional Formation

After college I worked at Messiah College in Pennsylvania for three years as the Service Ministries Director.⁶ This role oversaw and coordinated national and international service opportunities for students. Over those years I attended numerous short-term mission conferences with other leaders and organizations, mentored student leaders, and even led a few teams of students on trips (one national and two international). In this season my own definitions of mission were apparent and often

⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Hearing the Call: Liturgy, Justice, Church, and World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2011), 3.

⁵ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 32–33.

⁶ This role was in partnership with the Coalition for Christian Outreach, a campus ministry organization based in Pittsburgh, PA.

challenged, even in working to cultivate long-term and reciprocal connections with local organizations and helping students embrace a learning posture in their eagerness to change the world. The teams we formed and sent were temporary, rather than part of the fabric of a gathered community committed to gathering week after week to look and listen for God's call in Word and sacrament. I discovered that the most realistic goal was to broaden the perspective of God at work in the world for these young adults.

The gift of studying ecclesiology and the theology and history of mission in this Doctor of Ministry program is the ability to see and understand the roots and shape of what I have claimed as inherent inheritance. The ability to name the presuppositions, the plausibility structures,⁷ and even the many assumptions that shape this way of being in the world, open the door to a richer experience and fuller integration of liturgy and mission in the life of the church.

The Intersection of Mission, Liturgy, and the Church

There is a profound relationship between ecclesiology, missiology, and liturgy that has unfolded over time, such that it is nearly impossible to discuss one without engaging the others. While this is not always the lived reality of the local church (as we will see in the unfolding story of Second Church), scholars offer rich connections with great potential for continued transformation among God's people.

If Smith is to be believed, worship practices—what we might understand as liturgy—exist for the people of God before any sense of mission or the gathering of the

⁷ Defined as patterns of belief and practice accepted within a given society Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 9.

church.⁸ These practices define daily and weekly rhythms for life in the promised land and throughout enslavement, exile, and wilderness wandering. In this ongoing work of the people, culture is formed through connections between God and one another.

Yet if we believe missiologists, mission is the foundation of faith. The roots of faith expressed through the church of Christ are “intrinsically missionary,” posits missiologist David Bosch. He writes, “Christian mission gives expression to the dynamic relationship between God and the world, particularly as this was portrayed, first, in the story of the covenant people of Israel and then, supremely, in the birth, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth.”⁹ Even painting in such broad strokes, the movement of God’s people gathering and sending is palpable. There’s energy, purpose, and connection with God, God’s people, and the world all around.

Jesus seems to live seamlessly between worship and mission. The act of gathering for worship continues as he spends time in the Temple and synagogues enacting the historic practices of his Jewish heritage. But worship is also complex in the days of Jesus, as it is for us. In the stories of Jesus, we find tension with historic ritual practices mired in strict observation and seemingly devoid of the intended rich connections to God and neighbor. The rigid boundaries of the Scribes and Pharisees act as counterpoint to Jesus’ inclusion of and compassion towards those often on the margins—the demon-possessed, infirm, tax collectors, even women. Jesus’ disciples and the curious crowds are transfixed

⁸ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 136.

⁹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 9.

by his presence and power. As the stories reveal, many are also transformed by what Jesus models and the ways in which he invites their participation.

Mission unfolds as Jesus teaches, heals, and forgives. Jesus takes the work of the people beyond the walls of temple, synagogue, and known community. Yet similar to liturgy as the work of the people, mission is given to God's people. In the gospels we read that Jesus sends out disciples in pairs with the same message of the kingdom he himself proclaimed.¹⁰ This outward movement—a sent reality—continues after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. The gospels of Matthew and Luke and the book of Acts record Jesus' instruction to the disciples to continue to act as witnesses, specifically naming the reality of all nations and the ends of the earth as places to witness.¹¹

The rest of the New Testament unfolds the disciples' efforts to bear witness as Jesus commanded. The fruit of this movement is seen as individuals, families, and communities are gathered around shared meals and ideals, proclaiming a way of love and seeking provision for those in need.¹² Amidst tension and division, hope and longing, and even persecution, the early church continues to grow. Stories of Jesus and God's people

¹⁰ The Matthew 10:1-23 and Mark 6:7-12 accounts tell of Jesus sending out the twelve disciples in pairs. In contrast, Luke 10:1-12 speaks of Jesus sending out 70 disciples in pairs. Regardless of differences in the accounts, each contains the significant reality of disciples being sent out.

¹¹ Matthew 29:19-20, often called the Great Commission reads: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." This passage is regularly cited as a missional calling for the church. Luke 24:47-48 and Acts 1:8 use the language of witnesses with Acts 1 giving geographic instruction of "witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

¹² Acts 2:42-47 acts as a model for the early community.

are collected and told again and again. The rituals of gathering, worshiping, and sending are renewed and changed. The community continues to expand, all in the name of Christ.

Yet somewhere (likely more than one somewhere in more than one time) along the twisting road of church history, this movement changes. With the arrival of Christendom, the church moves from the margins of society and the antagonism of the empire into the regular fabric of community life with full acceptance by the empire.

Anabaptist scholars Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider write,

During the Christendom centuries, the phrase “worship and mission” occurred rarely, if ever. Worship was what the church in Christendom existed to do; worship was its central activity. Mission, on the other hand, was peripheral and rarely discussed. Mission took place “out there,” in “regions beyond,” in “mission lands”—beyond Christendom.¹³

This history of disconnecting the missiological fabric of the church and its liturgy is significant. This is most prominent in the Protestant arm of the Christian church in Western contexts (first Europe and then in North America).¹⁴ This disconnection is not that the church ceased supporting mission or talking about mission, it’s that mission became a separate entity. From the Enlightenment to the various Awakenings in the United States and Europe, there were theological, ecclesiological, and eschatological shifts in language and purpose for mission. An emphasis on the importance of individual salvation intermingled with a conviction to export cultural values and blessings

¹³ Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider, *Worship and Mission after Christendom* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2011), 23.

¹⁴ It is worth noting that the Eastern Church (Orthodox) does not disconnect liturgy from mission in the same way through its history. Following the Protestant Reformation, the patterns of the Catholic Church and various branches of the Protestant Church have some similarities with a mission emphasis that often prioritizes evangelism of culture and values as well as transformation in Christ.

(particularly Western, and then later American) were a different kind of missionary energy than the early church bearing witness to the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ!

In many ways, the life of liturgy in the church turned inward in these centuries. The church was separate from the world (out there). Even in the Reformed tradition liturgical practices took on ritual and tradition separated from mission. Forming churchgoers was the way to develop practicing Christians.¹⁵

Thanks be to God, a dramatic shift occurs through world missionary conferences, beginning in Edinburgh in 1910. These diverse, ecumenical gatherings challenged and changed the conversation about the relationship between church and mission. Bosch states clearly, “For the first time the recognition that church and mission belong together indissolubly began to dawn in a way that could no longer be overlooked.”¹⁶ These missionary councils led to the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948, which eventually united missionary and church councils into one place and purpose.

The new model connecting church and mission “recognized that the church could be neither the starting point nor the goal of mission. God’s salvific work precedes both church and mission. We should not subordinate mission to the church nor the church to mission; both should, rather, be taken up into the *missio Dei*.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 385.

¹⁶ Bosch, 379.

¹⁷ Bosch, 379.

This interconnected reality of church and mission redefines ecclesiology. Dutch scholar Johannes Blauw writes “a critical survey of what has been said about [a Biblical theology of missionary work],”¹⁸ including leading readers through a relatively brief but thorough meditation on the “missionary message” of Scripture, from Old Testament beginnings to New Testament epistles, before finally arguing that there cannot be a stand alone theology of mission but only a *theology of the Church*—an ecclesiology which affirms that God’s people are called out, set in, and sent out to all the world.¹⁹ Bosch builds on the work of Lesslie Newbigin in illustrating this new ecclesiology through a missionary dimension and intention in the church.

The missionary dimension of a local church’s life manifests itself, among other ways, when it is truly a worshipping community; it is able to welcome outsiders and make them feel at home; it is a church in which the pastor does not have the monopoly and the members are not merely objects of pastoral care; its members are equipped for their calling in society; it is structurally pliable and innovative; and it does not defend the privileges of a select group. However the missionary dimension evokes *intentional*, that is *direct* involvement in society; it actually moves beyond the walls of the church...²⁰

This “new” ecclesiology wrestles with internal and external realities in the life of the church, making space for rethinking both the worshipping life of the church and the shape of direct involvement with society. Where previously the world outside the church hardly deserved notice, this shift in understanding grapples theologically with God’s presence and activity in the world, not solely in the church. There is also a rediscovery of

¹⁸ Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church; A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), 11. I am indebted to my D. Min. colleague, Jonathan Ytterrock, for these insights taken from his review essay written for our cohort on this text.

¹⁹ Blauw, 17, 126.

²⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 382.

the local church and its role as church-in-mission. Bosch captures the congregational nature of mission, “The church *gathers* to praise God, to enjoy fellowship and receive spiritual sustenance, and *disperses* to serve God wherever its members are.”²¹

The nature of mission was regained when the church was redefined by mission. Until the late 20th century, mission was understood as Jesus-shaped activity; at the 1967 WCC meeting, “Mission became an umbrella term for health and welfare services, youth projects, activities of political interest groups, projects for economic and social development, the constructive application of violence, etc.”²² Dialogue and difference in defining mission is ongoing over the years of the WCC and beyond. Three decades later, the WCC dialogue around the meaning of mission is focused on the impact of globalization. Drastic changes in transportation, communication, technology, and economics are bringing the world closer together. Things that used to be boundaries are now easily transcended, which again changes the face and meaning of mission. The moderator of the 1998 gathering, Aram I, describes a global village in his report, where the following can occur:

Turning to God implies turning to our neighbour in active love, justice and reconciliation. We are a missionary people, not in the sense of dominating others by imposing our own values and cultures, but in the sense of sharing the “good news” with all people. Hence, dialogue with our neighbour does not in any way diminish our full commitment to our faith. In dialogical interaction with others, our own faith is enriched, refined and strengthened. To dialogue means witnessing, i.e. living the Christ-event in the midst of ambiguities, uncertainties and polarizations of this world. It also means listening and seeking to understand

²¹ Bosch, 395.

²² Bosch, 392.

the faith and perspectives of others. Dialogue is a safeguard against syncretism. It is a search for a wider community.²³

Bosch helpfully articulates at the conclusion of *Transforming Mission*, “The mission of the church needs constantly to be renewed and re-conceived.”²⁴ Bosch’s text has moved the mission conversation from activity and globalization to a renewed emphasis on local engagement, undoing the cultural transportation of values across the ocean from the West. Continuing to expand and test these understandings invites the local church to be attentive to the community directly around them, seeking ways to be in meaningful relationship and dialogue rooted in the good news of the gospel.

Lesslie Newbigin describes this posture as he writes, “The Christian community is invited to indwell the story, tacitly aware of it as shaping the way we understand, but focally attending to the world we live in so that we are able confidently, though not infallibly, to increase our understanding of it and our ability to cope with it.”²⁵ In naming the congregation as the hermeneutic of the gospel, Newbigin goes on to say, “It will be a community that does not live for itself but is deeply involved in the concerns of its neighborhood.”²⁶ Embracing the mission of God, the congregation is also a community of hope as it shares the stories of God.

It will only be by movements that begin with the local congregation in which the reality of the new creation is present, known, and experienced, and from which men and women will go into every sector of public life to claim it for Christ, to

²³ Diane Kessler, ed., *Together on the Way: Official Report of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1999), 77.

²⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 531.

²⁵ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 38.

²⁶ Newbigin, 229.

unmask the illusions which have remained hidden and to expose all areas of public life to the illumination of the gospel. But that will only happen as and when local congregations renounce an introverted concern for their own life, and recognize that they exist for the sake of those who are not members, as sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's redeeming grace for the whole life of society.²⁷

Mission and Liturgy

Bosch says, "To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love."²⁸ This movement of love is often rehearsed in the liturgy—an active and dynamic meeting between God and God's people. The movement of liturgy calls and gathers the people of God from varied places and backgrounds. In the liturgy, people are centered around the Word and invited to feast together at Christ's table. As Thomas Schattauer describes,

The gathering of people into this symbolic representation of God's purposes for the world is the church's part in the *missio Dei*. . . More than a place for individuals to encounter word and sacrament as institutions of grace, the church in its assembly around word and sacrament enacts a ritual symbol of God's gracious purpose for the world and so participates in God's world-encompassing mission.²⁹

From this rich encounter with God through Word and sacrament, the people are sent forth in peace to the places from which they came and to where they sense the leading of God's Spirit. In this way the liturgy continues beyond the gathering. Byron Anderson amplifies this: "Participation in God, as shaped by liturgical participation in the body of Christ, is both contemplative union with God and social action, participation with

²⁷ Newbigin, 232–33.

²⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 400.

²⁹ Thomas H. Schattauer, "Liturgical Assembly as Locus of Mission," in *Inside Out: Worship in an Age of Mission*, ed. Thomas H. Schattauer (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 13.

God in God's work in the world. Such participation is completed not with the final 'Amen' of the liturgy or the recessional hymn but beyond the liturgy, in daily life."³⁰

There's a sense of having come full circle, back to the earlier energy of the gathered and sent community of the early church. Meyers gives a compelling theological description of the dynamic connections of mission, liturgy, and the church when she writes:

The mission of God is God's movement outward toward the world, a love for the world evident in creation and in covenant with Israel, a passion revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Through the Spirit, God calls together a community whose identity is rooted in the mission of God, a community that participates in God's mission, embodying God's healing, reconciling, and saving love for the world, and proclaiming the good news of God's reign.³¹

Even as the interconnected nature of mission, liturgy, and church is apparent, the practical ways the church articulates and lives the connection deserves more attention.

Models of Integration

With so many traditions treating worship as one thing and mission as another, it's not surprising to consider what Wolterstorff describes as a "1 for 6" or "6 for 1" pattern. The first pattern suggests that worship practices equip us for the other six days of the week, meaning that our encounter with God and the Word in worship is what we take with us into the rest of life. While the worship experience may inform those six days, it is not necessarily integrated. In the second pattern we find that the bulk of life carries us,

³⁰ E. Byron Anderson, "Liturgical Reform: For Participation and/or Mission," *Liturgy (Washington)* 31, no. 4 (2016): 11–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2016.1194673>.

³¹ Meyers, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission*, 35–36.

maybe even propels us, into worship itself. Thus worship could be an escape from “the world” or the place that helps us to make sense of our experiences in the world.

Wolterstorff reflects,

It has taken me a long time to see the full pattern of the tradition. I think it was something like this: the tradition operated with a unique dialectic of affirmation, negation, and redemptive activity. On the reality within which we found ourselves and which we ourselves are and have made, I was taught to pronounce a differentiated yes and no: a firm yes to God’s creation as such, but a differentiated yes and no to the way in which the potentials of creation have been realized in culture, society, and self.³²

These patterns illustrate tension in the relationship between God and the world, which then finds its way into the experience of worship and how worship shapes or forms our engagement with the world. This strikes me as a common experience for many Christian churches. There’s a differentiated understanding that creates tension between the experiences of faith expressed in worship and any call to join in God’s reconciling work in the world—the experience of faith in the world.

Schattauer offers a radically traditional model that integrates world and worship. This is the “inside out” model where “The focus is on God’s mission toward the world, to which the church witnesses and into which it is drawn, rather than on specific activities of the church undertaken in response to the divine saving initiative.”³³ In this model liturgy and mission are not separate. Rather “the assembly for worship *is* mission. The liturgical assembly is the visible locus of God’s reconciling mission toward the world.”³⁴

³² Wolterstorff, *Hearing the Call*, 8.

³³ Schattauer, “Liturgical Assembly as Locus of Mission,” 3.

³⁴ Schattauer, 3.

Schattauer goes on to say, “The community of the church and its liturgical assembly was from this perspective the visible locus of the *missio Dei*, the symbolic enactment of God’s eschatological purposes for the world in the midst of the world.”³⁵

Meyers takes this model further, first with the image of a mobius strip, on which liturgy and mission are on either side, each still its own element yet inextricably linked. She offers a second model in the image of a spinning top. In this model, mission is the spinning top, with worship serving as the axis or “core of missional life.” The motion of the top is both outward and inward. Worship *sends out* into the world. And God’s love spins the top such that God’s people are *drawn back into* worship, “shaped by our encounters with the God of Jesus Christ in the world, cognizant of the hurts and hungers of our broken world.”³⁶ Meyers provokes a profound image with this model.

Imagine God setting the top spinning, gathering us for the sacrifice of praise in public worship, sending us out of the center for the sacrifice of good works, then gathering us once again, in an ongoing dance of missional worship and worshipful mission. We experience and discern God’s grace and mercy, God’s reconciling love, and we respond with both action in the world and adoration in public worship.³⁷

The dynamic energy of this model reflects my questions and convictions around the relationship between liturgy and mission. This model acknowledges God as the initiating, sustaining energy. In the inner core of worship, one can find the anchor of Word and

³⁵ Schattauer, 9.

³⁶ Meyers, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission*, 40.

³⁷ Meyers, 45.

Sacrament, creating opportunity to examine more fully how baptism and communion form identity, both propelling out and drawing back in.

Anderson emphasizes the participatory nature of the relationship of liturgy and mission, which amplifies Meyers' spinning top model,

The Three-One God whom we worship has come into the world in grace and love, has been sent to us and dwells among us, is and speaks the word of grace to the world, and sends us with a similar word. This is the missional purpose of liturgical participation. Just as there is no separation between God's being and acting, so there can be no separation between the being and acting of those joined to Christ or between our work of prayer for the world and our work of mercy in the world.³⁸

Our experience of God, equally in liturgical participation and missionary action, attunes us to the constant movement of not only telling but also enacting the story of reconciliation and grace.

Second Formation

Second Church is proud of her warm liturgical style. There's pride in being significantly different stylistically from other worshiping bodies in the community. There's assurance in the comfort of form and tradition felt in the physical space (pews, sacred furniture, and vaulted ceiling) and the rhythms of words, music, and gestures guided by bulletins and vestment-clad leaders. While one might expect that this means our congregation skews older, we continue to welcome younger families who appreciate our liturgical form. Some newer families whose worship experiences have been in less traditional settings articulate a richness and depth in our liturgy that they didn't realize

³⁸ Anderson, "Liturgical Reform," 16–17.

they had been missing. Several of our younger families also note the significance of a model that invites children and youth of all ages to be present in worship. As the opening story from Chapter One reveals, the consistent structure and rhythms are formative for all ages, inviting full participation in worship's dialogue with God.

Second also has a rich history of engaging in mission as we will see in Chapter Four. Second reflects her early-20th century roots of supporting overseas missions while worshipping locally in Zeeland. However, Second has also evolved as studies in mission have evolved. Second extended its missionary support to social action and local engagement in the 1960s and 1970s. Today, we are quick to offer monetary support to areas of need identified by local nonprofits. We are faithful in our financial support of global missions. We are now holding the breadth of mission in our congregation. Many of our members serve on nonprofit boards and/or are active in the life and work of nonprofits on their own accord.

What motivates this behavior? How is Second Church listening for and responding to God at work in the world around us? While my hope is that members are personally motivated in their community engagement by an understanding of the gospel and of mission born from an inherent inheritance with roots in liturgical formation, our current house of language tells a different story. The breadth and depth of our communal activity and engagement seem disconnected from our worshipping life. It is time for the form/pattern of our liturgy to move Second Church into a clearer understanding of mission and deepen her ability to engage together in mission beyond introverted self-concern.

There's a sense of urgency to this work when reading statements like this from Kreider and Kreider:

In the Christendom centuries, people learned the Christian story and rudimentary Christian ethics by a process of osmosis, from parents and the wider culture as well as from the church. But in post-Christendom these sources of learning have largely dried up. Today people are catechized by the global culture industries and by advertisers who prey without ceasing on our susceptibilities. If outsiders are to become followers of Jesus in post-Christendom, they need to engage in a process of deconstructing old assumptions and learning new ways of thinking and behaving. If they are to learn the elements of God's mission—love of God in Christ; love of the neighbor; love of God's reconciling work (including love of the enemy); and love of creation—they will need the support of the wider Christian family and of companions on the road.³⁹

The local church can play an important role in shaping followers of Jesus in this post-Christendom era. The liturgy itself can help to do the work the Kreiders name around deconstructing and learning new ways. The image of the dynamic spinning top of worship and mission motivates this work, as does this conviction by missional church scholars, Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile:

The spiritual renewal and deepening that begin within the gathered life of the church are essential for faithful participation in God's mission with respect to neighbors outside it. In a culture of distraction, superficiality, anxiety, fear, and division, disciples of Jesus must abide like branches of the true vine (John 15:4), rooted in God's love, in order to have anything unique to offer in witness. The abundant life Christians are called to share must be known experientially within Christian community first. This happens through spiritual practices—baptism, Eucharist, prayer, hospitality, reconciliation, Sabbath, simplicity, generosity, and so forth—that help make Christians what they are.⁴⁰

³⁹ Kreider and Kreider, *Worship and Mission*, 248.

⁴⁰ Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *Participating in God's Mission: A Theological Missiology for the Church in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2018), 319.

At the conclusion of *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, author Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen asks significant questions about the role of the church, and ultimately liturgy itself, as it relates to mission.

How can ministry patterns be created that would fuel, rather than extinguish, the flame of faith in the lives of ordinary Christians? What is the meaning of sacraments and the sacramental for people living amidst an unprecedented rise of (neo-)religiosity both in the West and elsewhere? ...How does the nature of the Christian church as *ekklesia*, a 'called-out-people,' relate to its lofty calling to be spread among the nations and become flesh in each particular cultural and religious setting?⁴¹

These questions affirm liturgical formation for mission and invite deeper inquiry into the life of the church and this called-out identity. By taking a closer look at traditions and patterns of integrating liturgy and mission, we can clarify a house of language, discern how to strengthen our formation for mission, and reorganize our worship and mission practices in light of what God has been up to and what God is calling us to as a matter of faithful interpretation.

⁴¹ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 233.

Chapter Four: Making Sense of Being Formed for Mission

Chapter Three demonstrated the dynamic energy possible between worship and mission. The energy that draws one into worship is the very same energy that sends one into mission. In this dance there are internal and external realities for individual members and for the congregation. What serves the members in the pews on Sunday morning is formative, rooting each child of God in their beloved identity and in the power of God's presence through the Word and Sacrament. While some attempt to set aside the rest of life, worship is always an invitation to bring one's whole self into God's presence. Most worshipers cannot help but be changed, even in small ways, through the gifts of music and liturgy that keep time through the seasons of the church year.

Sent out from the sacred space of the walls of Second Church, God's people find themselves offering more of what they have received as they take up the mantle of employment, care of family, neighborliness, and humble acts of service. Often without knowing that it's happening, they offer the gift of presence and the sacred art of listening to friends, family, neighbors, and even to strangers and enemies. By instinct more than obligation, each member finds ways that their gifts bring life and hope to God's world. The members of Second Church are tuned by God's grace to open their lives to the already-and-not-yet kingdom of God. This is a common refrain recurring since their formation as a church.

Early History

The village of Zeeland was initially organized by Dutch-speaking settlers in 1847, yet by 1903 most townspeople conducted life in English. This culture change had significant impact on local congregations. While some English-speaking worship services were being offered, they were less often and only in the evenings. Dutch-speaking services were still needed for many older immigrants who were not fluent in English. There was tension in the church about how to maintain community in the midst of this drastic culture change. Finally in November 1903, 104 people from Zeeland, Michigan, signed a petition to the Classis of Holland:

Believing that there is an urgent and ever growing need for an English speaking congregation in our village, and that this is an opportune time for a movement in this direction, we, the undersigned members of the Zeeland Reformed Church, respectfully petition to be set off, and to be organized as an English speaking Reformed Church. Praying that this may be accomplished in the spirit of Christian love, and for the extension and upbuilding of the kingdom of God.¹

The Classis approved this request and Second Reformed Church in Zeeland, Michigan had her first worship service on September 12, 1904.

Location, Location, Location

The new congregation initially met in the chapel of First Reformed Church and under the leadership of First's pastor, Rev. J. P. DeJong. A request for ongoing and more frequent use of First's chapel space for worship and education was not well received,²

¹ A scanned copy of this document is included in "The Founding Families of Second Reformed Church," (document presented at the centennial celebration of Second Reformed Church, 2004), 10.

² Contents of the written request are included in John R. Allen, *Church at the Forefront of Change: The History of Second Reformed Church, Zeeland, Michigan*, May 1974, 12, 34-35. "...whereas

and so it was decided to build a place of their own and call a pastor of their own. The church building was constructed by members on land owned by member, J.P.

Hartgerink.³ The first service in their own building occurred on December 18, 1904, and Rev. William Moerdyk was called as their first pastor and installed on January 17, 1905.

By January 1909, the congregation voted to build a new building. This sanctuary and an additional educational building were completed in 1911 on the opposite corner to First Reformed Church.⁴ A pipe organ was installed in October of that same year. This building fell into disrepair during World War II, which led the congregation to vote to construct a new building on the same site.⁵

The third church building was completed in 1952 and included parts of the original pipe organ. This building is notable for its tall spire, topped with a Celtic cross, set in place in 1952 by Gerrit Heuvelhorst, grandfather of current Second Church

we desire above all else to cherish the spirit of harmony and in no way to give cause of offence—we deem it advisable and hereby respectfully decline the offer of the church during the vacant noon hours, or to enter into any arrangements for union services of any kind. We regret exceedingly that our petition was not considered in a more kindly and charitable spirit. We asked no more than we are justly and morally entitled to, but had we foreseen that it would furnish the occasion for such action, we would gladly have refrained from asking for anything. We deem it our Christian duty to continue our work with the Sunday School and Endeavor Society, and to attend other Church meetings for the time being, while the same may meet with your approval.”

³ As recorded by Secretary, William De Pree, in the “March 11, 1920 Historical Report” for Second Reformed Church.

⁴ The original Second Reformed Church building was moved to another location and used first by another church and then by the local school.

⁵ Reported in John R. Allen, “Church at the Forefront of Change: The History of Second Reformed Church, Zeeland, Michigan” (Holland, MI, Western Theological Seminary, 1974), 22–23. “Second Church Building Committee Minutes,” March 17, 1949. Also noted in a brief historical paper entitled “Looking Back.” “When it became evident that even drastic measures would not suffice to put our auditorium into a proper state of repair, because the war scarcities had prevented such careful maintenance as was required, the congregation decided to erect the beautiful sanctuary in which today we worship our Lord.”

members. The family story told by granddaughter, Gloria (Heuvelhorst) DeKleine, is that when the cross was first set in place, it had to be taken down to shorten. This required Gerrit to scramble two times to that very high perch beyond the scaffolding!⁶

Most Second Church publications after 1952 include a photograph or drawing of the spire. A newsletter named, “The Spire,” eventually became our weekly bulletin announcements insert. The image we use now was recreated by former office staff member, Hope Olson, in 2015. The Spire tells a story of the rhythms of our church life—from worship to discipleship to serving and connecting in our wider community. These weekly announcements attempt to draw people’s attention beyond the church spire to the significance of life within our community—to the places we live, work, and serve.

Just below the church spire is the home of our electronic chimes⁷ that have tolled the quarter hour from 8 am to 8 pm each day for sixty years, and continue to mark weddings, funerals, and other memorials in the life of the church and community. When the interior chimes controls had to be relocated during the 2017-2018 construction project, the neighborhood was strangely quiet, with rumors circulating that the chimes were never coming back. Whether or not they were happy to hear, we gladly let people know this breach of our neighborhood outreach was temporary!

We still worship in the 1952 sanctuary, although it has been renovated and added to a few times. A new Reuter pipe organ was installed in 1972 and restored and improved

⁶ Gloria DeKleine, email to author, September 14, 2021.

⁷ The Maas-Rowe system was installed in the 1952 construction and upgraded in 1984. A congregational letter by Rev. John Kleinheksel on December 8, 1983 encouraging gifts for the upgrade says, “A new chime system will ring praise, honor and glory to our Holy God throughout our church and community.”

in 2017-2018. In 1994 a major building campaign expanded congregational gathering places, classrooms, and church offices. Most recently we completed a remodel and fourth addition that transformed the church kitchen, parking lot entry, gathering areas, and the chancel and seating in the sanctuary.

Second Church is located a block away from the “downtown” strip in the city of Zeeland, Michigan. It is not uncommon today to hear Zeeland referred to as Pleasantville. The charming downtown, the city’s tree-lined streets, an excellent school system, and regularly scheduled family-oriented activities contribute to the pleasant small-town experience. The city’s infrastructure is supported by a significant manufacturing base whose tax revenue supports the school system and community life with additional city amenities such as parks, parades, a community splash pad, free concerts, and other free community-wide events and activities.

Perception is not necessarily reality for the whole population. City-limit statistics suggest that Zeeland is barely affordable to more than 40% of its residents who are considered asset-limited, income-constrained, and employed (ALICE) according to studies conducted by the United Way.⁸ While the city limit population numbers remain steady, the surrounding area continues to grow evidenced by new housing and increases in school enrollment. Zeeland is one of just a few districts in Michigan whose enrollment

⁸ United Way ALICE data can be accessed at <https://www.unitedforalice.org/county-profiles/michigan>.

has steadily increased.⁹ The change in population and tension between the haves and have-nots will continue to impact city and area dynamics.

Second is often referred to as the fountain church. Our church borders a small city park (oddly divided between three corners of the Central and Church intersection). Central Avenue and Church Street are the historic center of the original Dutch settlement. To our southwest stands First Reformed Church.¹⁰ To our north stands First Christian Reformed Church.¹¹ For those who know the differences in Reformed congregational names, these three entities are filled with political and ecclesial stories of collaboration and competition. As stated above, ours is the church whose clock chimes on the quarter hour, keeping the neighborhood in tune with the passing of time.

The People of Second Church

Sitting in the pews of Second Church are descendants of the original charter members and several more who have only ever known Second as their church. Their connection to history and legacy is strong. Next to them in the pews are those whose life stories have involved the pain of rejection from other church bodies due to unplanned pregnancies, divorce, or commitments to the inclusion of women's gifts in leadership. Some of the congregation is there because of a deep love for our warmly liturgical and

⁹ Zeeland Public Schools superintendent, Cal DeKuiper, shared this statistic at a Second Church Adult Second Hour in February 2020.

¹⁰ First Reformed Church of Zeeland's website is <http://frcz.org/>.

¹¹ First Christian Reformed Church of Zeeland's website is <https://firstzeeland.org/>.

traditional worship style. A young family that recently joined named their love of singing from a hymnal and the accompaniment of the organ as a key reason for connection.

We are young and old. We are longtime residents and new to the community (even West Michigan). We are single and married, some with children and some without. Many of the adults have college education or beyond. We are 99% white. We are primarily middle to upper middle class, including a few very wealthy families. Many of those in our congregation live within walking distance of the church and are deeply invested in the leadership of our community as business owners, board members, and philanthropists.

There is a refrain in Second Church's history about being an outlier. In the fiftieth anniversary booklet it describes the original call of this English-speaking congregation:

That the Lord has blessed this call and the accepted challenge is surely evident today. Our membership now includes German, French, Polish, Scotch, English and Canadian, Swedish, Greek, Iraqi, and "American" in addition to Holland. And among us are those who have come from the Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Christian Reformed, Episcopalian, Congregational, Baptist, Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches. Yet we are all one in Jesus Christ and one in fellowship. "For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of that bread."

A decade later, the consistory names this continued sense of identity, albeit in somewhat of a comparative stance.

Second Reformed Church was founded on certain principles which we feel leads to the unique service this church performs in the community. The Second Reformed Church was the first English-speaking church in the community serving a special need. Today, we have a unique Christian Mission, not only in Zeeland but also in the whole area. It is felt that the local church does serve as a place where people from other denominations or backgrounds more readily find a

church home. We tend to have a more open door policy than is offered in other churches.¹²

There is occasional pride about this otherness, but more so profound wonder at a church that pondered women's ecclesial suffrage already in 1913, eucharistic and baptismal hospitality to an unwed mother and her child in 1968,¹³ and supporting ordained female leadership in the early 1970s.

The Dove Distinctive

In 1972, Second Church wrote up some long-range objectives, including "The development of a symbol which may be used as a means of saying something about what kind of a church we are."¹⁴ By the late 1970s a dove (varying in size, shape, color, direction of flight, etc.) became a key symbol, included on letterhead, bulletins, mugs, sweatshirts, stickers, etc. We cleaned out a closet a few years ago and found the dove included on a flyer welcoming participation in a Second Church pub night!

A dove symbolizes God's gracious provision as depicted in the flood narrative in the receding of the destructive waters.¹⁵ The dove carried the olive leaf, green and

¹² Second Reformed Church Consistory Minutes, November 3, 1964.

¹³ Second Reformed Church Deacons Minutes, November 4, 1968.

¹⁴ Allen, "Church at the Forefront of Change," 42.

¹⁵ Genesis 8:8-12 "Then [Noah] sent out the dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; but the dove found no place to set its foot, and it returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took it and brought it into the ark with him. He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark; and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. Then he waited another seven days, and sent out the dove; and it did not return to him any more."

growing in the good creation God had made, symbolizing the promise of God for protection and flourishing. A dove is also a key symbol named in all four gospel accounts of the baptism of Jesus.¹⁶ The “Spirit descending like a dove” is witness and affirmation of that profound moment of identifying Jesus as the beloved Son of God.

Although I did not find official documentation regarding the intent of the dove symbol, it’s not hard to imagine a connection to the ongoing work of the Spirit in our midst. This is the Spirit that confirms the beloved identity of baptized children of God. This is the same Spirit given to disciples of Christ to comfort, teach, and inspire to the end of time.¹⁷ The Second Church dove symbolizes both identity and purpose for the people of God, gathered and sent by God. It holds the symbol of new life from the baptism of Jesus and the symbol of promise from the flood narrative.

At the completion of the 2018 construction, we commissioned a piece from Alex Janssen.¹⁸ A large version of the current dove symbol now hangs in the new parking lot entry, above a table he also designed. The dove imagery is now consistent from interior directional signage to letterhead to social media. Yet its symbolism remains more subtle than obvious—another untold story that could be more strongly represented in our house of language.

¹⁶ Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22, and John 1:32.

¹⁷ In Jesus’ “farewell discourse” to his disciples recorded in John 14-16, the Advocate is named four times. This Advocate is understood to be the Holy Spirit whose presence remains to teach, remind, and testify.

¹⁸ Alex Janssen, baptized and raised at Second Church, initially designed and made a right-sized Celtic cross for the refreshed sanctuary in 2018. The wood for the cross and dove intentionally came from Holland’s Heinz Pickle factory’s old vinegar vats. Forged by Design, <https://www.forgedbydesign.com/>.

The Continuity and Challenge of a Reformed Identity

Second Church has always been a part of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), an historic denomination in the United States.¹⁹ As noted above, Second received permission to form as a congregation from the Classis of Holland (a smaller regional body within the denomination) in 1903 and was formally established in 1904. Eventually classis membership shifted to Zeeland Classis, presumably as population grew and more Reformed Churches began in the region.

In the mid to late 1920s, a group of Zeeland residents became involved with the Gull Lake Bible conferences. Gull Lake Bible was associated with the Baptists yet is now a non-denominational camping ministry.²⁰ Several prominent members of Second Reformed Church participated, creating significant tension within the congregation when they moved their membership. In 1929 a building, the “Bible Witness Hall,” was erected on West Main Street for the purpose of conducting Bible conferences. “The First Baptist Church of Zeeland was organized as an outgrowth of Gull Lake Bible conferences which emphasized the study of prophetic events in scripture.”²¹ The loss of key and active members from the congregation certainly presented its challenges, although the growth of the church continued.

¹⁹ The Reformed Church in America’s website is www.rca.org/about/history.

²⁰ This history can be found in Wendell K. Babcock, *Great and Mighty Things: A Celebration of 75 Years at Gull Lake Bible and Missionary Conference* (Gull Lake, MI: Gull Lake Bible and Missionary Conference, 1993).

²¹ Allen, “Church at the Forefront of Change,” 18.

Second is one of three RCA congregations within Zeeland city limits. They are all within one mile of each other on Central Avenue! Three other RCA congregations exist in the 49464 zip code, with another 37 RCA churches less than 10 miles away (many of these are concentrated in Holland).²² As noted above, Second holds its own particular identity in this church-dense area. From Sunday morning worship traditions (vestment-wearing clergy, a majestic pipe organ, oft-used hymnals, and lengthy bulletins) to the active presence of ordained female leadership, we do stand out in the crowd.

Rev. Ken Eriks does well in describing her uniqueness,

Second Church is a church that has remained Reformed in its doctrine, in its stance, in its place within the theological spectrum. It is a church that has remained catholic, open in all its relationships to dealings with other Christians. As a congregation it has remained evangelical, ready to reach out to other people both with the good news of Jesus Christ, and experiencing the love of Jesus Christ in action as well as in word. You are the people who are the bearers of a 75 year history, a history of being in the mainstream of Christianity, within the mainstream of the churches in the United States of America *while offering a very important alternative to worship and work within the community of Zeeland.*²³

The people and ministry of Second Church continue to reach out in action and word while remaining steadfast to Reformed identity, particularly in a sense of *semper reformanda* (reformed and always reforming).

Defining Mission

Belonging and connection are clearly marks of Second. Even our commitment to world mission pours forth from connections more locally. Support for missionaries

²² These numbers are based on the church finder search found at “Find an RCA Church,” Reformed Church in America, www.rca.org/find-an-rca-church/.

²³ Ken Eriks, Second Reformed Church 75th Anniversary booklet, 18. (emphasis mine).

serving abroad began early in the life of Second Church. “The church has strongly supported missionaries in the field since 1907 when the Reverend Henry DePree and his wife sailed for China and 40 years of service there.”²⁴ The 1920 historical report describes the first pastor, William Moerdyk’s tenure:

During his faithful pastorate of six years, God blessing his labors among us, the membership in full communion had more than doubled, having grown from 110 to 285. Over forty-three thousand dollars had been contributed, of which nearly twelve thousand dollars was for foreign and domestic missions.²⁵

This is nearly 28% of contributions specifically for missions in the very early years of the church!

Global/foreign mission support ebbs and flows in Second’s history. At present, our congregation financially supports five RCA global missionaries with an annual half mission share.²⁶ These missionaries serve in diverse ways in a variety of places around the world. Now when we add new missionaries to our support list, we take into consideration the connection to the interests and passions of our congregation, as well as seeking to offer connections in a variety of places.

The most recently added half mission share supports a female working in a part of the world where Christian ministry is particularly challenging. We were introduced to her by another local RCA congregation, which led us to invite her to share her story with the wider congregation. Several in the congregation were very moved by her testimony and

²⁴ Second Reformed Church, 1971 Church Directory.

²⁵ De Pree, “1920 Report.”

²⁶ The Partner in Mission share is determined by the denomination and changes slightly each calendar year.

commitment to Christian ministry, and immediately sensed connection to our history of welcoming women in ministry when others around us did not.

Second's mission engagement mirrors the changes expressed in the global conversation that brought church and mission back together in closer relationship. External relationships, whether world mission or local charters, are long-standing for Second. One example is Second's history with Boy Scouts of America (now known as BSA). Second Church started as the chartering organization for Troop 21 in 1951. This expanded to include Cub Scout Pack 3048 in 1960. Even more, the BSA partnership aligns with the historic narrative of Second as we added BSA Troop 2 in 2018, the first all-girls troop in our district. While BSA participation on the part of Second Church members waxes and wanes, the partnership is most visible in the level of activity in our building throughout the week. Troops 2 and 21 meet consistently on Monday evenings. The Pack meets on Tuesdays. Second's sanctuary is host to "moving up ceremonies" and Eagle Scout inductions. Once a month, our building is host to the districtwide leader meeting. Although "Scout Sunday" feels obligatory each February, it also demonstrates commitment and hospitality to these partners and their commitment to children and youth in the area.

Consistory minutes from the late 1960s and early 1970s demonstrate ways that Second continued to expand its engagement in social action, again mirroring the kinds of changes happening in global conversations. Rev. John Nordstrom's pastorate during this season of the church is fondly remembered by many current members, likely in part due to his encouragement of the congregation to engage beyond themselves. It was also

during Nordstrom's tenure that Second became the site of several weekly Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) group meetings. "This congregation became engaged in social action and ministry to meet local needs, as well as continuing to support foreign mission. From this time on the Second Reformed Church building has been a place to serve the hurting and disadvantaged as well as the 'saints.'"²⁷

This outward, action-oriented focus rooted the church in a time when national and global tensions were high. In a powerful sermon offered on November 25, 1973, Nordstrom reflected on life and ministry in the 60s and the opportunities facing the church in the 70s. Speaking directly to the role of lay leadership, Nordstrom opined:

You touch the world in significant and meaningful ways. You are important. What the leadership of the Church owes you is not a bunch of pious generalities, but an opportunity to grow in your humanness and get further training in skills which will help you fulfill your ministry. The Church of the 70's must be a place of training in biblical, theological and interpersonal skills.

The question is still the same; only the words change. To Isaiah it was "Whom shall I send?" To us it is "Who takes responsibility for the neighbor or the earth if we don't?" You are the "salt of the earth" and "the light of the world!" Your ministry is critical!²⁸

This sermon reveals roots of the "living the kingdom" tagline that shows up decades later!

Long-standing partnerships have also connected us to area churches, expanding a sense of church and mission beyond one local congregation. We successfully partnered with area churches in helping to start Parkview Home—a Christian residential

²⁷ Second Reformed Church 2004 pictorial directory, in the section about Nordstrom's tenure, 4.

²⁸ Rev. John Nordstrom, "Reflections, a meditation on being a Christian minister during 'ten tough years,'" a sermon delivered in the Second Reformed Church of Zeeland, Michigan on November 25, 1973.

community for adults with cognitive disabilities. Our church maintains a seat on the board of this nonprofit and greatly benefits from ongoing relationships with the residents who not only live across the street from our church but also, prior to Covid, regularly participated in our Wednesday night activities (dinner and worship). Each week the residents cross to First Reformed Church to participate in Special Education Ministries, a program that started in Zeeland at the hands of a Second Church member, Sue (Miller) Den Herder, back in 1981.²⁹

In March 1981, eight churches in Zeeland partnered in response to a need for affordable senior housing. Now known as Haven Huis, this ministry continues today, with a board seat always held by a Second Church member. Sadly, most members of the church know very little about this housing project and our connection to it, let alone the needs of the residents. This highlights an ongoing struggle for Second in telling our stories of engaging in mission. Certain core members uphold traditions behind the scenes, rather than actively bringing their experience and stories to bear in our worshiping and community life.

²⁹ Second Reformed Church Consistory Capsule, April 12, 1982 includes the following: “Christian Action Council reported that a Special Education Ministries has been formed in the Zeeland area under the leadership of Ms. Sue Miller and in cooperation with parents of ‘special education children,’ from the Zeeland area. This is an exciting ministry that is an outgrowth of the Third Reformed Church special education ministries in Holland.”

Living the Kingdom

For over twenty years, “Living the Kingdom” provided a house of language for the mission and vision of Second Church. It was adopted by Consistory during Rev. Bob Dahl’s tenure on June 5, 1990, with the following mission statement:

The mission of Second Church is to witness faithfully to the reconciling love of God, the Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, as revealed in Jesus Christ and nurtured by the Holy Spirit.

By grace, we claim God’s reconciling love for ourselves and for the whole creation. Our witness is the expression of that love –

- returned to God in worship,
- shared with each other in fellowship (which includes our worship, social, and educational life together as a faith community), and
- presented to the world in a ministry of service through word and deed.

Kim, Kyle, and Steve all gave examples of the significance of educational life at Second. Their involvement and experience as faith formation leaders corresponds with the “living the kingdom” vision. When Kim was initially asked to be a leader with Children In Worship at its beginnings at Second in the early 1990s, it was a leap of faith for her to commit. All the leaders traveled together to a training in Spring Lake, a training Kim describes as “the most impactful time that I had in really worshipping God and having a sense of leadership because they not only trained us but tried to uplift those being trained.” The close connections with the group formed through their shared training and leading in the church “helped people stick it out for a lot of years. The group took care of each other.” Thirty years into the program and Kyle also described the value of shared leadership in Children In Worship. He was “inspired working alongside others... by their gifts... a sense of being empowered.”

Steve, who taught a high school faith formation class, mentioned his co-teacher but focused on what he gained in perspective from the youth. “We both agreed, at the end of the year, that we had benefited more through our interactions with students than they had benefited from us in that we learned about their behaviors, thought process, etc.” Faith formation certainly concerns itself with making disciples, a clear mission action.

Frank talked both about Habitat for Humanity experiences and church property projects. He noted that he once told a group, “We’re here to build a fence, but that’s not really why we’re here. We’re here to get to know one another and work together.” To Frank, the camaraderie was the mission. A theme that shows up even as Frank reflects rather vulnerably about a group Habitat build, he asked,

Is [the project] helping or hindering? ... ‘Give a man a fish...’ you know that story. So, when you’re helping *these people* out, you go into it with some semblance of expectation that they are going to participate with vigor as part of gaining a house. Yet you look at *them* on the job and see that they’re not working as hard as the guys from the church group. Are we helping this family? Yes. Are we helping the individual who is supposed to be providing for his family?

He lets his last question linger. I admit that I didn’t ask Frank about what they did, if anything, to get to know the family for whom they were building. I didn’t press Frank on his insider/outsider language. It’s not hard to read between the lines that there’s tension around the intent and impact of this kind of work. This could be why Frank turns his attention to group dynamics instead, knowing that the impact of working side-by-side is more within his control. Their witness in a service of deed takes a back seat to the fellowship of working together as members.

The 1994 church directory makes plain the initial “living the kingdom” mission statement, “The mission of Second Church is to put beliefs into action through service

and witness within the congregation, in the local community and the world at large.” Hope’s employment in the nonprofit sector is an interesting example of service and witness in the local community. While in charge of a feeding ministry, Hope saw this work as “faith in action” and truly the “biggest time she engaged in mission.” Whether coordinating volunteers, managing tight budgets, or serving hungry people, it “always felt like being the hands and feet of Jesus.” For Hope, mission includes tangible, action-oriented, and place-specific activity. None of this happens without people, a clear priority for Hope in her mission engagement.

Pete and Kyle convey service and witness in stories of mission trips. Pete participated in some flood relief in his teenage years but has changed his view on mission engagement over the years. “Mission is such a funny word,” he quipped. “There are so many different ways to think about it.” While his comments darted from here to there and everywhere, you could hear his brain ping connections between being sent and meeting needs, between the experience of worship and daily life, between the needs nearby and those farther off. A decade older, yet around Second only a couple years more, Kyle shared about international mission trips including from more recent years. Lingering around the edges of his story was deep awareness around the impact of going far away when similar needs are nearby. Despite existential angst around this kind of experience, Kyle did not hedge one bit as he said, “Engaging in mission equates to helping others—using my gifts to help—that is loving.”

This kind of mission and service also contributes to the stated goals of sharing in fellowship. John prioritized the group experience in his story of church mission trips to

Chicago. He carefully named each member of the group for one trip, and the names of his children who accompanied him on another trip. While there was clearly impact on his perspectives of mental illness and poverty, he was more enthusiastic that “sharing mission time is a great experience.” This, he thought, is more long-lasting than the “impact of what they could do.”

While these varied stories suggest mutuality in mission, most also convey a sense that engaging mission is about meeting an external need, whether that’s physical, emotional, or relational. The extent of witness is evident in John and Hope utilizing the language of “sharing faith” and “faith in action” to describe the impact of these tangible acts of service and mission.

The general ethos of the “living the kingdom” tagline carried through the long tenure of John Schmidt (1995-2012). In a Fall 2021 historical presentation for adult education, longtime members of Second Church were surprised that this vision actually predated Schmidt’s tenure! An overall emphasis in this long season was to remind members that their call was to “live the kingdom” wherever they found themselves.

Our vision is the very kingdom of God – people living in covenant with God, doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God (Micah 6:8). We “Live the Kingdom” in this community by trying to be people who reflect the attitude of Jesus – poor in spirit, who are able to mourn with others, who are meek, and who hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:3-10). We want to enjoy the fruit of God’s Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22). This is who we have been! This is who we are! This is who we want to be!³⁰

³⁰ “Celebrating a Century of Faith and the Joy of New Beginnings” a 2004 centennial brochure, Second Reformed Church, Zeeland, MI.

The ways of the kingdom invite acts of justice, love, humility, and service through an already-not-yet reality rooted in the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

John's connection to Second spans decades, including significant leadership roles on consistory and with youth. "I think everything I do is relative to mission," John told me. "From raising children to work I do in moving things along in a way that honors God." He went on to describe workplace values and parenting decisions that provided his children with wider experiences of the world in their growing-up years. His broad view of mission seems in line with the "living the kingdom" era at Second, even if his words were different.

Amanda offered a similar life-encompassing sentiment around mission. "Our family tries to engage in mission every day." Amanda is the kind of Zeeland neighbor that knows who lives where and what they might need at any given time. Her children play freely in the streets and up and down the block with any number of neighborhood friends. She's the kind of neighbor who happily makes an extra meal to share, even when her life calendar is full to overflowing. Deeply rooted in neighborhood and community, Amanda is also a leader in the church, having served on consistory and in faith formation on and off for over a decade. John and Amanda were the only two interviewees who articulated mission engagement so broadly, particularly in this life-encompassing way.

Kim has been around Second long enough to also be impacted by the "living the kingdom" vision. She described mission engagement in her workplace. Kim told a story from her days in healthcare, coming alongside a wide variety of patients. Three different times in the story she said, "I didn't know I was doing it at the time." By offering a

listening ear and truly staying present to the person before her, Kim was true to herself and unaware of the positive impact. It was several weeks later that she received feedback through the healthcare system, recognizing her “for going above and beyond.” Kim certainly demonstrates the kind of person who “lives the kingdom” out of their beloved identity and offers to the world the kind of grace and presence she has received from God.

The flexibility of “living the kingdom” allows mission commitment to change over time. “It’s selfish that I don’t do it now,” Steve said reluctantly. Although he still financially supports Young Life, he did not see this as the same as hosting dinners in their home for local leaders. This experience from almost two decades ago was still alive in him. He shared about how it “gave him a new enthusiasm for ministry and a heart for the unchurched.” Yet, once his daughter had moved on as a participant in the organization, his personal engagement shifted. Had Julie been listening in on the conversation, she probably would have eagerly reminded Steve that missional giving matters too in “living the kingdom.” Heavily involved in philanthropic efforts throughout the community, Julie teared up in telling the story of selecting a scholarship recipient while serving on a board committee. For Julie, “the awareness of what an opportunity to help,” is her definition of mission. Also, practically a life-long member at Second, Julie’s story bears witness to the “live the kingdom” era, at least in the sense that all parts of life are a place where we can engage missionally.

Julie’s check-writing mentality also fits with the kind of story often told about mission at Second and affirmed through the “living the kingdom” era. We are excellent at

writing checks as a church, and we don't tend to collectively plan mission engagement. Community is a high value in our congregation, both in terms of relational connections within the congregation and commitments to the health and life of our local community. The internal community is visible in dynamic and often lingering conversations before and after church events. The reach of Second Church into the community is broad, whether through serving on boards, giving consistent financial support to local organizations, or dedicating weekly service hours to our schools and area nonprofits. In these ways Second Church truly "lives the kingdom" albeit more as individuals than a church engaging in mission together.

Deep and Wide

A new pastor arrived in 2013 and put aside the long-held statement (although its presence lingers on our church coffee mugs used every Sunday!). In November 2014, Rev. Karsten Voskuil proposed "deep and wide" to the consistory, focusing on deepening commitment and widening hospitality,

In exploring the role and meaning of membership in the changing realities of our culture, we will find a wonderful opportunity to emphasize both commitment and hospitality. True to our historical roots, Second is a community that has done a good job of welcoming people not always welcomed elsewhere and equipping the gifts of people not always fully equipped elsewhere. This gift of hospitality is as needed today as it was when we were established as the first English speaking church in Zeeland. That being said, the tent of hospitality needs to be deeply rooted for it to truly provide sanctuary and comfort. Our roots are the gospel. Experiencing and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ is our meaning and purpose. This means that discipleship making, commitment to being Christ's body, and robust theological reflection are essential to any future God has for our church.³¹

³¹ Second Reformed Church Consistory handout, November 25, 2014.

The document goes on to list a wide variety of practices, values, and priorities that the church could see as moving “deep and wide.” This new phrase attempted to build on the strengths of a congregation already committed to community. However, its broad nature served as more catch-all than focus for the congregation. Where “living the kingdom” encouraged taking the gospel into every part of life, “deep and wide” focused more on drawing the community in through hospitality and discipleship.

Several members who came to Second in the “deep and wide” era hesitated to describe their experiences of engaging in mission. Their tone and body language reflected doubt that the activity they described “counted” as mission or maybe with a sense of shame around something they thought they ought to be doing. Kristi immediately hedged: “Being a host family...but I don’t think that really qualifies...It’s mission but doesn’t feel like love your neighbor. Jesus says love everybody.” For all her life experience, Kristi often shows up in the world with more doubt than assurance. Yet her heart longs for inclusion, care, and meaningful connections. Even with living at least a decade in West Michigan, she experiences many people here as “closed off and insular.” Her mission commitments to caring for students counteracts this, and she believes, “connect[s] them to care and growth; gives roots and plants seeds.”

Kristi clearly articulates a need for hospitality in the wider community. Her hesitation and disconnect of mission from the local church illustrate the lack of clear language for a church in mission and the more insular focus of this season in the life of the church. Several newer members couldn’t really come up with any examples of serving alongside others from Second. To be fair to them our church has done little to

organize group mission interactions, beyond rather passive invitations to walk in the annual Crop Walk (raising money and awareness) or an occasional neighborhood Christmas cookie delivery.

In September 2016 the Board of Elders approved a document that described membership at Second through the significance of our identity as those baptized into the name and purpose of our Triune God.³² In this Triune community of love, “Second Church is to be a community of faith where relational love drives our identity and mission.” The document goes on to name seven key actions of life together: worship together regularly, forgive and commit to the work of restoration and reconciliation, celebrate diverse gifts, create space, prioritize financial support, grow (referring specifically to spiritual faith practices both individual and corporate), and embrace the wider work of transformation (through acts of service, mercy, justice, evangelism, etc.).

The language encouraging members to “embrace the wider work of transformation” is essentially a continuation of “living the kingdom.” The formative language and theological foundations for our life together are significant. Yet, the language stayed as language, rather than shaping our life together or providing a clear mission or vision as we move into the future.

The clearest picture of “deep and wide” in this era came in the building project completed in 2018. The architect for the project used the Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil as design inspiration. Christ’s extended arms in the statue suggest

³² The text of this document is posted on Second’s website, “Belonging to a Community of Love,” Second Reformed Church, September 27, 2016, www.secondreformedchurch.org/belonging-to-second-church.

hospitality and welcome. The arc of the proposed new entry mirrored these open arms, inviting the community of Zeeland in. This affirmed and encouraged “deep and wide” language as the case for the 2015 capital campaign launch.

Wide compels us to *welcome everyone*: the well and the unwell, the rich and the poor, the citizen whose family came over with VandeLuyster and the new immigrant, she who loves church and he who is uncertain. *We invite every person into the fellowship* of our family. Going **Deep** accompanies this winsome and hospitable connection to Second. A desire for **Deep** compels us to learn and experience both what it means to be loved by and to serve the risen Christ. **Deep and Wide** is not a change of direction for Second Church. You could say it is the most recent expression of our historical commitment to being a missional church.³³

The mentions of serving the risen Christ and “being a missional church” attempt to provide language for a church in mission. Yet, a building project of this nature could not help but keep the congregation focused on our location and the movement of gathering and welcoming in, rather than being sent out.

Throughout the construction season several directed conversations helped the congregation brainstorm how we might utilize the new and refreshed spaces as resources for existing community organizations or in offering new activities to meet community needs. In this way, the emphasis on bringing people to us felt less self-serving and more connected to investment in the health of our wider community. Concurrently, a small group of church leaders actively conducted community research on needs and resources. Since the building project included renovating the church kitchen to a commercial kitchen, this team paid special attention to local food needs.

³³ Capital Campaign case document created for the congregation in 2015.

Unfortunately, the energy and momentum being generated around the new construction came crashing down during a pastoral crisis in August 2018. The season that followed turned the church further inward as we worked through the pain and grief. We learned important skills about managing congregational anxiety and living with integrity in that season.

Rooted and Reaching

In September 2019, as newly installed co-pastors we introduced the language of being a congregation that is *rooted and reaching*.

Like the idea of deepening our faith, thinking about roots challenges us to be aware of where we're rooted and what we're rooted in. Like the idea of widening our hospitality, thinking about leaves and branches reaching skyward challenges us to ask what we're reaching for and why we're reaching.³⁴

We hoped that this spin on “Deep and Wide” might offer the missing clarity and hooks for outward-facing mission and shift us away from the inward-looking language of the now-completed building project. Rooted connects us to the pride of our history and DNA as a congregation and speaks to the life gained from being rooted in Christ and drawing life from the Word. Reaching speaks to the call to welcome and to serve. Like branches reaching out and up, we commit ourselves to God and the world that God loves.

We spent time with consistory that fall trying to write a mission statement or at least form some goals, particularly focused around worship, faith formation, and community partnerships/engagement. We struggled to lead the conversation and

³⁴ Revs. Eric and Miriam Barnes in a sermon preached on September 8, 2019.

ultimately never came up with a concise mission or vision to present to the congregation. The Covid-19 pandemic certainly offered a roadblock, or at least a speed bump to continuing to develop this vision for Second Church.

The ethnographic interviews provided important texture for understanding Second's current reality and spurring hopeful movement in the direction of "rooted and reaching" as a vision for a church in mission. I was surprised that the language and action of mission was practically a foreign language for Frank, a lifelong member at Second. An older, retired educator, Frank begrudgingly remarked, "'Doing church mission' is not something I've really had or felt I was doing." Of course, Frank is the type of guy who is always pulling people together, finding ways to build relationships as people work and live together. He's as quick to offer tangible help as he is to share his opinion, whether you asked for it or not. Over his many years serving in area school districts, he lived his faith out, sometimes "skirting the laws carefully" to convey his religious convictions. His life illustrates "rooted and reaching" even if he doesn't see it, and his testimony validates the house of language struggles when it comes to integrating mission at Second.

Gary is a tangible and action-oriented person with a passion for people. He was eager to talk about his involvement in summer camp ministry as a clear place of mission. Recognizing impact and growth in his own life from his time as camper to staff to current volunteer, Gary is convicted by "the significance of building community." He illustrated this kind of community in telling the story of a camper from his staff days who later reconnected during Gary's volunteer week, and eventually joined staff. A shared growth trajectory and the human interaction along the way are the impact that proves to him it's

mission. Gary remains committed to serving with this organization, as a means of bearing witness to transformation. Although Gary might not make a connection between his involvement at Second and this camp commitment, there's a parallel in his own roots in the organization that compel him to keep reaching from it.

Kristi recalled joining a summer bike ride the previous summer, an event organized to educate about the community more than serve. The impact for her was being “part of a group. I appreciated the shared laughter and silliness.” Pete talked about being involved with the church choir, another in-group at Second. He believes “singing and music ministry creates a home for people – and that’s a part of mission.” He went on to describe the choir as “a community of care,” sharing the story of checking in on a fellow member sick with Covid-19. “That’s mission,” he said determinedly, “loving people as Jesus commands us.”

Kristi and Pete certainly aren't wrong to value sharing in life with fellow members of Second Church. Yet is this inward-facing activity truly mission? While it's true that Second is composed of members with a diversity of opinions and experiences, how much boundary crossing is required? How does this contribute to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, reaching beyond the safety of our church community?

Gary suggested that Wednesday night dinners offer connections between Second Church members and wider church community. That's at least what he thinks ought to be happening. He recalled sitting with a new family from the neighborhood and getting to know them over a few weeks. Not one for small talk, Gary did his part to foster meaningful connections. Overall, he felt the neighborhood family “obtained a positive

outlook and experienced realistic community.” It’s rare to have true outsiders at a Wednesday night dinner, and yet Gary’s attitude toward fostering mutuality and connection is certainly a valiant one.

Amanda told the story of working with our new Community Schools Partnership and hosting a special Christmas party for children whose parents were attending a meeting. After naming the church members there with her, she gushed about the experience the children were able to have. “It says it all seeing the looks on kids’ faces... it surprised them to have fun.” Grateful to participate with others from Second Church, including her own children, Amanda also deeply values the relationships built with mission partners. Her story illumines the best hopes of rooted and reaching that take members of Second into the community together and return again to worship with a story to tell.

Whether or not “rooted and reaching” comes to define Second and how she engages in mission, it remains an important season of listening. At the top of our weekly worship bulletin is a brief welcome paragraph.

Welcome to Second Reformed Church! We are thrilled to have you join us in worshiping our living God. Second Church has been gathering as a community of Jesus Christ since 1904. We are **rooted** in faith, history, and community. We are committed to **reaching** our local community and world, using our gifts to follow Christ in mission.

These words are likely read by newcomers and glossed over by regular attendees. What could it mean for these words or another shared vision statement to prompt integrating stories of mission with our worshiping life? How might we continue to build

on the rich roots of our tradition in ways that send us out as much (or more) as we are drawn in?

The varied stories from interviews and history confirm a shared value of relationship in mission and continue to highlight deficits in our house of language around mission. There is very little sense that members understand mission as movement beyond our Second Church experiences – taking stories of God into the world and enacting God’s love in the world.³⁵ In many ways it feels that people are content in thinking that the church is its own mission. Although I didn’t enter these interviews looking for justification for my research, my longing for richer language and understanding of mission and its connection to our worship life finds resonance here.

Defining Tradition

Tradition at Second refers to pews, hymns, organ, choir, and robed pastors as much as it refers to the flow of the Sunday morning liturgy. Whether Second Church is the only church community one knows, or the worshiper is new in the last few years, there is common language around the Sunday morning experience. Amanda shared about her journey to Second more than a decade ago. “When we started looking for a church, we wanted something that would imitate the traditional, but have a warm, welcoming feel.” New to Second just before the Covid-19 pandemic, Hope shared about not growing up in the church and her more recent past in a “seeker sensitive” CRC on the other side of the state. “We found you guys. You’re really traditional...not as conservative, but more

³⁵ Ruth Meyers, *Missional Worship Worshipful Mission: Gathering as God’s People, Going Out in God’s Name* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), 4.

traditional...a weird cross-section.” She went on to describe her family as “devout Christians who are socially liberal” and a sense that Second Church fits that, or at the very least has space for them to be themselves. Kyle grew up in what he described as traditional churches and knew what he was looking for when his family relocated to Zeeland. He makes a big deal about traditional not meaning stuffy, particularly at Second. “Second is less stuffy than those places (although my kids might think it’s a little stuffy). There are ways in which there is forethought to what’s going on; ways traditions are upheld...”

Music as Tradition

References to organ and choral music are abundant in Second Church’s history. A pipe organ accompaniment has sustained the voices of Second Church members since the 1911 sanctuary. Choirs are positively named in vision documents from the 1930s and 1970s,³⁶ as well as in ministry summaries throughout Second’s history. The choir tradition includes a wide range of ages over the years, from elementary-age children to adults in their 80s. We have a long history of gifted organists and dedicated choir directors. A recent retirement of our Director of Music (a role which included directing the choir and serving as church organist) prompted numerous conversations regarding the value and importance of both organ and choral traditions at Second.

These musical traditions are intricately and seamlessly woven into Second’s worshiping life. The history and tradition of organ and choir combined with the lively

³⁶ Allen, “Church at the Forefront of Change,” 21, 47.

acoustics of our sanctuary lend themselves to certain styles of music. Traditional hymnody in classical styles is most common. Common meters with solid four-part harmonies (and the occasional descant) are some of the most-loved hymns. Hymnals have always adorned our pews, with a willingness to adapt and update. When we decided to move from *New Century Hymnal* (published by the United Church of Christ in 1995) to *Lift Up Your Hearts* (published by Faith Alive in 2013, a joint effort of the CRCNA and the RCA), there was awareness of gains and losses. Thanks to technology for copying and music notation software, we can offer some continuity by including music from other sources in our bulletins. It is notable that in the last fifteen years (at least), the musical style has expanded to include Taizé, Iona, global music, and the occasional modern contemporary song composed in the last twenty years.

Changes in musical styles over the years also created space for including other instruments in worship. The piano is heard most Sundays, sporadically accompanied by acoustic guitars and maybe even a djembe. On occasion we include string, wind, or brass instruments on certain pieces calling on the gifts of the congregation or wider community to share these gifts. This is one way we try to include youth participation, as many study an instrument through school.

Music traditions at Second also open doors to different kinds of community connections. For a brief season, Second actively recruited Hope College students to participate as choral scholars (and occasionally with other musical support). These young adults were not merely supplemental voices, but participants who discovered care and connection through their participation, while also broadening the experience and

perspectives of Second Church members. Their engagement with Wednesday night dinners and Sunday morning coffee time suggest deeper bonds were formed with the wider community.

One of the gifts of the most recent sanctuary renovation was creating a flexible chancel with additional space. The ability to reconfigure the space for a choir, orchestra, solo recital, or even a dance troupe opened the door for a renewed focus on the arts in worship and in building use. A committee helped to create a monthly concert calendar, called “Second Series: Sublime Art in a Sacred Space.” The goal of the series is to host a monthly event, open to the wider community, that allows for the gift of music to be more widely appreciated. From harp to organ to choirs and more, these events have opened the church doors to a different community of listeners.

Second’s musical traditions richly contribute to the feel of our Sunday morning worship. Whatever the accompaniment, the voices of God’s people find valuable connection to the full range of human emotion and the variable dynamics of worship’s dialogue with God.

An Intergenerational Tradition

Hard pews, tiled floors, and a vaulted ceiling contribute to a certain traditional feel in the sanctuary. They create an incredibly resonant space, where music sounds amazing, and noises like the rustling bulletins, a dropped hymnal, or the sounds of a young child are amplified. Instead of enforcing strict age and worship behavior boundaries, Second prioritizes intergenerational worship, welcoming a cacophony of sound. We offer nursery care for children under age 5 (the age cap has varied over the

years), yet many parents have opted to keep their children beside them in the pews from birth. This is certainly Amanda's story. "From the minute we walked into Second we felt comfortable. It feels like home. We felt comfortable having little kids in church and this wasn't frowned upon." Although her children are long grown, Kim shared about her four children being welcomed, even as she attempted to keep them contained in the back row of the balcony. She fondly recalled a member telling her, "You have the most well-behaved children." Kristi reflected about the challenge to her own attention with her kids in the pews yet noted "I feel included and don't feel watched (because of my kids)." Welcoming children is a significant way Second creates warmth in its worshiping life.

John and Kyle both noted that certain aspects of the worship experience might not connect with children and youth. Where John expressed a sense that it might not be "comfortable" for our youth, he was open to their making their own path when the time came. Kyle takes a slightly different approach, articulating James K.A. Smith's work on phenomenology and sees that "kids aren't always aware of what's happening – we're tricking them (in a good way)." As parents, both John and Kyle value the welcome and experience of children, trusting that formation is happening within the tradition, regardless of whether the child will one day choose the same for themselves. Also a parent who cares deeply about her family's engagement, Amanda notes that "The interaction of the congregation is meaningful. Anyone can call church a church, and sit in a pew, but to have that interaction and be physically a part of it means something else."

Worship as Tradition

John owns his personal preference for the worship experience. “I like traditional. I’m not comfortable in a dynamic setting. I love the artistic aspect of [worship] and have always thought Second tries to do it in a way that opens the mind—traditional but not narrow minded.” Gary doesn’t like to use the word liturgy, yet says, “I greatly appreciate pattern and regularity—a predictable pattern of worship. It’s one of the things that drew my family here.” Similarly, Pete talked about Second “checking all the ‘structural’ boxes” of what he was looking for in a church worship experience. Without naming the exact components of a worship service, these comments highlight commonalities in experience.

The liturgical patterns of services and seasons, the steady meter of hymnody, and organ accompaniment all point to a kind of tradition. It’s this tradition that offers comfort and clarity to Sunday morning worshipers. Rather than indicating a formal, stiff, and inhospitable environment, members routinely articulate warmth and openness in their experience of worship.

Although pastoral and lay leadership change through the years, the typical order of worship is quite consistent. A Children’s Sunday bulletin from 1918 looks remarkably like a 1969 bulletin. Nearly all the elements from the 1974 order of worship are still included in today’s order of worship.³⁷ The threefold order of Approach, Word, and Response scaffolds the dialogue between God and the People of God. Perhaps the most

³⁷ Allen, 48.

notable change observable in printed bulletins over the years is an increase of “call and response” elements between worship leader and the gathered people. Where previously a worship leader acted as a stand-in for the congregation in prayers or other spoken elements of the service (i.e., Call to Worship or Prayer of Confession), now the congregation regularly speaks in unison for prayers and other litanies throughout the service.

All worshipers are invited into an encounter with God, surrounded by a gathering of God’s people. Julie meets God in the “very act of walking into the sanctuary.” The space gives her a visual framework. “Music, liturgy, connection with people—this gives me the worshipful environment.” Pete appreciates the interplay of silence and speech in a particular physical space. “I lean more towards the structural side of worship...because I feel like there’s conversation with God.” Like Pete, Kyle appreciates “the deeper sense of what’s being performed/shared.” The practices of “scripture readings, sermons, meaning of hymns, the litany [sic lectionary] and sacraments” form a connection with God and with Christians worldwide.

Gary, Kristi, and Steve focus on deeply personal encounters with God in worship. For Gary, music facilitates that connection and feeling, inviting him to “just ... sit and be.” Kristi describes a movement from song to memories to prayer. In a way that other parts of her life are loud and distracting, she meets God in quiet prayer and reflection. “In the pew I feel weak and insignificant,” Steve shares. Deeply aware of God’s presence, Steve welcomes the worship encounter as “a time for to absorb whatever the service is

about that day. Even if I don't remember the details later...it's the moment that matters to me."

The centrality of Word and Sacrament in Reformed worship is key to connecting with God. Frank, John, Steve, and Hope name a value in the reading and interpretation of scripture. Frank even mentions a particular sermon that has continued to challenge him. He quips that "Sometimes God through the liturgy makes the assignments difficult." Hope makes a connection with the richness of scripture each week and the regular celebration of communion. She sees weekly communion as "a good way to center yourself for the week." Steve remembers the overwhelming feeling of serving communion for the first time as an elder. "The communion service always touches my heart." The grace-filled table tells a particular story of the people of God, gathered in remembrance, communion, and hope. There's movement in toward the table as a community united in Christ, even as there's movement out as those called to love God and neighbor.

Visitors often remark about the warm and welcoming people of Second Church. For all the formality of our space and the ceremonial emphasis of our worship services, we do see ourselves as warmly welcoming. Anyone up front looking out at the congregation can tell when someone isn't sure what to do with the hymnal, bulletin, or unspoken cue for when to stand to sing. While we do our best to show hospitality through clear written and spoken instruction, we are also aware that our formal and organized order of worship is not everyone's cup of tea. Whether or not someone appreciates the style of worship, we extend the same warm welcome before, during, and after worship.

It's one of our favorite quips to remark that "everyone is welcome. And we're not for everyone."

Testing Tradition's Roots and Reach

We were discussing the cost of music streaming licenses and their priority in our ministry at the consistory meeting on March 3, 2020. The consensus was that this was not a priority for our congregation. We didn't have the technology in place for livestreaming, either video or audio, and didn't anticipate posting the audio of the services. Two weeks later we streamed our first ever worship service on Facebook Live, using a personal iPhone and iPad. The irony was not lost on us.

Second has never been high tech, yet we were surprised at the ease of translating our worship rhythms to a weekly livestream. The moment demonstrated our adaptability and our continued commitment to familiarity. We offered hymnal pick-up for those longing to hold the familiar book in their hands. We created at-home bulletins for digital download or personal pick-up. The bulletins included musical notation; this is a long-held value to promote musical knowledge and participation. We continued to use responsive litanies and music, even knowing that not everyone at home would participate in the same way they had from the pews. We trusted that the voice of the people was still there, even if those behind the camera couldn't hear it.

In January of 2020 we expanded weekly communion to both Sunday morning services. Previously it was weekly at the 8 am service and seasonal at the 10 am service. The pandemic brought this newly established practice to a screeching halt. The Board of Elders had meaningful discussions around theology and practice, but ultimately voted to

hold off on celebrating communion remotely. We continued to reference the table, symbolically setting it each week, and reminding ourselves of its grace-filled promises. It was a significant reminder of the empty ache the pandemic was creating in each of us as week after week dragged by, with decreasing hope that our in-person gatherings could safely return anytime soon.

We continued to refine our technology each week. We led worship from the more intimate 8 am gathering space, rather than from our empty and echoey sanctuary. Even with familiar worship patterns, people shared how much they missed that particular and beloved sacred space. Easter Sunday, April 12, was our fifth week of livestreaming. To emphasize our celebration of resurrection hope and joy, we began with the iPad and iPhone cameras in the sanctuary. The space came alive in a new way with an organ prelude and an adaptation of “The Risen Conqueror,” a choral piece sung every Easter since 1905.³⁸ Then, in shaky procession, during the singing of an Easter Alleluia, we followed the wooden Celtic cross to our secondary space. We continued this new pattern until July 2020 when we had official equipment installed in our sanctuary that offered better video and audio quality.

Although the at-home view of the familiar sacred space created some connection for the congregation, it introduced a new challenge to us as pastors and worship leaders. The distance from pulpit to camera was vast. The starkness of the empty pews a constant reminder of the loss of connection and distance between members of the congregation through this pandemic season. Even as we pictured each precious member in their usual

³⁸ This was the first Easter of Second’s organized church existence.

seat, there were no faces and body language to read, no sounds of children (other than our own), no voices audibly joining ours in response and song.

As the Michigan weather and growing global scientific knowledge allowed, we began to offer some outdoor in-person worship gatherings that summer. We dragged out a piano, communion table, baptismal font, and cross to cue our connections to the sacred spaces inside. The voices muffled behind masks were better than no audible communal response. That and the bright eyes of beloved people offered hope of connection.

The Board of Elders also decided that it was time to celebrate communion again, even if we were apart. Who were we to place limits on the Spirit's ability to gather and unite us? On Sunday, July 19, we celebrated communion virtually—each household with its own elements prepared. The return of this familiar sacrament offered a morsel of grace in worship, even as it served as another stark reminder of our season of distance from one another.

After a few false starts, we finally welcomed a controlled number of households to join us for Sunday morning worship on World Communion Sunday, October 4, 2020. Masked, distanced, and silent participants, their presence brought new life and strange adjustments to the space. Where did we focus our eyes during preaching? How could we invite engaged participation without voice? How did we make sure to fully address both on-line and in-person participants? How long would people tolerate the strange taste of the pre-packaged communion elements? The dilemma lasted a mere seven weeks, as community spread increased, closing the building doors to in-person worship yet again.

We remained committed to weekly worship offerings with their anchors of familiar words and practices. Knowing we would be online for all of Advent and Christmas, we expanded our use of technology. We continued to livestream yet began inserting prerecorded videos of families and individuals leading us in parts of the service. Each week of Advent a different family led the opening liturgy from their home: lighting the Advent wreath, raising the Bible, pouring water in a bowl, and setting the communion table. This visible connection to the wider community was deeply moving for the congregation.

On the Second Sunday of Advent, we dipped our toes in new water as we celebrated the sacrament of baptism via livestream. Only the immediate family and grandparents were in the sanctuary with us that day. Even as we felt the absence of the congregation in the space, we trusted the Spirit's gathering and uniting as promises were uttered from living rooms and kitchen tables across Zeeland and Holland.

These months of testing our traditions and connections changed the landscape of this ethnography. Nearly every interviewee voiced concern over the short and long-term effects of the pandemic on the life of our church. These concerns included our worshiping life, the continuation of long-held routines and worship practices, our ability to interact together, and our sense of mission as a church. Although nearly everyone expressed gratitude for some aspect of ongoing worship or connection, the grief and pain from the losses rang louder. We will never know how differently people might have responded without the contours of a global pandemic that altered numerous aspects of human life and community. Yet questions of worship and mission continue to be vital in

the life of Second Church, arguably even more so as we continue to navigate a pandemic and the long-term impacts in our community and world.

Liturgically Formed for Mission

The communion table is exactly where Pete connects worship and mission. “Worship is where we come together around the table... We worship God as individuals, but it’s special that we get to worship God together—to love each other—to support each other—share in space—we get to love God in our own lives but then it comes together in the space of worship.” Unfortunately the definition for neighbor often gets limited to those in the pews (or online). Julie talks about the most local mission as knowing what’s happening in lives of fellow parishioners. John names “Being alongside others who are not like you—and are your neighbors too.” Kyle notes the practice of “passing the peace” in worship, where Steve sees coffee hour as the most likely space for connection with neighbor, noting that Covid-19 isn’t exactly making that possible. Hope suggests that loving your neighbor can be accomplished “in worship, if a congregation is welcoming.”

For all the ways it is natural to describe worship as love of God, it seemed unnatural for people to try and make connections between worship and the world outside the walls of the church. Pete did talk about the powerful experience of lament in worship, particularly “as we feel the noisy world around us. Looking over the last year—not just the pandemic, but of racism and violence—how the anxiety, horror, sorrow, the lament of that has come to church with me and shown up in a beautiful way either in preaching or song.” Kim and Frank clearly articulated the call and challenge of loving neighbors. Frank mentioned that he “finds the recent political upheaval to make this really

challenging.” Kim shared about her experiences as a nurse and the natural way it leads her to care for others. She also pointed out the significance of congregational prayers in worship. “When you pray for others...leads into mission...when you say a prayer and give it to God, that helps you to reach out to others.” Steve, John, and Julie also suggested congregational prayers (and prayer updates) as a way to love neighbor or at least be more connected to neighbors.

Both Kristi and Steve expressed a resistance to bringing their work realities with them to worship. “I help people all day long; I listen to people all day long.” Kristi shared. “I don’t always want to listen. Sometimes I just want to be quiet—have time to myself. This is important to me for Sunday morning.” Steve expressed the annoyance of his local leadership role and people bringing work-related questions to him. “I tried to separate work from my worship experience. ...Over the course of my [helping career] lots of painful things happened in my work and I don’t like to reflect on it. Anytime I had a bad week, going to church on Sunday recharged my batteries.” Although Steve doesn’t want to make the connection, he does express a certain hope that what happens in worship does impact how we live in and respond to the world around us.

If the rest of the world doesn’t show up with us in worship, does worship show up in the other parts of our lives? Could this be a way that the people of Second Church could articulate a relationship? Again, it seemed unnatural for people to make connections. While this could be the “inherent inheritance” at play, it’s also possible that this demonstrates the deficiencies in our house of language. Kim named learning scripture and prayer as a help in her early days as a nurse. In two different challenging

situations, scripture and prayer came to mind. In one situation she prayed (to herself) for a patient's peace, and in the other she literally offered a cup of cold water. Both times she experienced God's presence and sensed a difference in her patients. In his stressful work environment, Gary often quiets himself through intentional reflection, allowing himself to connect emotionally in ways that he also experiences in worship. Hope, Kim, and Kyle each mentioned different ways that lines from sermons, scriptures, or songs come to mind in the week following a Sunday. These little connections offer encouragement and insight, grounding them to their beloved identity and a God who meets us where we are. John's history and experience in the church sheds light on his sense of call that drives him in his work. "My role doesn't have to be a preacher or teacher; I can be someone who has a role as a lay person—serving and helping. As a lay person, you have a good role—it builds together—a way to contribute." Grounded in this identity, John beautifully connects worship and mission throughout his life.

Based on the history of Second Reformed Church and some deeply rooted worship practices, there is continuity in the ways people think about and engage in worship. What is harder to see is the full contour of mission engagement by members of Second. The lack of shared language (and perhaps understanding) around mission is an opportunity for growth. The average congregant's inability to articulate a sense that worship is forming us for mission also invites growth in language and experience.

Sent out into the world from worship, the response to a call to service, love, and peace looks different. Some see it as integrated in all of life. Some discovered mission alive in them without their making a conscious choice. In a sense, there's permission

granted and acted upon in being sent from worship to live the story of God's love, grace, and mercy without limit. There's no right way, even as there needs to be a way each follower of Christ answers the call. I believe our rich worship traditions offer significant opportunities for establishing a house of language in mission and giving all people of Second Church a richer relationship between worship and mission going forward.

Chapter Five: Embracing Constants and Change

John 15 begins with Jesus offering an extended, earthy metaphor of vine and branches. In the metaphor, the life of the branches is dependent upon connection to the vine and requires careful tending by the vinedresser. In fact, without the watchful and intentional care of the vinedresser, the vineyard won't produce good fruit. About eight verses in, the metaphor slips away while Jesus continues to name the importance of abiding. From this place of abiding, Jesus emphasizes love as an action, love that goes beyond oneself, love that embraces the other.

Speaking to his disciples in this moment prior to his crucifixion, Jesus is painting a picture of community. He uses the image of vine and vinedresser to illustrate a present and future reality for these disciples. It's ultimately a vision of community—of what it means to create and sustain community, particularly a community with Christ's mission at its core.

Abide is a word of connection—connecting us to God and because of God, to one another. In abiding we connect to something beyond ourselves. We put our faith and trust in a skilled vinedresser. We remember that we are not God, we are a vine. We remember that we are interdependent, rather than independent. We live our life together in pursuit of the common good.

God's love-in-action is the kind of love we are invited (actually, commanded) to demonstrate in community. While the other gospel writers challenge us with loving strangers and enemies, John's gospel brings it close in: love the people in the room with you right now.

Rooted and Reaching

As a church committed to learning and growing together, there is an internal and external dynamic to our community life. There is a need for internal shared value and meaning. There is also a need for connections to our wider (external) community that ground us in a bigger story. This is the inspiration for a season of Second Church known as “rooted and reaching.” One of the tasks ahead is to discover if this is truly a shared vision and one that connects our liturgy to our mission.

Systems researcher and practitioner Peter Senge, teaches that the discipline of shared vision is more than an idea.¹ It provides the focus and energy for learning. A shared vision does not come about because the head of the organization or the board names it. Shared vision begins with personal vision. The goal with a shared vision is not just that others will passively sign on but that they will truly commit.

Moving toward a shared vision will require courage, risk taking, and some experimentation. It will also require continued work with our consistory to explore our *what* (vision – names preferred future), *why* (purpose – answers why we exist), and *how* (core values – what day-to-day life looks like while pursuing vision). Even though we have often defined ourselves by what we are not and how we are different, it is time for us to define ourselves as God calls. We long for this vision to bring energy and creativity not just for a few months, but for a long season.

¹ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 2006).

In *Community: The Structure of Belonging*,² Peter Block calls communities to make the choice to stay in the room and engage the conversation, creating “space for something new to occur.”³ I do hope that a clear shared vision is ahead for us as Second Church—one that can help us to connect liturgy and mission for years to come. The liturgy of Second Church continues to *root* and ground us in God’s presence. It’s also the liturgy alive in us that invites us to *reach* into our community and the world with our God-given gifts and passions.

Liturgical Roots

When I decided to apply for this program, I felt unsure of how my love of liturgy would fit into the conversation around mission, leadership, and the church. It has been pure gift to read and grow as a missiologist, leader, and lover of the church. The ethnographic work has endeared the stories and people of Second to me as their pastor. The connection between liturgy and mission is not new, yet this focus comes at a critical moment in Second’s story. The 2017-18 building project included vision for a different kind of community engagement that we have not yet embraced due to a pastoral crisis in 2018 followed by a global pandemic in 2020. In this season of re-emerging, I, along with the leadership, are poised to explore critical questions around our understanding of mission and how our building and individual lives become important resources. Our rich

² Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., 2008).

³ Block, 175.

history and traditions (liturgy included) are a wonderful foundation on which to build as we continue to lead with God ahead of us.

The ethnographic study confirmed what I knew to be true: worship works at Second Church. We know and trust the rhythms of our liturgy. We appreciate the style, space, and people in the pews. We might not like every song, litany, prayer, or sermon each week, yet the overall *feel* is what matters most. In a tradition that can seem to prize head over heart, people routinely use feeling words to describe their worship experiences at Second. The congregation trusts pastoral staff and musicians to plan and lead and welcomes invitations to join in these efforts. There's a collective sense that our Sunday mornings more than meet the congregation's expectations.

Current shifts in Sunday morning attendance continue to nag at my convictions around the formative nature of liturgy and the kind of people it invites us to be in this world. A recent email from a young family who stopped attending regularly since Covid-19 asked big questions about the nature of faith. How, they wondered, did their parents and grandparents maintain their faith in God? How will their children fare since they, as parents, don't seem to have that same faith to offer as inheritance? There is no perfect answer to these complex questions. Yet what immediately comes to mind is the *inherent inheritance* of regular liturgical practice. James K. A. Smith writes, "The point of worship is not formation; rather, formation is an overflow effect of our encounter with the Redeemer in praise and prayer, adoration and communion."⁴ Whether or not previous generations were motivated in their church participation more by obligation or general

⁴ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 150.

cultural pressure, they could not help but be formed by their encounter with God and the people of God! We see the fruit of this formation when people articulate assurance of God's love and provision even in the midst of life's challenges.

Smith's work convicts me again and again that what's happening on Sunday mornings at Second Church matters. The willingness of people (including parents with children) to drag themselves on a consistent basis to participate in this dialogue with God will bear fruit. Although it is not the only thing required in the life of faith, Smith suggests, "When Christians engage in the practices of hospitality and Sabbath keeping, singing and forgiveness, simplicity and fasting, they are engaging in a way of life that is formative and constitutive of Christian discipleship."⁵ Sunday morning participation cannot guarantee a particular outcome for faith or discipleship. Even so, making a regular commitment to connect with God and the people of God is a worthwhile spiritual discipline. Byron Anderson points out, "liturgical participation may critique our present experience and life (rather than reinforce entrenched notions of power and privilege), offer a vision of a world not yet realized, repattern the church and our lives in relation to the world, and provide a means through which we are not only engaged with but joined to divine life in God."⁶

As we embrace the life of liturgy in the community of the church, we are given an opportunity to move beyond ourselves. Formation in the church can serve as counter-formation to ploys of consumer culture, individualism, and endless striving. Rooted and

⁵ Smith, 212.

⁶ Anderson, "Liturgical Reform," 12.

grounded in the presence of God, we are sent out to live and reach from a place of belovedness, mutual responsibility, and hope.

This project is shaping me as a leader who in the struggles and losses still finds ways to imagine the fuller picture of what God might be asking of me and the church. Our worshiping life at Second is one of God's good gifts in this season of life and ministry. As such I long to continue our intentional, warmly liturgical practice, trusting that the Holy Spirit is moving among us.

Weeds of Anxiety

The anxiety train drives worship from time to time. This seems to flip a switch for some members, particularly around music. Liturgical studies have long held that tensions around music selection and style are less about the music and most often about something deeper.⁷ Recently two different members raised concerns about changes in musical style and our long-standing choral tradition. Rather than focus on feeling attacked and defensive as pastors and staff, we “got on the balcony” for a different perspective.⁸ We first reminded ourselves that the combination of a pandemic and major staff transition (retirement plus new hire in music) are natural moments for increased anxiety in a system. Then we gave each member a chance to share their concerns directly with church leadership (pastors, staff, and elders). As we intentionally listened, the general grief from

⁷ Marva Dawn writes about the tendency to use music as a scapegoat for a multitude of issues in local church life. Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for This Urgent Time* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 166.

⁸ Ronald Heifetz, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*, 1st edition (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 7.

the change and loss of this most recent season became clear. Rather than processing the grief, these members succumbed to an impulse to find something to blame or fix. Rather than adapt to change, they sought out a technical solution to a perceived threat to tradition. Both members ultimately knew that worship is not about their personal preferences (even if they have strong ones). By providing space and time for their concerns to be heard, we honored them and our relationships. We modeled a way of leading that welcomes disagreements.

Rooted and Growing: A Learning Organization

Too often rich history and tradition can be equated with a static community. Over the years Second has demonstrated a commitment to learning, growing, and changing. We saw this in Second's embrace of mission as social action in the late 1960s and 1970s. We see this in Second's ongoing desire to be warmly welcoming to whomever walks in the door. We see this as Second continues to explore the changing dynamics of our community and how our resources (i.e., building, people, finances) can contribute to human flourishing.

Senge writes extensively about organizations who embrace the process and practice of learning in *The Fifth Discipline*.⁹ Senge defines a learning organization as “organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective

⁹ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*.

aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.”¹⁰
This is a worthwhile posture for a local congregation.

As the leaders at Second Church continue to attend to God’s presence, we can’t help but expand our thinking and learning. Although our life as a voluntary organization makes this a little more challenging to engage on a daily basis, our work with the *Churches Learning Change* initiative¹¹ has helped many of our leaders come to understand that individual change in thinking and interacting is necessary for organizational change, and that the work is not a destination but a journey. As pastors, we continue to prioritize emotional and spiritual maturity, modeling and teaching awareness around responses to anxiety, living with integrity, and noticing impact. We invite our leaders to make *personal* commitments and goals, even as we talk about larger *church* commitments and goals. We attempt to share resources to expand our thinking; we welcome others to share and explore their learning in our meetings.

Senge believes that systems thinking is critical for a learning organization. He defines systems thinking as “a discipline for seeing the ‘structures’ that underlie complex situations, and for discerning high from low leverage change.”¹² In complexifying systems thinking, Senge illustrates that the practitioner grows in seeing interrelationships rather than linear cause and effect and grasping the whole process of change instead of

¹⁰ Senge, 5.

¹¹ Originally known as Ridder Church Renewal, the Churches Learning Change movement works with RCA and CRCNA congregational teams over two different modules. Each module includes learning values and practicing skill sets that contribute to faithful and fruitful missional living. Churches Learning Change, Inc., <https://www.churcheslearningchange.com/>.

¹² Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 69.

snapshots. Like Abraham Heschel who gave us the language of “words make worlds,”¹³ Senge is clear that “language shapes perception.”¹⁴

Rather than a blanket acceptance of an inherent inheritance, Second Church continues to benefit from looking at our history and the changing community in which we live and minister. As a learning organization Second can continue the work of translation and boundary crossing in our current post-Christendom context. We know that liturgical formation is happening. We know that God calls us in mission. The interviews of this project rehearse this. Telling the story of how we understand God’s presence and engagement with the world is vital to our liturgical experiences and our missional engagement.

Moving Toward Reaching: Sending and Praying

The brochure designed for the 100th anniversary of Second Church quotes a hymn text from Fred Pratt Green to “capture the experience of Second Church past, the reality of Second Church present, and the hope of Second Church future.” The hymn, “God is Here,” written in 1978 is one we still sing in worship. This rich text gives a theological description for the gathering of God’s people.

God is here! As we your people meet to offer praise and prayer,
May we find in fuller measure what it is in Christ we share.
Here, as in the world around us, all our varied skills and arts
wait the coming of the Spirit into open minds and hearts.

¹³ The genesis of this well-known phrase is explained by his daughter, Susannah Heschel, in the introduction to a collection of his essays. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), viii–ix.

¹⁴ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 73.

Here are symbols to remind us of our lifelong need of grace;
Here are table, font, and pulpit, here the cross has central place.
Here is honesty of preaching, here in silence, as in speech,
here, in newness and renewal, God of Spirit comes to each.

Here our children find a welcome in the Shepherd's flock and fold;
Here as bread and wine are taken, Christ sustains us as of old.
Here the servants of the Servant seek in worship to explore
what it means in daily living to believe and to adore.

Sovereign God, of earth and heaven, in an age of change and doubt
Keep us faithful to the gospel, help us work your purpose out.
Here, in this day's dedication, all we have to give, receive,
we, who cannot live without you, we adore you! We believe!¹⁵

On a Sunday morning at Second, this hymn would likely be sung at the beginning of our worship because the text lends itself more to the act of gathering than the Word or sending. One of the gifts of this hymn is its narration of liturgical realities—from the way the space is arranged to who is present to what we do as a gathered people. God's presence is clear throughout. The invitation to full participation for varied skills and young and old alike is compelling. Unfortunately, any integration between liturgy and mission is so subtle, it might as well be nonexistent. Phrases like “as in the world around us,” “seek in worship to explore what it means in daily living to believe and to adore,” and “Keep us faithful to the gospel, help us work your purpose out,” do more to separate church and world than to integrate.

It's not hard to see why the leaders of Second Church would gravitate to this hymn. It does encapsulate our deeply traditional and warmly liturgical worship life. It articulates all that liturgy in the church offers. Although it draws God's people into

¹⁵ Fred Pratt Green, *God Is Here* (Hope Publishing Company, 1979).

awareness of God’s presence, it lacks the core missional life engagement of Ruth Meyer’s spinning top model by not articulating the significance of our being a sent people. Which is why it makes for a great gathering hymn, and definitely not a sending hymn. For all the ways this hymn text is a “fit” for Second Church, we need more than this hymn to help us connect liturgy and mission in our life together.

Patrick Keifert describes the church as called, gathered, centered, and sent.¹⁶ “God Is Here” tells a story of called, gathered, and centered. This comes easily and naturally to Second Church (and other churches too). Fully embracing our sent identity is more challenging yet is a critical piece of telling the whole story of God. If someone suggests we use this hymn for our 125th anniversary, we might need to add a new fifth verse to demonstrate the integration of church and mission.

Loving God who calls and gathers, send us out in hope we pray.
Nourished by your Word and table, help us follow in Christ’s way.
Use all our varied skills and arts, to act in peace, to offer grace.
May our lives reveal your story, transformation our embrace.¹⁷

Our current worship planning is a joint effort of pastors and pastoral musicians. Mindful of the rhythms of the church year and attentive to the Revised Common Lectionary, we plan around our established worship order, paying close attention to the preaching text (or scripture themes). After a few months of this doctoral program, at my urging our staff talked together about how our planning could grapple with the reality and

¹⁶ Keifert, *We Are Here Now*, 28.

¹⁷ A quick attempt drafted on February 24, 2022 that can be improved upon by other thoughtful members of Second Church!

energy of being sent from worship into the world and how our gathering could engage the reality that we come together from myriad places in the world.

Two key shifts in practice came out of that discussion. First, Second's then-Director of Music, Gordon Bruns, recalled that our order of worship formerly included a sending rite. Sometimes this was an invitation from the worship leader and at other times this was a litany. We were already in the habit of "sending" our children to their worship centers at this point of the service, so it felt natural to add this moment between the final hymn (usually called the sending hymn) and the benediction.

Adding a sending litany helps the congregation to remember that "we are sent from formation *for* mission."¹⁸ I love how the Orthodox Church describes the significance of this moment:

The liturgy is not an escape from life, but a continuous transformation of life according to the prototype of Jesus Christ, through the power of the Spirit. ... The liturgy does not end when the eucharistic assembly disperses. 'Let us go forth in peace'; the dismissal is a sending off of every believer to mission in the world where he or she lives and works, and of the whole community into the world, to witness by what they are that the kingdom is coming.¹⁹

Beginning with Advent 2019, we resumed the practice of a sending litany in our regular order of worship. Rather than change the words every week, we decided to use the same litany through a season of the church year. As we planned worship for Lent in early 2020, we decided to explore an opening rite and sending rite that would mirror one

¹⁸ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 4.

¹⁹ Orthodox Advisory Group to the WCC-CWME, "Go Forth in Peace: Orthodox Perspectives on Mission," in James A. Scherer and Stephen B. Bevans, eds., *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 226.

another, calling attention to the Christ candle, Scripture, the baptismal font, and the communion table. These bookends in the worship service were a way to “provide a textual and ritual *inclusio* to, and a missional frame for, the liturgy as a whole.”²⁰ We now have litanies for all the seasons of the church year (See Appendix A), and anticipate writing more as needed.

The second shift involved the congregational prayer (Prayers for Thanksgiving and Intercession). When we began to celebrate communion more frequently in worship²¹ we decided to include congregational prayers in the epiclesis section of the Great Thanksgiving prayer, which meant we usually concluded that prayer by reciting the Lord’s Prayer together. As we anticipated weekly communion, we agreed that having the Prayers for Thanksgiving and Intercession stand alone in response to Word and Sacrament would help the congregation to feel our connections more strongly to God at work in the world around us. As Smith suggests, “In intercessory prayer, we are reminded of at least two things: First, that we are called, even chosen, as a people not for our own sake but for the sake of the world.”²² The second reminder is “in intercessory prayer we are given words to articulate the vision of justice that is at the heart of the biblical vision of *shalom*.”²³ Defining a clear moment in the service for this kind of

²⁰ Anderson, “Liturgical Reform,” 16.

²¹ We had increased the frequency to all the Sundays during Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter plus any other major feast Sundays (Transfiguration, Pentecost, and Reign of Christ). Otherwise, communion was celebrated monthly. We officially began celebrating weekly communion at both Sunday morning services in January 2020.

²² Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 193.

²³ Smith, 194.

prayer would allow us to clearly name places of pain and joy and listen for God's invitation to participate in healing, reconciliation, and hope. Although we anticipated this would add time to the service, we agreed to make this change beginning in January 2020.

These subtle yet significant shifts to our core worship life increase the energy and focus flowing outward and drawing us back together again week in and week out. Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile describe the gifts and possibilities that come from these kinds of changes,

Yet the very nature of the church has the *inherent* ability to adapt and change in order to participate faithfully in what the Spirit of God is bringing forth in the world. That change does not represent a wholesale uprooting from familiar traditions, but rather the fruit of new growth that comes from tapping and translating the rich life within the roots of tradition.²⁴

Within the roots of our tradition, we responded to the work of the Spirit, adapting in small ways for rich reasons. In hindsight these shifts came at exactly the right time, as each of these practices created important touch points for our congregation as we shifted to virtual worship in March 2020.

These are two small examples of how the liturgy helps Second Church to embrace “that they exist for the sake of those who are not members, as sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's redeeming grace for the whole life of society.”²⁵ As we continue to cultivate liturgical practices and deepen our house of language around mission, our participation is strengthened in the divine movement of the spinning top. The conclusion to Meyer's seminal work, *Missional Worship Worshipful Mission*, is motivation to

²⁴ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Participating in God's Mission*, 325., (emphasis mine).

²⁵ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 233.

continue to explore Second's missional engagement in and through our liturgical rhythms from Sunday morning gatherings and beyond

Missional worship is thus true liturgy, work for the common good, in which the assembly responds to God's self-giving acts for the life of the world. Gathered by the Spirit, the assembly is drawn into Christ's liturgy, his self-offering for the sake of the world. In this public service, the assembly enacts and signifies God's gracious desire, merciful judgment, and abundant love for the world. Going forth from this worship in the power of the Spirit, members of the assembly continue to participate in God's mission, living as the body of Christ in the world. They then return, again and again, bringing the hopes and hungers of the world into the encounter with God in Christian worship.²⁶

Communion with Roots and Reach

When my husband and I joined the pastoral staff at Second in 2014 we were enfolded into the worship leader rotation. Within the first few months, the lead pastor at the time began to encourage us to engage in some extemporaneous theology for the meaning and invitation to the sacrament of communion. Using the scaffold of remembrance, communion, and hope, we were encouraged to pull together themes from worship (scripture, sermon, congregational concerns) as we welcomed God's people to Christ's feast.

This practice has become second nature to me. It helps me to rehearse and remember a theology that includes a God whose love is so great as to send Jesus Christ, the eternal Word made flesh for us and for our salvation. Scripture bears witness to God who not only sees our suffering and collects our tears in a bottle, but who enters it with us. United with Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we get caught up in the

²⁶ Meyers, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission*, 233.

already-not-yet story that points us to the hope of future glory. Gathered at the feast, we get a taste of that hope and *are sent back out to join in telling God's story of love, grace, reconciliation, and redemption*. As the body of Christ, we are the living, breathing story of Emmanuel, God with us.

There has never been a week where the pain and suffering of this world have not been a reality at this feast. This sacrament grounds us theologically and sends us out to continue to engage with God and the world. This is a blessing and burden for the church in mission. As Smith writes,

In a broken, fragmented world, the church is called to be the first-fruits of a new creation by embodying a reconciled community; and the way we begin to learn that is at the communion table. . . .the Eucharist is just a macrocosm of what the church is called to be as the new humanity: a community that gathers, irrespective of preferences, tastes, class, or ethnicity, in order to pursue a *common* good.²⁷

The communion liturgy is a beautiful and natural place for us as worship planners to intentionally point to our *sent* identity. In the same way we composed rich litanies of gathering and sending commonly used earlier and later in the worship service, we would benefit from crafting language that incorporates our “sent-ness” in both the meaning and invitation to the table and the Great Thanksgiving each week.²⁸ Part of what we remember at the table is God’s *sending* of Jesus, God’s *sending* of the Spirit to guide and encourage, and God’s *sending* out witnesses of the good news. Often it is our own profound encounter with Christ that compels us to move outward in inviting others,

²⁷ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 202–3.

²⁸ We often use litanies and prayers from other churches and traditions, including in our weekly communion liturgy. I anticipate continuing to look at other sources for ideas and prioritizing the work in-house that is reflective of our context and the rhythms of the liturgical calendar.

including ourselves, to discover our shared beloved identity and connection. Finally, it is this feast of hope that tells a story of a world longing for redemption and renewal. It is Christ who invites us to join in the reconciling work of the gospel that happens at and beyond the table.

Crafting liturgy for communion is not merely a liturgist or pastoral role, but ought to be shared among the congregation. This project has demonstrated how the people of God carry liturgies within their own stories. In a post-Covid world, how does the current time allow us to reshape our programming and invite story-sharing as both an extension of the sacrament and opportunity to shape our continued liturgical practice? I wonder if it is possible to invite the congregation to share their experiences of communion and how it speaks remembrance, communion, and hope into each of their lives. There are currently three obvious ways to move this forward: an Adult Second Hour class or two, a prompted table conversation at a Wednesday night dinner, or as an interview project for the Board of Elders. Using the simple yet profound technique of storytelling will allow the stories of our community to be heard in new ways. Connecting these stories to the communion table is another subtle yet potentially significant shift in better naming our called, gathered, centered, and *sent* reality as the people of God.

Liturgizing Mission

Second's generosity of spirit and resources was evident to me soon after I arrived. I experienced it each week as different people offered generous words of encouragement with warmth and kindness. The demonstration of generosity is clear in a myriad of ways:

When consistory leaders eagerly embrace global mission partner support through adding a half mission share a year over five fiscal years.

When Deacons demonstrate knowledge and care of the wider community through discussion and decision of which local organizations to support with our annual Thanksgiving Offering.

When the BSA Troops asked to meet more nights in our building, and no one hesitated or demanded financial support. Instead, we rearranged closets and classrooms to give them better on-site storage.

When a member provided a challenge grant with the annual denominational Gift of Hope campaign during Advent.

When members celebrated the new building construction and each person expressed delight in the new and fresh feel of our space, yet also shared an eagerness for it to get dirty with regular use.

Sadly, very few of these moments and stories find their way into worship or the ways we talk about ourselves as a church, outside of an occasional moment for mission on a Sunday morning. You must be an insider who serves on consistory or staff (or are the rare super volunteer) to catch a glimpse of these stories.

Perhaps it is a lingering impact of the long-standing “living the kingdom” vision at Second that moved mission so much into the personal lives and stories of Second Church members that it disconnected mission and church. A significant percentage of our active congregation was not around during that era, yet somehow this is still in Second’s DNA and continues to shape worship and mission practices. The “deep and wide” era

reclaimed hospitality practices in the church and continued to focus more on individual lives active in the community. Even as we attempt to make the shift toward “rooted and reaching”—a vision that invites living our identity as a church formed for and in mission—we struggle to find language and practices that reach the wider congregation.

One of the motivations in this project was to figure out how to better live and tell our story of a church in mission. One facet of this endeavor is around how we engage with our existing mission partners, both local and global. The first step in this was to clarify our list of partners. The Board of Deacons worked to focus the list for our annual Thanksgiving Offering and recommended five local organizations as key partners.²⁹ Consistory affirmed these local partners and five RCA global missionaries.

The next step is to bring the stories of these partners into our community life as a church. The staff and deacons are designating a different mission partner for each month. During that month we highlight stories from their ministry in the Spire and weekly emails. At least one Sunday of the month we have a moment for mission during announcements, where a representative from the organization shares a brief highlight or update. During the program year, we also invite these representatives to lead an Adult Second Hour which provides deeper insight into ministry. If there are physical needs by the mission partner, we attempt to provide barrier-free ways for members of the church to help meet those needs (i.e., collecting school supplies or food). We are also continuing to

²⁹ Parkview Home, <https://parkviewafc.org/>; The Bridge Youth Center, <https://www.bymczeeland.org/>; Harvest Stand Ministries, <https://harveststandministries.org/>; The Community Schools Partnership, <https://www.oaisd.org/ottawa-community-schools-network/>; and Campus Ministry at Grand Valley University, <https://campusministrygv.com/>.

explore other ways we can grow our relationships and connections, either through volunteer support or networking.

The hope is for most people connected to Second to easily rattle off the names of these partners in the coming years. There is also hope that the stories of these partners and our partnership will find their way into sermons and prayers and what it means for us to be that called, gathered, centered, and sent community. This intentional engagement with mission partners shapes our perspective on our community and world and can teach and call us to embrace our generosity in new ways. It is also a practice that encourages members of Second to bring their own stories of mission into our worshiping life. Drawn up into the joy of such stories of God's faithfulness, we will find ourselves again sent out into our communities to tell and enact the story of reconciliation and grace.

Abiding Change

Jesus' invitation to his disciples in John 15, and to us now, demands our attention and contemplation. It expects us to engage with those who think differently from us, not to make them more like us but to know the opinions, hopes, dreams, failures, and needs of others. There's really no one-size-fits-all model for life in community. It's messy and often painful to come face-to-face with our own shortcomings, our own selfishness, our own misplaced expectations. And we are still called to abide together—to learn and vision together.

As Second Church presses forward in liturgy and mission, my prayer is that we will discover sisters and brothers on the road with us, making space for all of us to encounter God's active love that calls, gathers, centers, and sends. Our transformation to

a “rooted and reaching” people is possible because we choose to show up and do what we can to abide in God’s love and to love one another. After all, we love because God first loved us.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. One way to define mission is to quote Jesus who said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself.” Tell me about a time when you engaged in mission. What is it like for you to tell me this story?
2. Tell me about a time you participated with a group or person from Second Church in a mission opportunity. What was the impact (on you; and others)?
3. Describe your experience in worship at Second Church.
 - a. How do you connect with God in worship at Second?
4. I said earlier, “One way to define mission is to quote Jesus who said, ‘Love the Lord your God, and love your neighbor as yourself.’” How does worship do this?
5. Describe a time when you found the Sunday morning worship experience engage your M-F experience? OR tell me about a time when your daily experience showed up in your worship experience.
6. Describe the impact of COVID on worship and mission at Second Church.

Appendix B: Gathering and Sending Litanies

Lent (written by Rev. Miriam Barnes in 2020)

Gathering

Jesus Christ is the light of the world.

The light no darkness can overcome.

Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh.

Through the Word we discover grace and truth.

Jesus Christ is the living water.

At the font we are marked as Christ's own forever.

Jesus Christ is the bread of life.

At the table the bread is shared with all who hunger.

Jesus Christ is the cup of salvation.

At the table the cup is shared with all who thirst.

Sending

Jesus Christ is the cup of salvation. Nourished at the table,
we bring refreshment to the world.

Jesus Christ is the bread of life. Strengthened at the table,
we bring food to the world.

Jesus Christ is the living water. Made new at the font,
we bring life to the world.

Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh. Sustained by the Word,
we bring Christ to the world.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world. Transformed by Christ's light,
we bring light to the world.

Easter tide (written by Rev. Miriam Barnes in 2020)

Gathering

Jesus Christ is the light of the world.

The light no darkness can overcome.

Jesus Christ is the living Word.

Through the Word we are redeemed.

Jesus Christ is the living water.

At the font we are raised with Christ to new life.

Jesus Christ is the great table host.

At the table saints and sinners gather to receive and proclaim redemption.

Jesus Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Sending

At the table we remember our good shepherd who laid down his life for us sheep,

So we go into the world to share what we can with others.

From the font we know we have been raised with Christ and made a new people,

So we proclaim resurrection and hope.

Rooted in the Word we see that Christ has burst forth from the tomb,

So we demonstrate this new life in acts of love and healing.

Transformed by the light no darkness can overcome,

We rejoice and carry peace forward.

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Pentecost and Season after Pentecost (Ordinary Time)

(written by WTS intern, James Schetelich in 2020)

Gathering

Jesus Christ is the light of the world.

The light no darkness can overcome.

Jesus Christ is the living Word.

Through the Word, God draws near to us.

Jesus Christ is the living water.

At the font, we are sealed with the Spirit.

Jesus Christ is the great table host.

At the table, we are welcomed and nourished by Christ who reigns over all.

Sending

At the table, we commune with Christ and his body throughout the world,

**So we go in hope of the glorious heavenly banquet,
where all God's people will see Jesus face-to-face.**

At the font, we are marked with the truth that God loved us first.

So we go in love: for one another, ourselves, and the world so loved by God.

Embraced and addressed by God's living Word,

We go with the assurance of God's steadfast mercy.

Reborn by the Spirit as children of light,

We use our lives to bring light and joy to all places.

Season after Pentecost (Ordinary Time) (written by Rev. Eric Barnes in 2020)

Gathering

Jesus Christ is the light of the world.

The light no darkness can overcome.

As we meet Christ in and through the Word,

Lord, open our lives to your transformation.

As the waters are poured and we remember our baptism,

Lord, may we know that you are the one who calls us here.

At tables near and tables far,

Lord, feed us and nourish us once more.

Sending

As we leave from this place,

Lord, may we be instruments of peace.

As we face the week ahead,

Lord, may we be agents of love.

As your people gathered and now sent,

Lord, may we be bearers of hope.

In all we say and do,

May your light shine through us.

Advent and Christmastide (written by Rev. Miriam Barnes in 2020)

Gathering

Jesus Christ is the light of the world.

The light no darkness can overcome.

Jesus Christ is the living Word,

The Word made flesh who came to dwell among us.

Jesus Christ is living water,

Who sustains a weary world with hope and love.

Jesus Christ is the great table host,

Whose joyful feast offers us all abundant life.

Sending

Strengthened and nourished at the table,

we now offer Christ's joy to the world.

Refreshed at the font,

we now offer Christ's peace to the world.

Sustained by the Word,

we now bring God's love to the world.

Transformed by Christ's light,

we now bring God's hope to the world.

Epiphany and Season after Epiphany (written by WTS intern, James Schetelich in 2021)

Gathering

Jesus Christ is the light of the world.

The light no darkness can overcome.

Jesus Christ is the living Word.

Through the Word, God brings salvation to the ends of the earth.

Jesus Christ is the living water,

Who has come for the life of the world.

Jesus Christ is the great table host.

At the table, we commune with Christ and his body, near and far.

Sending

Welcomed and fed by Christ at the table,

We use our lives to serve God and our neighbor.

Washed at the font,

We witness to a love greater than our own.

Redeemed by the Word,

We marvel at the wideness of God's mercy.

Enlivened by the light,

We join in God's promise to make all things new.

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