Abstract

This paper argues that listening to stories of community leaders and activists as well as writing a Eucharistic liturgy to practice together were effective elements of a pilgrimage that had the goal of educating Christian college students about racial justice. Together these practices helped students imagine new possibilities of building community across lines of difference, embrace unity between spirituality and bodily engagement in social justice, and sense forward movement in vocational discernment.

Introduction

Many engaged in the work of racial justice visit the section of Canfield Drive where Michael Brown was shot and killed by police officer, Darren Wilson, on August 9, 2014. While once was a community-created memorial in the middle of the street and a crowd of people to foster mutual inspiration toward the work of racial justice, the scene is quite different today. Along with the fact that the street operates as any other, the actual asphalt where Michael Brown’s body once lay for hours has been clearly cut out from the street and replaced with a new rectangle of pavement. This does not change the significance of the space, but it can raise questions for individuals and groups who continue to make pilgrimages to this site. How might a person or group of persons participate in a meaningful visit to this site now that the crowds and the memorial in the middle of the street are gone? This paper focuses on the experience of a racially diverse group of nine Christian college students who embarked on a school-sponsored spring break pilgrimage from Boston, Massachusetts to Ferguson, Missouri in March 2017. The pilgrimage involved listening to the stories of community leaders and activists and writing a liturgy to practice Eucharist during the visit to Canfield Drive. As an organizer and guide for this pilgrimage, I offer this paper as an invitation for the reader to join in meaningful reflection on Eucharist and the possibility of teaching and learning faithful practice of Eucharist in context. This paper has three major moves. In the first move, I offer a portrayal of Eucharist as a prayerful protest and suggest that the work of this pilgrimage can be understood as educational endeavor of mutual discernment toward such a practice. In the second move, I offer an overview of the work of listening and

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2 Unless otherwise explained, the use of “Canfield Drive” in this paper refer to this particular area of the street.
3 There are markers on the sidewalks, including the Michael Brown Memorial Plaque. However, this is quite different than community-created memorial of stuffed animals, hats, flowers, and other mementos.
liturgy on the pilgrimage, including a presentation of the Eucharistic liturgy that was written on this pilgrimage. In the final section of the paper, I offer a report on what students learned from the pilgrimage. Ultimately, I argue that listening to stories of community leaders and activists as well as writing a Eucharistic liturgy to practice together were effective elements of a pilgrimage that had a goal of educating Christian college students about the intersection of Christian faith and racial justice. Together these practices helped students imagine new possibilities of community across lines of difference, embrace unity between spirituality and bodily engagement in social justice, and sense forward movement in vocational discernment.

**Toward Practicing Eucharist as a Prayerful Protest**

For the past two decades, William Cavanaugh’s book, *Torture and Eucharist*, continues to spark theological academic interest in the practice of Eucharist, as it portrayed the practice as a creatively subversive act in the face of injustice. In this book Cavanaugh offers a practical theological analysis of the Catholic Church’s response to the widespread torture and “disappearing” that took place during the era of Pinochet’s regime in Chile. The first portion of the book explains, how the regime would abduct its own citizens at random, use emotional and physical torture techniques on them and then either dispose of their bodies or send them back into society with only emotional scars and no physical evidence of their torture. The purpose of this was to create a sense of isolation among citizens and an absolute dependence on the state for social control. Because victims were either “disappeared” or lacking physical evidence of their experience, the ability for communities to hear and share these stories and oppose the state was severely challenged. Cavanaugh explains that because of the accepted influence of Jacques Maratain’s dualistic philosophy of the “distinction of planes,” the Church’s authority was relegated to spiritual matters alone while the state was given full control over physical, or in this case, bodily, matters. For years, the Chilean society was left without a social mass that had any ability to publicly name and effectively challenge the state’s practice.

However, the Church eventually turned toward an understanding of ecclesiology and Eucharist that rejected the dualism, recognized “…Christians as the real body of Christ,” and viewed Eucharist as a unique practice that mystically “knits” Christians together as a social body with a particular social responsibility of creatively bearing witness to God’s way in the world. In Eucharist, they could “re-member” the body of Christ, which did not only involve a cognitive memory of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection but also a gathering of the community as members the Body of Christ. With this understanding and practice, the Catholic Church engaged in practices that challenged the state, such as excommunicating anyone involved in torturing, providing services for victims of torture, and finding creative ways to make public the stories of the victims of torture. Rather than being lost from social memory or untrusted individuals, the victims of torture and their stories became testimonies and prophetic calls for the Church to challenge injustice. And as a result, the practice of Eucharist became an act of protest, and the church’s “counter-discipline to state terror.”

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5 Ibid, 151.
6 Ibid, 212, 229-36, 267.
7 Ibid, 229.
8 Ibid, 253-77.
9 Ibid, 229.
I begin with this lengthy discussion of Cavanaugh’s text, because it provides a thick backdrop for discussing Eucharist as a protest to injustice. As the practice announces a narrative and a hope that is not tied to a nation-state, it has the ability (or responsibility) to tell honest stories about oppression and declare God’s stirring in situations and places that can appear God-forsaken. In the context of racial injustice in the United States, Eucharist has potential to make significant declarations in protest to the deaths of unarmed black men and women by police officers, the systemic injustices that continually lead to their deaths, and the unethical ways their stories and the stories of protesters are portrayed. However, the reality is that despite various attempts to declare the ways Eucharist or Holy Communion can foster healing, justice, and peace in communities, the practice is rarely discussed in this manner.

As an educator in the field of practical theology in the Church of the Nazarene, one goal of mine was to let this pilgrimage to the Canfield Drive serve as an opportunity for students to learn about and experience Eucharist in a manner that reflects the heart of what is discussed in Cavanagh’s text while taking the Ferguson context seriously and staying faithful to the Wesleyan theological discourse. Maria Harris’s influential contributions regarding curriculum and forms in religious education supports the kind of creative work we pursued on this pilgrimage. In *Fashion Me a People*, Harris suggests that education is not merely one of the church’s tasks but an essential aspect of the church’s identity that flows out of its life together. In this vein, she challenges the “schooling models” of religious education and calls readers to consider the church’s curriculum to be the church’s journey of relationships and discernment as it seeks to faithfully live out the Way of life it is called to embody in the world. Along the Way, this work of relationships and discernment is practiced and taught through five “forms” that reflect the traditional markers of church practice that was developed from the Book of Acts. These forms are *kerygma* (proclamation), *leiturgia* (prayer), *koinonia* (community), *diakonia* (service), and *didache* (teaching).

The five curricular forms, as Harris presents them, do not make up a static checklist of isolated tasks for educators to complete. Rather, she argues that each of these forms ought to display an interplay with the others as well as an on-going dynamic of improvement over time in light of global and local (contextual) needs and injustice. Harris also explains that the five curricular forms are not the responsibility of clergy alone. Rather, she points out the need for

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11 It is important to point that this is not the only reason for making Eucharist a central practice of the pilgrimage. Another reason for doing this was because reflecting on the narrative elements of Eucharist and having a project that requires collaboration can help participants embrace important aspects of pilgrimage, such as the experience of being a stranger in a new land, the demeanor of openness to change, the welcome of new community, and the transition to returning home, we structured the entire pilgrimage around the practice of Eucharist. See Sheryl A. Kujawa Holbrook, *Pilgrimage—The Sacred Art: Journey to the Center of the Heart* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2013), 58-63, 135-67; Also see Brett Webb-Mitchell, *Practicing Pilgrimage: On Being and Becoming God’s Pilgrim People* (Cascade Books: Eugene, OR, 2016), 65-81.


13 Ibid, 24-25, 95. Harris’ exact words to describe curriculum are, “the entire course of the Church’s life.” I emphasize “Way” of life to highlight the relational, non-linear, as well as the Christological aspects of her argument. She grounds the church’s vocation in the traditional offices associated with Jesus—priest, prophet, and king. She views this identity as offered to the entire body of Christ and describes the church’s vocation as priestly, prophetic, and political. In many ways, Harris’ argument is ecclesiological in nature and suggests that the church is the curriculum.

14 Ibid, 27-32, 64.
mutual involvement between clergy and laity as they engage this interplay as an imaginative and artistic endeavor. In other words, everyone in the church is called to participate in re-creating or re-fashioning church practice, as we are all image-bearers of the Creator. And it is in this work, that the very people called church are continually re-fashioned for faithfully living out its vocation. She clarifies that this does not mean the church is left to its own demise. Rather, “We are held in the divine hands, and the grace of God and the Spirit of God abide within us, enabling us to become what we are called to be.”

In many ways, the pilgrimage discussed in this paper practiced the kind of education that Harris describes, especially if we view the pilgrimage as a journey of relationships and discernment and the participants a group engaged in the work of re-fashioning and being re-fashioned. I am most interested in highlighting Maria Harris’s emphasis on leiturgia or liturgy, which she describes early in her book as “…coming together to pray and to re-present Jesus in the breaking of bread.” While this description can be interpreted as limiting liturgy to official worship services in which the Eucharist is celebrated, she clarifies that she views the curricular form of liturgy as including all types of prayer in all places. Throughout the book, she emphasizes a broader view of liturgy as “prayer” and leans upon the work of John Westerhoff III to suggest that this includes prayer in both ‘ritual celebration’ as well as ‘daily life.’ She explains:

We are educated to prayer, and we are educated by prayer. And that education can happen anywhere and everywhere, not only in classrooms. It can happen in church and at home certainly, but also on a bus, at a ball game, on the job, while going for a walk, or while visiting in a nursing home, holding the hands of someone we love.

In many ways, this paper seeks to show the significance of adding “while on a pilgrimage to Canfield Drive” to that list. Harris’s focus on liturgy as educational alongside her broader call for interplay with the other curricular forms connects well with the groups’ experience of imagining artistic and meaningful connections between Eucharist and the church’s response to the police shootings of unarmed people of color. More specifically, Harris’ work offers support in understanding the pilgrimage encounter at Canfield Drive as one that creatively “…concentrate[d] on the proclamation of the gospel in its priestly, prophetic, and political demands, and on the human longing to be: in adoration and wonder and love and hope in the...

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16 Ibid, 16.
17 Ibid, 16.
19 Ibid, 95.
20 It is important to point out that Maria Harris does not directly address the work of creatively engaging Eucharist or writing a Eucharist liturgy in Fashion Me a People through her narratives or suggested exercises in this book. However, she opens space for readers to engage in the spirituality or imagination of sacramental life beyond the walls of a church building and beyond the space of a worship service. She does briefly address Eucharist in a previous book when discussing “Eucharistic spirituality.” She writes in support of congregations and groups without a priest who find creative ways to practice Eucharist via mutual involvement of the laity and resources at hand. See Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran, Reshaping Religious Education: Conversations on Contemporary Practice. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), pp. 47-48.
presence of God” all while exposing injustice for what it is.21 For the participants on the pilgrimage under consideration in this paper, it became clear after a week of listening and liturgy that Eucharist can challenge attempts to erase the story of Michael Brown’s death from social memory, allow a community to encounter Canfield Drive as a site for inspiration toward social action, and maintain a discipline of awareness and action.

Listening and Liturgy: An Overview of the Pilgrimage

This trip was not simply about meeting influential leaders and hearing perspectives on how to engage in the work of justice. Rather the goal was to listen well and let the encounters along the way contribute to the faithful Eucharistic encounter at Canfield Drive. In this section of the paper, I will offer a brief explanation of who participated on the pilgrimage then share the basic flow and elements of the pilgrimage. After that, I will offer two snapshots or brief narratives from the pilgrimage, then display the call and response Eucharistic liturgy that was developed and practiced on the pilgrimage.

Participants

The pilgrimage consisted of nine students. The entire group travelled with two leaders—my spouse and myself—to and from Ferguson/St. Louis and participated in all meetings and activities during the week as a collective.22 The student participants were all undergraduate students from the same private Christian college in Boston, and their ages ranged from nineteen years old to twenty-three years old. Along with diversity in majors and year in school, the group represented racial and gender diversity. Of the student participants, there were three black women, three white women, two white men, and one black man.23

Basic Flow and Elements

We arrived in Ferguson/St. Louis on a Saturday, visited Canfield Drive on the following Thursday (five days later) and returned to Boston on Friday (the day after the visit to Canfield Drive). The work of listening began Saturday night as the group watched and discussed 13th, a

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21 Harris, Fashion Me a People, 101. The quote by itself does not reveal Harris’ broader discussions of hope and human longing as grounded in honesty about injustice. For example, she writes, “Deep within the human heart is a longing for a holy time when ‘all will be one,’ a dream of a new heaven and a new earth where death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore. In that new heaven and new earth, God will wipe away every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21). This, ultimately, is the undersong of every joining” (76).

22 My wife, Jennie Williams, and I served as leaders throughout the week. It should be noted that we also brought our 1 year-old daughter on the pilgrimage. If there were more space in this paper, I would share about how the presence of a toddler made space for the group to embrace rest and play along the pilgrimage.

23 Initially, the composition of student participants included two black men, but one of those students took a break from school for the spring semester. The fact that five black students even applied for one of the school-sponsored spring break trips displays break from the norm with ENC’s program of spring break service-learning trips. Often there are no black students on any of the trips. The school-sponsored spring break trips are made available to all students at Eastern Nazarene College (where I served as College Chaplain and Assistant Professor of Religion and Culture). Students who apply go through a rigorous interview process, in which the Office of Spiritual Development pastoral staff assesses students’ motivations and readiness for the trip. For this pilgrimage, we put a great deal of intentionality into the work of promotion and personal invitation, in order to develop a diverse application pool.
recent documentary that displays connections between race and mass incarceration. In light of the documentary’s attention to and footage of Ferguson, students of different backgrounds and experiences expressed statements, such as, “It’s strange to think that all of this happened a couple miles away,” and “I can’t believe we’re here.” The work of listening continued the next morning as participants were introduced to Ferguson and Faith: Sparking Leadership & Awakening Community by Leah Gunning Francis and given chapter assignments to have read for discussions throughout the week. The group left that morning discussion to attend a worship gathering at Wellspring Church and begin the work of face-to-face listening. On Sunday evening, participants reflected on insights from Cavanaugh’s Torture and Eucharist and discussed potential connections to our work of writing and practicing a Eucharistic liturgy together.

Throughout the week, the pilgrimage participants met with ten pastoral or faith-based organization leaders, three activists who were not pastoral leaders, one lawyer who represented activists and faith leaders, and the Ferguson police chief. They interacted with residents by eating at local restaurants, such as Cathy’s Kitchen, and attending local events, such as the public debate between the mayor (James Knowles III) and the leading incumbent mayoral candidate (Ella Jones) at the time. We began each meeting by thanking the storytellers for meeting with us and offering an explanation of our pilgrimage. We explained the connection between the meeting and our practice of Eucharist in the following manner:

We are framing our trip as a pilgrimage to the site where Michael Brown was killed. We’re working on a Eucharist or Holy Communion liturgy together throughout the week, and every conversation and experience we encounter along the way will contribute to how we form and practice that liturgy on Canfield Drive. We’re heading to Canfield on Thursday afternoon, and you are certainly more than welcome to join us.

The storytellers rarely connected their stories and insights to Eucharist, and the group did not ask any questions directly related to the practice. However, the plan to practice Eucharist influenced the group’s way of listening. The goal was not simply to gain information. Rather, the participants on this pilgrimage listened for the sake of sharing in communion with the storytellers, each other, and the “cloud of witnesses,” through the fellowship of Holy Spirit. Every evening, the group met to reflect on insights, wonders, and experiences, including how

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24 Leah Gunning Francis, Ferguson and Faith: Sparking Leadership & Awakening Community (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2015). This book was helpful for several reasons. First, it offered an introduction to the happenings in Ferguson—including the rise of #BlackLives Matter—from someone who was living in the area. Secondly, the book focused specifically on the work, theological reflection, and narratives of faith leaders in Ferguson and the St. Louis area. Thirdly, the book highlighted the way in which faith leaders had to learn from and listen to young activists who did not identify as part of the church. Fourthly, the final three chapters of the book focus on engaging in the work of racial justice regardless of city. In fact, one of those chapters is entitled, “There is a Ferguson Near You.” This perfectly complimented the group’s transition to returning home with a commitment to discern faithful action in their own context of community and vocation. Along with offering a thematic structure to the pilgrimage, this book introduced participants to some of the locations, leaders, activists they would encounter on the journey and provided a context for asking questions, hearing narratives, and navigating the city with their eyes open. For those who felt very informed on matters related to racial justice in general, this book served as an equilibrium-disrupter by unearthing the complexities and displaying the significance of the local context. For those who felt less informed at the start of the trip, this book offered an extensive introduction. Regardless of one’s background and experience, reading Ferguson and Faith during the week in Ferguson opened each person of their own sense of being a stranger in a new land with a need to learn more.
they experienced the presence of God throughout the day. I took notes of what students shared and formed a draft of a call and response Eucharistic liturgy by Wednesday morning that made space for every participant to serve as the “Leader” at least twice. On Wednesday evening, the pilgrimage participants were invited to read the entire draft aloud, reflect silently, make notes, change wording, add wording, and identify “leader lines” they would personally like responsibility for saying while at Canfield. This process ended after every pilgrimage participant felt comfortable about the written liturgy. One interesting result that came from this dialogue was the group’s decision to leave a “leader line” unassigned and available for any guests who chose to join us at Canfield.

Snapshots

To display the significance of collective creativity and to allow readers to have a glimpse of the pilgrimage experience, I will briefly offer two snapshots or brief narratives from the pilgrimage. The first shares of the group’s turn toward prayer practices in the middle of the week. The second insight regarding the group’s walk to and from Canfield Drive.

Snapshot 1: A shift happened on the third day of the pilgrimage. Before leaving the hotel for our day of meetings, we decided to hold hands and pray for each other and the upcoming encounters. We proceeded to sing an acapella version of song we heard during the Sunday morning worship service at Wellspring Church. The song speaks of being open to God’s calling and work in the world and a desire to serve as a sanctuary in the world. This demeanor of prayer continued throughout the day. Struck by the intensity of the stories shared by the pastor in our first meeting, we asked if we could pray with her. After she gladly welcomed the offering, the group surrounded her and laid hands on her shoulders as participants volunteered to pray. As this pastor/activist expressed sincere gratitude, the rest of the trip transformed into a pilgrimage of prayer. From this point forward, we continued the practice of praying with pastors, activists, and other community leaders after hearing their stories and engaging in meaningful conversation. Later in the week, we saw a post on social media from the pastor/activist mentioned above, which included a picture of the group and a caption that shared about the encounter. The post ended with the following words, “When we concluded, they asked if they could lay hands on me and pray. That was a gift from GOD!”

Snapshot 2: The entire pilgrimage culminated on the day we made our way to Canfield Drive, practiced of Eucharist at Canfield Drive, and then made our way back from Canfield Drive. This journey reflected several creative ideas and decisions that developed throughout the week. Aside from the insights expressed in the written liturgy itself, two developments from the week should be explained here. First, because the group heard and read about the way several pastors and activists found the McDonald’s on West Florissant to be a meeting point and safe haven during the marches and gatherings, the group decided that the journey to Canfield Drive would include the half-mile walk from the McDonald’s parking lot. This also gave the group a way to embrace the imagery of walking that is often associated with pilgrimage. With all of the conversations throughout the week, this half-mile walk to and from the place where Michael

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25 Specific lines were reserved for the two leaders on the pilgrimage who were ordained in the Church of the Nazarene to preside over sacraments.
Brown’s body once lay gave an extended time of pause and silence to prepare for the encounter and to reflect afterwards.

The second creative idea emerged as participants reflected on the connections between Michael Brown’s story and the stories of many others. Participants became interested in displaying this through the imagery of Skittles and Arizona tea, which are the items that were found in Treyvon Martin’s backpack after he was killed in Sanford, Florida in 2012. To be clear, the group did not use these items during the practice of Eucharist, but they wanted to make use of them in an artistic and expressive way. The decision was made to meet with the Ferguson chief of police on the way to McDonalds and give him a bag of Skittles and a can of Arizona tea after conversation and before prayer. The decision was also made to stop at the Michael Brown Memorial Plaque during the walk back and leave a bag of Skittles and a can of Arizona tea near a piece of the remaining bread and a container of the remaining grape juice. The group did not force each other into an interpretation of these creative expression, but let them remain as points of reflection and continued meaning-making.
Our Eucharistic Prayer in Call and Response

Leader (Ordained): The Lord is here.

All: The Lord is with us.

Leader (Ordained): Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All: It is right and our deepest joy
to give God thanks and praise.

Leader: It is by grace that we have known You,
O God of this and every age.
In mercy, You heard the cry
of Your enslaved people
and reached out to deliver them.

Leader: In loving-kindness, You offered a covenant
to bind Yourself in faithfulness to the vulnerable, hurting, and oppressed Hebrew community.
When they chose their own path, You sent prophets to speak Your word and reveal Your heart of love.

All: Through grace, in the fullness of time,
You sent Your Son to be our Savior. Jesus, fully human and fully divine, was nurtured in
and born from Mary’s body to redeem all of creation.

Leader: Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a town looked down upon by many in society and considered
unworthy of anything good.

Leader: Jesus has received all of Israel’s story into himself. He is the fulfillment of the priest,
king, and prophet and calls the people of God toward justice and righteousness.

Leader: We rejoice to sing Your praise that in Jesus,
Your covenant has been opened to every single person and group of people. With generations
before us and all of heaven, we proclaim:

All: Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of Your glory;
Hosanna in the highest!
Blessed is the one who comes
in the name of the Lord;
Hosanna in the highest!

Guest: The Lord is making all things new.
All: By His life, death, and resurrection,
You restore Your image within us
and let us share in Your new creation.

Leader (Ordained): On the night He was betrayed,
Jesus took bread and gave You thanks.
He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying:
“Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

Leader (Ordained): In the same way, after supper
He took the cup and gave it to them, saying:
“Drink this, all of you. For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for all for
the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

All: We remember Christ’s death.
We proclaim Christ’s resurrection.
We await Christ’s coming in glory.

Leader: We are not left alone
as we await
Christ’s return and His heavenly banquet.
For You have poured out your Holy Spirit
into the world to gather your church
in the Love of God.

All: By grace, You call and empower us
to grow as a community of holiness.

Leader: You offer us new eyes, ears, and imagination
amidst all the world’s pains and promises.
And You open our hearts to Your upside-down Kingdom of sacrificial love.

All: We thank you Lord!!!
Give us an assurance to live out
this Good News in our daily lives.

Leader: As we remember that Christ died by the hands of agents of the empire, we are
compelled to resist forgetting the story of Michael Brown who was killed here and whose
bleeding body lay visible for hours in the sun, exposing the unjust realities of the empire before
the watching world.

All: We must not forget the story of Michael Brown and the related stories of so many
others.

Leader: Say their names.
**All:** Say their names!!!

**Leader:** Let us take a moment to say names of individuals whose lives ended as a result of racism, sexism, and/or classism in society’s systems.

*(Allow time for individuals to speak names out loud. Then listen to the song, “Neighbor” by Rev. Sekou)*

**Leader:** It is only when we can unapologetically declare, “Black lives matter,” that we can sincerely affirm that all lives matter.

**All:** Black lives matter!!!

**Leader:** As we remember that Christ died by the hands of agents of the empire, we are compelled to resist forgetting stories of those who put their bodies on the line for the sake of others here in Ferguson.

**All:** Let us remember the stories of people we have met and shared life with on this pilgrimage. Let us remember the stories of people we have read about on this pilgrimage.

**Leader:** We remember exemplars who have prayed with their feet and followed Jesus into the streets.

**All:** Let us also remember the stories, questions, and wonders of those who are earnestly discerning what it means to live faithfully here.

**Leader:** We are thankful for this journey.

**All:** We are thankful for the Body of Christ.

**Leader (Ordained):** Lord, You make Your presence known in the mundane elements of our daily lives. Consecrate these mundane elements, Lord, that this shared meal of broken bread and poured out wine may reveal in us the abundant Life that is offered in the broken body and poured out blood of Christ.

**Leader (Ordained):** As we share and consume the bread and wine, we pray that Your healing, hope, and way of being in the world would consume us. Draw us into the Body of Christ for the sake of the world.

**All:** Transform our broken lives to reveal the ongoing stories of Your presence.

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through the unity of the Body of Christ.

Leader: Yes, Lord. Sanctify us for Your mission in the world.

All: Open our eyes to see the world from the perspective of your coming Kingdom that is already breaking into the world. Open our eyes to the possibility of righteousness and justice in our communities.  

Leader: Let us rely on the Holy Spirit to stay awake to the realities of injustice and the needs of our neighbors affected by injustice.

All: Lord, help us be good neighbors.

Leader: Let us rely on the Holy Spirit to stay awake to the ways God is at work in the world, revealing hope in unexpected places and actions, and inviting us to participate in God’s mission of restoration.

All: Lord, help us stay woke.

Leader (Ordained): And now let us pray as our Savior has taught us…

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name. 
Your kingdom come, 
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 
Give us this day our daily bread. 
And forgive us our trespasses, 
as we forgive those who trespass against us. 
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. 
For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Leader (Ordained): Let us share in this meal together.

(Share in the meal saying, “The Body of Christ is broken for you; The blood of Christ is shed for you.”)

Leader: You are the Light of the world, O Lord, and you have empowered us to participate in Your mission. Help us play our part in shining Your Light wherever we go, so that the world may see You in Your fullness.

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28 The language of kingdom in this liturgy could be changed to kin-dom, which would challenge the patriarchal and hierarchical implications of the former and embrace the family-oriented mutuality displayed in Biblical depictions of the community for which Christian hope and long. See, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, En La Lucha-In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004).
Leader: Be with us as we share this journey with our friends and family members, and help us do so in a manner that reflects Your patience, persistence, and peacemaking. *(Take a moment for silent prayers)*

Leader: And now, Oh God, send us to out to do the work You have given us to do.

All: To love and serve you as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord. To Jesus, You, and to the Holy Spirit together be honor and glory forever. Amen
Learning: A Report from the Processing and Feedback Survey

Learning on this pilgrimage can be observed in multiple areas. The first is in the written Eucharistic liturgy that was formed in community. The individual lines of the liturgy and the document as a whole display reflection, discussion, analysis, negotiation, commitments, and communal decision-making. A second place to observe learning can be found in the speeches two students gave during a campus-wide chapel gathering that focused on student experiences on school-sponsored spring-break trips. A third place to observe learning can be found in the fact that the three graduating seniors on the trip altered their post-college plans in light of their experiences on the pilgrimage. A fourth place to observe learning is in the responses to the “Processing and Feedback” survey that student pilgrimage participants were given one month after returning to Boston.29 Due to the constraints of this paper, this section focuses primarily on the fourth area to observe learning—the responses to the “Processing and Feedback” surveys. After receiving the completed surveys, I identified themes and presented the findings during campus-wide academic symposium with all of the pilgrimage participants present.30 The findings suggest that the work of listening and liturgy helped students 1) imagine new possibilities of building community across lines of difference, 2) embrace unity between spirituality and bodily engagement in social justice, and 3) sense forward movement in vocational discernment. These themes are not isolated from each other, but they do display distinct aspects of learning that can help in assessing how the students personally found the trip to be impactful and meaningful in their lives. I will briefly explain each theme and offer examples from students’ response.

Imagining New Possibilities Community Across Lines of Difference

Several students of different backgrounds and life experiences commented on how the group felt like a family or a unique community. Others named being encouraged or surprised by how much mutual learning took place among the group. Along with this, some commented on how this experience gave them hope regarding the ability to address seemingly divisive topics in the future with other diverse groups. This dynamic can be seen in words from a student who explained the following:

29 The surveys gave opportunity for students to write out responses to the following questions: 1) In our conversations with each other and people we met along the way, we often described the trip as a pilgrimage to the site where Michael Brown was killed. In what ways have you found this pilgrimage metaphor to be helpful or meaningful? 2) We encountered various people (each other, pastors, a lawyer, police chief, activists, mayoral debate) in various locations (hotel, churches, home, parking lot, restaurant) around Ferguson and the broader St. Louis area. Please explain any encounters you found particularly memorable, meaningful, or impactful. 3) Over time, our pilgrimage included a great deal of listening to stories and praying with people. Please share any reflections you have about the work of listening and praying on this trip. 4) One aspect of this pilgrimage included working on a liturgy together for Communion (a.k.a. Lord’s Supper and Eucharist) on Canfield Drive. In what ways did you find the liturgy and/or communion helpful or meaningful? 5) How would you describe the community formed among participants on the trip? 6) How important was it for this pilgrimage to include participants of different upbringing, racial identities, and genders? 7) Please explain up to three things you learned on this trip. These can be tangible things or more abstract.

30 This gave pilgrimage participants an opportunity to confirm, question, or correct interpretation of the data.
Getting to know some of the group members on this trip was one of the best parts for me! I connected with each member in some way, and it was truly a blessing…I felt like the pilgrimage metaphor truly fit our trip to Ferguson. Not only were we travelling to an unfamiliar area but we were exploring topics that sadly remain unwrapped in our society. Many people feel uncomfortable discussing the issue of race, so it can be ignored or pushed to the side. We were willing to have open minds and hearts...Our journey isn’t over. A new pilgrimage actually began once we stood where Michael Brown was killed.

*Embracing Unity Between Spirituality and Bodily Engagement in Social Justice*

The focus on unity between spirituality and bodily engagement in social justice first emerged in group discussions as the group reflected on what it means for Jesus to have grown up in Nazareth, live in a way that challenged daily injustices, die by way of capital punishment, and then empower disciples to take up their cross. These reflections are clearly seen in particular lines of the written liturgy. However, the responses on the student survey revealed the significance of listening and liturgy in helping students embrace this in their own lives. As one student explained:

It was interesting to see the ways in which we had been shaped by the conversations we had that week up until we visited the site where Michael Brown’ body lay. The pilgrimage metaphor was helpful for me, since in many ways, it was as much a social justice pilgrimage as much as a Christian one. In my own way, I’ve internalized the experience as an affirmation of my call. All the events and conversations leading up to the site prepared me for the emotional experience we had when we connected to the memories and events of the past on Canfield Drive. Though I hesitate to overly compare the two, I can only imagine that going to the Middle East to the places where Jesus walked would be a similar experience. I experience Jesus in my life in a very abstract way, but to walk where he walked and see the places where he performed miracles would give me something concrete to imagine...Similarly, without the pilgrimage to Canfield Drive, I would still have a passion that is abstractly connected to Mike Brown’s life and untimely death. However, to walk where he walked and stand where he lay; it has intensified my imagination and longing for equality and justice.

In a similar direction but explicitly naming a personal experience with racial identity, one student explained:

The main things I learned on this trip is the importance of presence and a caring heart. I know now that we don’t have to have all the answers or feel confident in every issue in order to make a difference. The ministry of bodies is extremely important. I also see the need for people with privilege to speak into the issue of racial discrimination. I used to feel uncomfortable by being a middle-class white female trying to speak on race, but the truth is that everyone needs to be talking about race and equality.

*Sensing Forward Movement in Vocational Discernment*
As college students, constantly faced with the question of what to major in and what kind of life to pursue after school, student responses leaned heavily toward the area of calling and vocation. Some expressed a broad sense of vocation that pointed toward a personalized sense of Christian responsibility in the world rather than a career. An example of this can be seen in the following response from a student who explained the following:

One encounter I found meaningful was when we observed the dynamics going on between the members of the [a predominantly white church in Ferguson that is part of my own denomination]. This was meaningful to me because I felt like [the pastor] represented many people who believe they know about the issues at hand and are doing what they think is enough to address the problem, but in reality are unobservant of the underlying conflicts going on between the people around them. This encounter reminded me that I must always make an effort to be observant of the struggles of those who are different from me.

Several students shared how certain encounters with professionals affirmed or inspired their own sense of calling toward a particular career. Three examples are listed below:

Student 1: I learned that pastors can be cool. Pastors and religious people can stand at the pulpit and at a protest. I don’t think I could have imagined what that was like without hearing those stories, which wouldn’t have led to my second realization that I’d be okay with being a pastor someday. But aside from that, I also think I learned to see the ways in which Ferguson is not so different from where I am from.

Student 2: As someone who is planning on going into the counseling field, I was excited to engage in this opportunity to listen to so many others’ stories. By the end of the week, I realized that being attentive to others for such a long period of time every day could be quite tiring. Nevertheless, I think this experience reinsured me that the counseling field is one that I would definitely like to go into.

Student 3: The encounter that left me with goosebumps was when we met with the civil rights lawyer. I was so invested in her answers that I didn’t even take notes. She basically has my dream job!

Conclusion

I have attempted to offer a glimpse of the pilgrimage to Ferguson, Missouri that my spouse and I led for nine Christian college students of diverse backgrounds and experiences. Because the pilgrimage experience is tied to the relationships formed along the way and includes several meaningful moments in between the planned encounters, it is not possible to offer a complete picture. However, I offered three moves as way of welcoming the reader into the educational experience. First, I invited the reader to consider a portrayal of Eucharist as prayerful protest and the possibility of walking with students toward such a practice, specifically on Canfield Drive in Ferguson, Missouri. Next, I offered an overview of how the pilgrimage participants engaged in listening and liturgy during the pilgrimage, and I ended that section with a presentation of the written Eucharistic liturgy that was developed on the pilgrimage. In the
final move, I presented findings from analyzing the student surveys that were completed after the pilgrimage. The surveys suggested that listening to stories of community leaders and activists as well as writing a Eucharistic liturgy helped students imagine new possibilities of community across lines of difference, embrace unity between spirituality and bodily engagement in social justice, and sense forward movement in vocational discernment.

While the experience of this pilgrimage may not be fully reproducible on paper, my hope is that readers will find inspiration to engage in—and engage their students in—pilgrimages to sites that bear the marks and stories of injustice as a way of discerning God’s presence and call there. As we do so, may our eyes be continually opened to see from the perspective of the coming Kin-dom that is already breaking into this world and declaring sacred the very places that often appear God-forsaken.
Works Cited


