

Who Ya Gonna Call?
The Experience of Licensed Lay Worship Leaders in Rural Congregations in the
United Church of Canada

By

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REB Approval Certificate

Certificate of Ethical Acceptability for Research Involving Humans

This is to certify that the Research Ethics Board has examined the research proposal:

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and concludes that in all respects the proposed project meets appropriate standards of ethical acceptability and is in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2) and Atlantic School of Theology's relevant policies.

Approval Period: 1 September 2018 to 16 April 2019

Dated this 4th day of December, 2018 at Halifax, Nova Scotia.

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Abstract

This qualitative research study examines the experience of Licensed Lay Worship Leaders (LLWLs) serving in rural pastoral charges in the United Church of Canada. Taking the form of a phenomenological study, the experiences of LLWLs were obtained through a series of interviews. Analysis of these interviews identified some common themes. Analyzing these themes offers us insight into the experience of LLWLs. These insights give us the opportunity to celebrate the experiences and successes of LLWLs while also offering us the opportunity to improve the experience for LLWLs, and at the same time, better meet the needs of the rural pastoral charges in which they serve.

December 8, 2018

Introduction

In 2009, after leading worship once or twice a year for many years, I felt called to enhance my skills and knowledge by taking a LLWL course at Calling Lakes in Saskatchewan. Over the course of the next two years I came to know others who also felt called to this same journey. Subsequently, I co-led the next offering of this course at Calling Lakes from 2012 to 2014 and met more people of similar experience. I began to understand this group of people as a community with gifts to offer to the church in the

area of worship leadership. Although my call has evolved into a journey to ordained ministry, my connection to this group remains strong.

Recently I have become aware of the challenges of calling or appointing paid accountable ministry in rural congregations. In part my interest comes through comes through my serving in a rural presbytery in preparation for ordination. In part this comes from my connection to the LLWL community, the challenges faced by them, and the rural congregations that engage them, as they try to address this need for rural worship leadership.

Purpose and Research Question

My research question is “What is the experience of Licensed Lay Worship Leaders serving rural congregations in the United Church of Canada?” I have become aware of the challenges of calling or appointing paid accountable ministry in rural congregations. It is helpful to understand that LLWLs are one resource the church uses to address the issue of supply when the clergy called or appointed to a congregation are unavailable. In some rural pastoral charges where paid accountable ministry does not exist, LLWLs are engaged on a far more frequent basis than would normally be anticipated.

With the above considerations in mind, the primary purpose of this study is to search for common themes in the experience of LLWLs. From these themes we can determine if there are gaps that are a cause for concern, any opportunities to improve the experience, and what about this ministry can be celebrated.

I believe this research has many potential benefits. For the LLWL there is the opportunity to identify areas where additional support and training may be needed. They may also identify challenges and barriers that limit their ability to offer their services to rural congregations. If challenges and barriers are identified, the church will have an opportunity to address them. This will help struggling, rural churches to improve their capacity to offer quality worship for their members and adherents. In turn, quality worship will help people to live out their call to a Christian life in the communities in which they live. Christians who live out the call to love their neighbour can improve the health and welfare of their communities.

Review of Literature

There is little in scholarly literature, if anything at all, that speaks directly to the experience of LLWLs serving in rural congregations. Even acknowledging that the term LLWLs is specific to the United Church of Canada and then searching by removing the word “licensed” the literature is extremely limited.

However, if we split apart the focus into separate search efforts, one for lay worship leaders and one for rural churches, we start to find more information. Therefore I will consider the literature for each of these terms before trying to bring them back together.

There are certainly many books that will enlighten us about worship leadership. There are books on preaching, praying, singing, sacraments and liturgy.¹ When it comes to leadership itself, about who is leading worship, little is written. Frequently there are

books that talk about the elements of worship that may make mention of the role of laity in worship. For example, Willimon, in *A Guide to Preaching and Leading Worship*, talks about all the aspects of worship. He mentions the laity five times.² One reference is unrelated to laity in leadership. Two references are actually outside the bounds of presiding in worship: offering feedback and planning and evaluation. In the other two references Willimon considers the parts of the service the laity can lead. Although he does not close the door entirely, he suggests that, “Some acts such as preaching or blessing are appropriately reserved for the pastor, ...”³ A book that seems most promising is titled *Lay Leaders of Worship* by Kathleen Hope Brown. However, when the contents and opening pages are perused we find the book is actually about lay leaders of prayer, not worship.⁴ Although much of what is written could apply to worship leaders equally as well as to prayer leaders, little is written about the experience of leading worship. A short sharing in the preface of the author’s experience of leading prayer services at an assisted living facility during Advent is a sufficient example. Brown shares both the “love, hope, and Christmas joy” and the lack of recognition due to not being ordained.⁵ It is this experience that I hope to explore. Is the experience affirming to those who lead? Does the feedback indicate the congregation has been spiritually fed?

There is some recognition that congregations are in need of leadership beyond ordained clergy. A website for the diocese of Salisbury in the Church of England outlines the qualifications for Lay Worship Leaders and provides a link to training information.⁶ The United Church of Canada offers a handbook that outlines the policies and procedures (including the process for being licensed), a description of the qualities and

competencies, and a suggested program of study, for Licensed Lay Worship Leaders.⁷

Courses are also offered online and by some conferences.⁸

Turning our attention to the rural church, much more has been written. Indeed, one of the factors leading to the formation of the United Church of Canada was the inability of the churches in Canada to provide sufficient resources to evangelize the vast Canadian prairies. This resulted in the creation of the Local Union churches in 1908.⁹ In 1948 the Canadian Council of Churches published *The Rural Church in Canada* with the opening sentence, “The rural ministry of the Christian Church in Canada today presents a distinctive and challenging problem.”¹⁰ Part of the problem recognized in the introduction is “the vastness of Canada’s expanse” and that “the minister may cover a very large, thinly populated area.”¹¹ However, no attention is paid in this book to the worship life of the congregation. Rather, the final chapter closes with eight recommendations for the rural church being active and present in the community.¹² No doubt these are worthwhile and laudable goals but the question of worship for those in rural locations is not addressed. An effort similar to the Canadian undertaking describes the American view in 1998 in *Rural Ministry*.¹³ It is written by an ecumenical group that “has over 120 years experience in rural America.”¹⁴ As with the Canadian perspective, this book focusses on what the church can do in the rural community. The thesis is “that the church in rural America today not only can, but must, contribute significantly to the renewal of individual people, the land, and the communities of people rooted in the land, as well as in urban places.”¹⁵ However, they do not forget about worship entirely.

Recognizing that we simply do not have enough clergy, they write:

One of the most promising [creative means] is the growing attention paid to *lay* and bi-vocational ministry. Not only do these programs provide a greater opportunity for *churches that otherwise would have empty altars* to be served by a minister, they also call forth from congregations greater levels of accountability and involvement. By moving the central responsibility for the life of the church away from the ordained minister, these models of ministry locate ministry in the whole body of the faithful.¹⁶ (italics mine)

Here is the recognition that one of the challenges of the rural church, that of a lack of ordered clergy (to state ordained would leave out the diaconate in the United Church of Canada) has some potential to be addressed by lay people. The authors acknowledge that this creates organizational difficulties. They name explicitly only one; some denominations “limit the administering of sacraments or ordinances to ordained ministers.”¹⁷ Lay and laity are mentioned through the book but there is no further mention of lay leadership in worship. It is hinted at but not explicitly mentioned. In the final chapter there is a focus on the training and support that lay people need. Specifically mentioned is leadership in various forms but again, worship leadership is absent from the discussion.¹⁸

There is an interesting discussion happening around the question of size of churches that may have significance for rural churches. Although he makes no mention of the role of laity in worship leadership Ray sings the praises of worshipping in small churches.¹⁹ Lings, in a recent study, revisits the work done by Wasdell in 1974, recognizing that there seems to be a size limit to effective parishes in The Church of England, and that the results of that study still seem to hold today. The study argues for more smaller churches rather than consolidating into larger ones to make for a larger

financial base. One of the recommendations from the original study that is repeated is to seriously consider more lay-led smaller churches.²⁰ Morrill, in a presentation at a conference in 2011, made similar observations about smaller American Roman Catholic parishes having more effective worship. The paper is focussed on how sacraments are experienced and received but the observations about the affect of the size of the congregation are significant. His conclusions include the idea that although priests still need to sanctify the elements, it would seem acceptable to the people that the sacraments be led by the laity.²¹

Perhaps there is a note of caution to be sounded when considering lay leadership in the rural church. Littler et al., in a study of the acceptance of lay leadership in rural Anglican churches in England in 2000, found some significant resistance to it. His study suggests that resistance is found mostly in the older members of the church and that resistance varies greatly depending on the specific duties being considered (e.g., preaching, reading scripture, serving communion, etc.).²² Do Licensed Lay Worship Leaders in the United Church of Canada experience similar resistance in rural churches? Listening to their experiences, I hope to find out.

We have rural churches in need of ministry. Certainly that ministry is more than leading in worship but leading in worship is part of their need. In the absence of sufficient numbers of ordered clergy, we have lay people who have taken training, been assessed by their governing bodies, found capable and acceptable to serve and been duly licensed. These lay people are willing to serve. Is the call to service they experience able

to meet the needs of rural congregations? This study will address the leadership experience. A study of the congregational experience will be needed to complete the picture.

The literature speaks to the challenges of current day rural congregations. The literature offers some limited perspective on lay leadership in the church, including a few references to leadership in a worship service. There is a gap in the amount of information about lay leadership in worship in general. When considering specifically rural churches, the gap with respect to lay worship leadership is wide indeed. The issue that does not seem to be addressed is the significant increase in the weekly presence of lay leadership that is necessary when regular ordered ministry is not available. I believe this lack of availability changes the dynamic for lay led worship. It seems that the occasional presence of laity in the pulpit is fine. How does the experience change when frequency increases significantly?

Method

The study employed a phenomenological methodology. According to Creswell and Poth, “a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experience of a concept or phenomenon.”²³ The phenomenon here is LLWLs serving rural congregations in the United Church of Canada. I hope to “reduce individual experiences with [this] phenomenon to a description of the universal essence.”²⁴ A research proposal to study this phenomenon has been submitted to, and approved by, the Research Ethics Board of the Atlantic School of Theology.

The primary method of data collection was through in-depth interviews of LLWLs. The focus of the interviews was on LLWL experiences related to serving in rural congregations. The licensed lay worship leader was generally defined as “a lay member of The United Church of Canada, in good standing, who has been recommended by the governing body of their pastoral charge, duly educated, and licensed by their presbytery to offer occasional worship leadership and preaching within the bounds of their presbytery.”²⁵ Seven LLWLs were interviewed during the period September 10-18, 2018, inclusive.

On the basis of input from consultants familiar with the training and support of LLWLs invitations were sent out to several LLWLs. The study was outlined and those interested in participating were invited to respond. Respondents receive more detail and were asked to sign an informed consent form. Once the consent form was received the interview was scheduled and carried out.

Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed for common themes. These themes were then considered in terms of the learnings that could be extracted from them. As there were significant distances involved interviews were carried out by technology appropriate to the interviewee. These included Skype, FaceTime, and audio only phone calls. All interviews were conducted in the privacy of my home office.

The definition of a rural pastoral charge was more challenging. There is no one consistent definition of rural across Canada. Therefore, during the invitation process

individuals were asked to identify in general where they served and the determination of qualification to participate was made on a case by case basis.

Data Collection

The individuals were located in rural Manitoba and Saskatchewan. In every case they served multiple pastoral charges. All but one were consistently serving multiple Sundays per month.

Each individual was asked eight questions (see list of questions in Appendix B on page 37). The fourth and sixth questions referred to experiencing affirmation. It quickly became clear that the two questions needed clarification to differentiate them one from the other. The first question focussed on internal affirmations the LLWL experienced while the second focussed on external affirmations from the pastoral charges they were serving. Without differentiation it was the second question that was often responded to in both cases.

The responses were recorded. In all, 148 pages of transcript were generated. The transcripts were studied for comments that seemed in some way significant. Recordings were studied in conjunction with the transcripts. This allowed for the possibility that the tone of a comment added significance that would not be detected in the written words. Over the seven interviews 407 comments were identified as worthy of note to the researcher.

Data Analysis

It was clear from the interviews themselves, and from later reviewing the transcripts, that the over all experience of LLWLs was positive. All those interviewed described a fulfilling experience. All participants seemed very open and willing to share their experiences without hesitation.

Studying the comments to find commonality resulted in identifying five themes. Four of them were universal. Each theme exhibited some common features that served to describe it. The five themes are commitment, journey, meaning, communication, and challenge. What follows below is a description of each theme and its features.

Commitment

One of the strongest themes coming out of this research is the level of commitment the LLWLs interviewed had to serving pastoral charges in the area and keeping the doors of worship open. All seven individuals displayed a high level of commitment. Commitment in general would be expected, given that they have all taken the course and gone through the process to be licensed. However, all have gone beyond the basic expectation of casual pulpit supply. Commitment displayed four features.

The first feature is need. All respondents were concerned about the great need for worship leadership in the rural church. This showed up in many ways. One of the most obvious was that all of them, once recognized as serving in worship leadership, were requested to serve in, and accepted, leadership in other ways. Five are presiding at funerals. Two lead worship at care facilities. Two have taken the Sacraments Elder

course and are presiding over the sacraments where they are licensed. Two have developed and led confirmation classes. Four have taken up leadership in other miscellaneous forms. In all cases these are things the local clergy would have been asked to do had there been local clergy available.

One might ask, just how big is this need? In an email conversation with Liz MacKenzie, Conference Personnel Minister for Saskatchewan Conference, I learned that over there are over 120 rural pastoral charges in the conference and that over 60 of them are vacant. Further, as an example of how great a challenge this is, Rev. MacKenzie offered that a 500 km radius in southwest Saskatchewan is currently being served by only three ministry personnel. In an email conversation with Judy Hare, Manitoba & Northwestern Ontario Conference (MNWO) Personnel Minister, I learned that in MNWO there are currently 27 pastoral charges without paid accountable ministry and not searching, that is, they are lay led by choice. I did not research the reasons for that choice. Further, there are 40 churches in either the ministry profile or search process and 10 pastoral charges that have entered into service agreements with other pastoral charges to meet their ministry needs. What both of these tell us is that there is a great need for ministry that we are having difficulty meeting. LLWLs are one of the ways we are meeting that need. As stated earlier in this report, it is common that they serve multiple charges and multiple Sundays per month. What was clear from their comments is that they are committed to meeting the needs of their church communities.

The second feature is boundaries. Perhaps this is best expressed by the comment of one respondent who said they were, “not a minister but people see you as one.” Therefore, to properly serve, LLWLs must be clear with the people they are serving about the role they are filling. This is a lot of work. People, generally, do not recognize the distinctions between different forms of clergy such as ordained, diaconal, or Designated Lay Minister. Add in Congregational Designated Minister (CDM) and Licensed Lay Worship Leader and the picture is even more muddled. For example, even though anyone can preside at a funeral, LLWLs must be clear they are not doing so as LLWLs. Funerals typically include pastoral care that is beyond their mandate. LLWLs typically also have a history with the community that is more personal than a minister who has been called from somewhere else. Therefore, being present as a friend challenges the boundary of saying no to pastoral care. Again, LLWLs must be clear about the role they are in at any point in time.

Part of the issue is that accountability and liability boundaries are not always clear to LLWLs or the communities they serve. For example, because they are not trained to do pastoral care and it is not part of their mandate, they are personally accountable for any actions deemed to be pastoral care and church insurance will not cover them.

Accountability is also the reason for restrictions on licensing of sacramental elders. This limits any sacramental elder to their own pastoral charge and only if there is no paid accountable minister called or appointed.

The third feature of commitment is a strong emphasis on the worship experience. This is not throw together a few scriptures, hymns and prayers and spew out a few random thoughts about them. In every case there was a deep desire to offer worship that is meaningful for those who attend. It was not simply a job to be done. Scripture was viewed as foundational. Hymns were selected with great care to fit the service and the congregation. It was common to hear their struggles with not knowing what hymns were familiar to a congregation. In all cases respondents acknowledge the significant amount of time they put in to preparing a worship service. This was true as well for services outside the church such as in care facilities.

The last feature of commitment is continuing education. Six of the seven respondents expressed significant interest in continuing education. There was a strong commitment to improving their worship leadership skills. Interest was expressed in training and mentorship with a particular focus on theology and on deepening knowledge of scripture. Some are already participating in annual retreats, workshops and studies. Some of these have been self-initiated by LLWLs and others have been offered by presbyteries. Those who participated in the series of webinars offered by Rev. Dr. Christine Jerrett spoke highly of them.²⁶

Aside from a strong desire for more education a related concern was the lack of record of any training taken. The example cited was boundary and racial justice webinars. Attendees do not receive certificates, although certificates are issued and sent to conferences for paid accountable ministry and to presbyteries for LLWLs. The general

feeling is that the person taking training should receive their record of completion. It is possible this may change with the move to three courts.

Journey

Each of the respondents offered rich language that described experience of a journey. Becoming a LLWL was not an isolated event in any of their lives. Three features are generally present in the experience of LLWLs.

In every case the respondents described being involved in some other aspect(s) of church and/or worship earlier in their lives. Involvement generally expanded to multiple areas of congregational life.

A second feature was a sense of call. Five of the respondents used language that evoked images of call. Three of them specifically used the word call in their descriptions of entering the LLWL program.

The final feature of journey, and perhaps the most significant one, is that five respondents identified one or more individuals who invited and encouraged them to enter into some form of ministry. At least one is considering going further into ministry, in part because of such invitations and encouragement.

Meaning

Closely related to the theme of journey is the theme of meaning. One might suggest that meaning is an outcome of journey. All of the respondents described finding

meaning and value in the experience of serving in worship leadership. Perhaps the best way to explain this is to offer some example quotes:

- “brings me life”
- “brought something in me I didn’t know I had”
- “deepened my faith”

The first of three features that describe this theme is affirmation. External affirmation of how people experienced their worship leadership was common. No one had to search for something to say when asked about affirmation. As with the overarching theme, a small sampling of comments is probably the best way to understand affirmation:

- “did you ever touch me!” (a positive affirmation expressed by a congregant after experiencing a worship service led by an LLWL)
- “I needed to hear that today”
- “when are you coming again?”
- “why don’t you become our minister?”

A second feature of the meaning theme was that serving in worship leadership changed relationships. People viewed and treated respondents differently once they became LLWLs. Sometimes respondents were “put on a pedestal.” This was seen as an opportunity to develop people skills. In particular respondents took the opportunity to get to learn more about people in their congregations and, as a result, found themselves becoming less judgemental, recognizing that there is always something they don’t know behind people’s actions.

A third feature of the meaning theme is an experience of connection. This is an internal experience of connection to God and with others. Largely, this is a result of time spent in worship preparation. Sitting with scripture, hymns and prayers gives and opportunity to reflect that opens one to God. Ultimately, the result of this is personal growth.

Communication

The fourth theme I have labelled communication. Where the previous three themes were present for all respondents this one presented for six of the interviewees. This still seems a significant number to me. I recognize that often we label an issue as a communication problem rather than look at other implications. However, I believe in this case that the stakeholders in the issues identified all have the best of intentions for how they serve the church and the LLWL community. Therefore, it is more likely that communication is the issue rather than any intention to favour or disadvantage one group or the other.

The first of two features in this theme is a lack of clarity. Three examples should suffice. First, already discussed is the lack of clarity in congregations about the different forms of ministry. This creates many challenges when LLWLs are asked to perform duties outside the scope of their training and authority. Second, the policies and guidelines that govern LLWL practice seem inconsistent. This is, in part, because each presbytery has some latitude in how they execute oversight of LLWLs. Therefore the oversight is different in each presbytery. Relicensing may happen every one, two or three

years depending on where you are licensed. Some LLWLs will not use the word regular because it has been so ingrained that they must not provide services on a regular basis to any congregation. This is related to Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) regulations but the definitions given to LLWLs are so varied that no one really knows what regular means. In some places the only discussion is around a cumulative \$500 worship stipend limit that the CRA dictates is a threshold for the mandatory issuing of T4s. For some it means no more than 'x' Sundays per month. For some it means that they don't do the same Sunday every month. To be clear, respondents were offering not only their own experience in this case but that of other LLWLs they are in conversation with. The third example has already been discussed to some extent in the commitment theme on the topic of boundaries. Pastoral care is specifically prohibited for LLWLs. That is clear. However, none of the LLWLs interviewed seemed aware of the reasons for this. Specifically, the accountability and liability issues have not been presented in a manner that has connected with them.

The other feature of this theme is a strong sense of exclusion by the LLWL community. This experience of exclusion has two sources. One is due to inconsistent communication from the church hierarchy. The other is the comments of some ordered clergy who make it clear they do not consider LLWLs to be ministers. It does not seem to them that input on their needs is requested and some wonder if it is even considered. This has come to the fore most recently as part of the restructuring that will move us to a three court system. I offer three specific examples; two from interviews and one from my own recent experience that supports their experience. The restructuring changes the

reporting and accountability lines for LLWLs, as it does for clergy. However, for clergy there is more clarity because of the establishment of the Office of Vocation. In general, it appears that presbytery oversight of LLWLs will move to the region and the local pastoral charge responsibilities will remain the same. This has not been made clear to the LLWLs. There has been almost no mention of them in the restructuring plans. A second example comes from the experience of scheduling meetings with LLWLs. In some cases short notice is given even when the meeting is considered mandatory. No consideration seems to be made for scheduling conflicts. While these may be isolated incidents, they certainly create feelings of exclusion. The third example comes from my attendance on the recent Church Hub webinar. It was revealed that the web site would allow clergy to place themselves on the pulpit supply list. When I asked about LLWLs the immediate response was, “they are not ministers.” The definition of minister notwithstanding, this suggests either a gap where LLWLs were not considered or a two-tiered pulpit supply list that will cause headaches for those administering and accessing it.

I am confident that the church sees LLWLs as important. I believe we understand there is a need they serve, even if we may not understand how great that need is. Therefore I believe that being more intentional in communicating with the LLWL community will go a long way toward addressing this theme. A hopeful example is the recent establishment by Region 5 of a Committee on Lay Ministry Support. If all regions take similar action then LLWLs will have a clear contact point when they have questions and concerns.

Challenge

I chose to separate this out as a theme on its own because was not as common. It would have been possible to treat these differently as parts of commitment and communication but these features were not as universal as the other items. However, I felt they were important enough to be mentioned. There are two specific challenges that I have placed in this theme.

The first challenge is congregational expectations. Two respondents identified this issue. In general, this can be described as arriving at a church to lead worship and finding out that there are practices or needs about which you were not informed. A congregation may have changed the bulletin the LLWL provided to include things they are unprepared for or ask the LLWL to make announcements of significant import to the congregation with no preparation or context that will help the congregation to hear it. Such incidents put LLWLs in a very difficult situation that can diminish the effectiveness of their leadership.

The second challenge is regarding receiving honoraria. As with many people, talking about money is difficult for LLWLs. While it was very clear that LLWLs are not in this for the money there are some practices they find challenging. First, payment practices vary greatly. Honoraria range from \$125 to \$210 plus mileage in some cases. While some congregations struggle financially, there is at least the perception that some congregations simply choose to pay significantly less than they can afford. It seems strange to have such a broad range for providing the same service, sometimes by the

same individual. Further, some pastoral charges do not offer their honoraria at the time of the service. It goes into their system and is paid at the end of the month. While this might seem reasonable to someone on a salary who receives it monthly, it seems to me that this practice runs dangerously close to running afoul of CRA rules that would then define the service provider as an employee. The last observation around receiving honoraria is that it would be helpful when receiving a cheque that there is something that separates out the honoraria from mileage as mileage is not taxable.

Theological Insights

Theologically, consideration of lay people leading worship begins with gifts.

Migliore writes, “The gifts of the Spirit are given not only to a few individuals but to all members of the community.”²⁷ He references 1 Cor 12-14 where Paul talks of gifts and of the body of Christ that we are part of. In discussing the gifts in 1 Cor 12:27-28

(NRSV) Paul writes:

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, *forms of leadership*, various kinds of tongues (italics mine).

In this I hear that the gifts of the Spirit are part of God’s call to us. One of those gifts is leadership in many forms. Migliore writes of God’s call, God’s election, this way:

The themes of election and vocation are deeply embedded in the biblical witness. God calls Abraham, chooses the people of Israel, summons the prophets, sends Jesus of Nazareth, and commissions the followers of Jesus for service in the world. ... Election is a call not to privilege, but to service (italics Migliore’s).²⁸

Further, Küng observes that, “Church ‘office’ is not a biblical concept,” that the secular word for office would have had connotations of domination, and that the word usually used by Paul in the Bible is diakonia, meaning service.²⁹ I think we can safely say that lay leadership in the church is biblical.

Regarding the rural church that these LLWLs serve I would simply quote Jesus when he says, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” (Matt 18:20, NRSV)

LLWLs are a significant part of the ministry of the United Church of Canada, particularly in rural pastoral charges. They are one of the vehicles through whom our theology is shared, even when only two or three are gathered.

It is also clear from the statistics I have shared that, in some cases, closing a church will leave people, however small in number, with no reasonable alternative for attending worship. Distance is a significant inhibitor. What, then, is the responsibility of the church to these people?

It seems clear to me that LLWLs are a significant contact point between the church and many of its members, particularly in the rural church. Therefore, how we support them and define their roles will have a significant impact on the church. With many pastoral charges lacking paid accountable ministry it is often the LLWL who shares our theology through the act of worship leadership.

Conclusion

From the interviews and statistics shared it is clear to me that LLWLs fill a need in the rural church where a lack of ordered ministry has created a void. While there may be many reasons for this void I don't think we can deny it exists. The reasons for the void are not the point of this study. With that in mind, I make the following summary points for the reader's consideration.

In any system or process there is always room for improvement. This study has, I believe, revealed some areas where we could better support LLWLs and the communities they serve. Here are five things to consider:

- In our communication with clergy we should also always ask what, if any, relevance it has for LLWLs. Being proactive in our communication strategy will reduce feelings of exclusion. This can only help LLWLs be better worship leaders.
- Rules and policies relating to LLWLs (and probably CDMs) should be reviewed, and where possible, changed to allow them to better serve rural pastoral charges. This includes such areas as presiding over sacraments and pastoral care. This is also the time to consider where accountability should change. As we move from a four court to a three court structure accountability must necessarily change. What better time to make changes to better serve our congregations? We as a church should look at how we can make the structure serve the need wherever possible. No doubt I am not aware of all the issues this may create but that does not mean the conversation should not take place. If changes are made additional training may be needed. If not, alternative methods of service to rural pastoral charges need to be considered.

The pressure on LLWLs to provide these services seems to me to clearly be because the needs are not now being met.

- As well as reviewing rules and policies, the church needs to do ongoing education of congregations to help them understand the distinctions between various forms of ministry and the implications for accountability and liability. Clarity of roles is essential if congregations are to have appropriate expectations of the people that serve them.
- Some thought needs to be given to supporting LLWLs with continuing education. During the presentation it was suggested that this may be an opportunity for our educational institutions to step up and offer online courses that do not require an individual to be in any of their degree programs. The interest of LLWLs in theology, Bible, and generally extending their knowledge base to offer more meaningful worship leadership was made very clear to me.
- It was observed that LLWLs often experienced a specific invitation to take on some form of ministry. One possible takeaway is that we should be more intentional about asking people to discern whether they are called to some form of ministry.

It should also be clear to anyone reading this paper that there is much to celebrate. In the LLWL community we have a rich resource for providing meaningful worship. The sense of commitment of those interviewed to serving their local pastoral charges is inspiring to me. The affirmation they experience, and the relationships, connections, and community they are building represent hope for rural congregations and the greater

church. Although studying rural pastoral charges themselves was beyond the scope of this study I have a sense that LLWLs are filling a real need, and filling it well.

The United Church of Canada is in the middle of a time of transition. While the change is largely a structural one, it is also a time of opportunity for real transformation. When things are already changing, it is much easier to make some of the changes suggested here. We should not wait until we have finalized our current changes to address the issues presented here.

In A New Creed we proclaim:

We are called to be the Church:

to celebrate God's presence,

to live with respect in Creation,

to love and serve others,

to seek justice and resist evil,

to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,

our judge and our hope.³⁰

The church is not just clergy. The church is not just lay people. The church is the whole people of God. May we celebrate the gifts of Licensed Lay Worship Leaders as they live out their part of our calling.

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- ¹ For a very small sampling see: Thomas G. Bandy, and Lucinda C. Holmes, *Worship Ways: For The People Within Your Reach* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), Phyllis Cole, and Everett Tilson, *Litanies and Other Prayers: For the Revised Common Lectionary Year B* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), Ruth C. Duck, *Worship for the Whole People of God: Vital Worship for the 21st Century* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), and Jane Rogers Vann, *Worship Matters: A Study for Congregations* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011).
- ² William H. Willimon, *A Guide to Preaching and Leading Worship* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 9, 15, 26, 84, 89.
- ³ Willimon, *A Guide to Preaching and Leading Worship*, 9.
- ⁴ Kathleen Hope Brown, *Lay Leaders of Worship: A Practical and Spiritual Guide* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), vii-xx.
- ⁵ Brown, *Lay Leaders of Worship*, ix-x.
- ⁶ Diocese of Salisbury, The Church of England, "Lay Worship Leaders," accessed July 22, 2018, https://www.salisbury.anglican.org/ministry/lay-ministry/copy_of_new-lay-worship-leaders.
- ⁷ United Church of Canada, *Licensed Lay Worship Leaders* (Toronto: United Church of Canada, 2016).
- ⁸ See for example, United-in-Learning, "Online Licensed Lay Worship Leader Training," accessed July 22, 2018, <https://www.united-in-learning.com/index.php/llwl-online-training-program> and Maritime Conference, United Church of Canada, "Licensed Lay Worship Leader (LLWL) Program," accessed July 22, 2018, <https://marconf.ca/licensed-lay-worship-leader-llwl-program-advent-christmas-epiphany-2017/>.
- ⁹ Don, Schweitzer, ed., *The United Church of Canada: A History* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2012), 7-8.
- ¹⁰ W. E. Mann, *The Rural Church in Canada* (Toronto: The Christian Social Council of Canada, Department of Social Relations of the Canadian Council of Churches, 1948), 3.
- ¹¹ Mann, *The Rural Church in Canada*, 3.
- ¹² Mann, *The Rural Church in Canada*, 60-62.
- ¹³ Shannon Jung et al., *Rural Ministry: The Shape of Renewal to Come* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).
- ¹⁴ Jung et al., *Rural Ministry*, 9.
- ¹⁵ Jung et al., *Rural Ministry*, 19.
- ¹⁶ Jung et al., *Rural Ministry*, 52.
- ¹⁷ Jung et al., *Rural Ministry*, 52.

¹⁸ Jung et al., *Rural Ministry*, 219.

¹⁹ David R. Ray, *Wonderful Worship in Smaller Churches* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2000).

²⁰ George W. Lings, "A Case for Multiplying the Type and Number of Churches," *Rural Theology* 14, no. 2 (November 2016): 112-133. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 23, 2018).

²¹ Bruce T. Morrill, "Lay liturgical leadership in the US Catholic Church: popular advances, official retreat," *Worship* 88, no. 1 (January 2014): 23-36. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 20, 2018).

²² Keith Littler, Trevor, Leslie J Francis, and Jeremy Martineau, "The acceptability of lay liturgical ministry: a survey among rural Anglican churchgoers," *Journal Of Empirical Theology* 13, no. 1 (2000): 42-54. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 20, 2018).

²³ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2017), chap. 4, section "Phenomenological Research," 25 of 111, Kobo.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ United Church of Canada, *Licensed Lay Worship Leaders*, 4.

²⁶ The Rev. Dr. Christine Jerrett has been an ordained minister of the United Church of Canada since 1982. She has a strong commitment to training leaders for congregations. She has facilitated online Learning Circles for lay worship leaders for several years. During 2014 - 2015, she received a McGeachy Senior Scholarship from the United Church of Canada Foundation to research lay leadership training in the United Church of Canada: what is happening; what needs to happen. She blogs at <https://christinejerrett.wordpress.com>. United-in-Learning, "Online Licensed Lay Worship Leader Training," accessed January 24, 2019, <https://www.united-in-learning.com/index.php/lwl-online-training-program>

²⁷ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 238.

²⁸ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 256.

²⁹ Hans Küng, *Why Priests?: A Proposal for a New Church Ministry*, trans. Robert C. Collins, S.J. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972), 39.

³⁰ United Church of Canada. *The Manual* (Toronto: United Church of Canada, 2016), 20.

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Appendix A: Research Ethics Board Proposal

Name of Student Investigator: Donald (Don) Schau

Title of Research Project: Who Ya Gonna Call?³¹ Lay Worship Leaders in Rural Congregations

Summary of Proposed Research

Description

My research question is “What is the experience of Licensed Lay Worship Leaders serving rural congregations in the United Church of Canada?” My interest in this question is twofold. Having served as a Licensed Lay Worship Leader (LLWL) myself, I have a strong connection to this group, although my call has evolved into a journey to ordained ministry. I remain in contact with several LLWLs and have heard stories of struggle and triumph in their ministries.

Second, I have become aware of the challenges of calling or appointing paid accountable ministry in rural congregations. In part this comes through my serving in a rural presbytery in preparation for ordination. In part this comes from my connection to the LLWL community and the challenges faced by them, and the rural congregations that engage them, as they try to address this need for rural worship leadership. It is helpful to understand that LLWLs are one resource the church uses to address the issue of supply when the ministry staff called or appointed to a congregation are unavailable. In some rural pastoral charges where paid accountable ministry does not exist LLWLs are engaged on a far more frequent basis than would normally be anticipated.

Proposed Research Field Sites

No sites will be studied. Licensed Lay Worship Leaders who have served in rural congregations in the United Church of Canada will be invited to participate. Interviews will be scheduled at the convenience of the interviewees. Depending on the location of the interviewees, interviews may be face-to-face or by an online medium suitable to the interviewee such as Skype, Face Time, or Google Hangouts.

Principle Research Consultants

George R. Bott - Licensed Lay Worship Leader with Ministry of Supervision qualifications, leader of Online Licensed Lay Worship Leader Training³²

Joy Bott - Licensed Lay Worship Leader with Ministry of Supervision qualifications, leader of Online Licensed Lay Worship Leader Training

Rev. Marg Janick-Grayston - Spiritual Leader and Retreat Facilitator, Courage to Lead® facilitator, former leader of Licensed Lay Worship Leader course at Calling Lakes Centre in Saskatchewan.

Methodology

The study will employ a phenomenological methodology. According to Creswell and Poth, “a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experience of a concept or phenomenon.”³³ The phenomenon in this case is serving rural congregations in the United Church of Canada as Licensed Lay Worship Leaders. The primary method of data collection will be through in-depth interviews of LLWLs. The focus of the interviews will be on LLWL experiences related to serving in rural congregations. My intention is to interview four individuals. Through analyzing the data collected I hope to discover some general themes that can describe the essence of the experience.

I will be asking my consultants to offer names of prospective interviewees. Based on their recommendations I will send out the letter of invitation. My consultants have access to a large pool of LLWLs. In general, the criteria will be LLWLs who have served in rural congregations. Frequency of service and number of congregations served will be factors that influence the decision if I get an expression of interest from more than four individuals.

The questions I will ask can be found in Appendix A.

Potential Benefits from Study

This research has many potential benefits. For the Licensed Lay Worship Leader there is the opportunity to be heard and to identify areas where additional support and training may be needed. They may also identify challenges and barriers that limit their ability to offer their services to rural congregations. If challenges and barriers are identified the

church will have an opportunity to address them. This will help struggling rural churches to improve their capacity to offer quality worship for their members and adherents. In turn, quality worship will help people to live out their call to a Christian life in the communities in which they live. Christians who live out the call to love their neighbour can improve the health and welfare of their communities.

Potential Risks from Study

I do not anticipate any risks from this study. Further, participants have free choice to participate or to drop out of the study at any time. Although the risk is low, I have engaged a helping professional, Rev. Bob Gilbert, should the need arise for any of the participants.

Process for Obtaining Informed Consent

After I have identified potential participants, I will telephone or email them to ask if they are willing, in principle, to participate. If their answer is affirmative, I will arrange an interview place and time. I will indicate to them that they will be asked to sign an informed consent form, but they are free to decide at that point or at any point to withdraw. At the beginning of the meeting and before the interview begins, I will share the background of my project, answer questions they might have and ask them to sign the consent form (see appendix C). I will inform them that should they become distressed in any way during the interview that I can refer them to a helping professional. Rev. Bob Gilbert has agreed to serve in this capacity. They will be able to end the interview at any point and I will delete the recording if they decide to withdraw from the study.

Process for Protecting Identity of Participants and Confidentiality of Data

Protecting Identity of Participants and Storage and Destruction of Data:

1. Upon receiving a signed Informed Consent from research participants, I will:
 - a) provide one copy for the participants
 - b) keep one copy for myself which I will place in a envelope separate from all other materials and store in a locked file cabinet in my home office.
 - c) provide one copy for my supervisor (Dr. Willhauck), also placed in a separate envelope, who will store it in a locked file cabinet in her office at AST.

2. Participants will be given code names. Audio tapes of interviews will be recorded on a digital recording device. These digital recording devices will be kept in locked brief cases or safes and secured at all times during data collection from the time of Informed Consent until deleted permanently from my device at the completion of the research (December 10, 2018).
3. Within two weeks of each interview, I will transcribe the interviews onto a Word document. The Word Document transcripts will be kept on a password protected computer from the time of data collection until the final paper is due (December 10, 2018).
4. When the final paper is submitted to my supervisor on (December 10, 2018) the Word Document transcripts of interviews will also be submitted to her, either printed as hard copies or disposable CDs and deleted from my computer and trash bin.
5. My supervisor (Dr. Willhauck) will store transcripts of interviews in a locked file cabinet in her office at AST for one year and all data materials will be destroyed by shredding or crushing.

³¹ Ray Parker Jr., "Ghostbusters," recorded 1984, track 1 on Ghostbusters (Original Soundtrack Album), Arista, Compact disc.

³² "Online Licensed Lay Worship Leader Training," United-in-Learning, accessed July 19, 2018, <https://www.united-in-learning.com/index.php/llwl-online-training-program>.

³³ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2017), chap. 4, section "Phenomenological Research," 25 of 111, Kobo.

Appendix B: Proposed Interview Questions

- 1. What is it like for you to be a Licensed Lay Worship Leader in the United Church of Canada?**
- 2. How has serving in worship leadership affected your life?**
- 3. What experiences led you to pursue serving as a lay worship leader?**
- 4. What in worship leadership affirms your sense of call to this ministry?**
- 5. What in worship leadership have you felt unprepared for?**
- 6. How have you been affirmed by congregations as a LLWL?**
- 7. What are the challenges you have experienced?**
- 8. Is there anything else about your experience as a LLWL you think I should know?**

Appendix C: Invitation to Participate

(Date)

Dear (Name),

My name is Don Schau. I am currently in my final year of the Summer Distance program at the Atlantic School of Theology working towards my Master of Divinity (MDiv) degree and a candidate for ordination in the United Church of Canada. One of the requirements for the MDiv is to complete a qualitative research project. My project is focussed on the question, “What is the experience of Licensed Lay Worship Leaders serving rural congregations in the United Church of Canada?” Through this research I hope to learn about the joys and the challenges faced by Licensed Lay Worship Leaders when serving in rural churches. I received your name from (Name and relevant information) as someone who might be interested in participating in this study. This letter is my invitation to you to consider participating.

The primary method of data collection in this study will be through the use of interviews of individuals like you who have served as Licensed Lay Worship Leaders in rural congregations. The interviews will be conducted face-to-face where possible and through online tools such as Skype where it is not. I expect the initial interviews to last no more than one hour. During analysis of the data collected there may be a need for short follow-up interviews to clarify responses to the initial interview. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed and notes may be taken. The timing of interviews will be scheduled to meet your availability.

Participation is voluntary. You will be asked to sign a consent form prior to or at the first interview. At any time, including after you have signed the consent form, you may choose to end your participation. If you choose to do so the interview (if already in progress) will be ended and all recordings and notes destroyed. Should you become distressed at any point, a helping professional, Rev. Bob Gilbert, will be available.

This research has many potential benefits. For you, the Licensed Lay Worship Leader, there is the opportunity to be heard and to identify areas where additional support and training may be needed. As a group you may also identify challenges and barriers that limit your ability to offer your services to rural congregations. If challenges and barriers are identified the church will have an opportunity to address them. This will help struggling rural churches to improve their capacity to offer quality worship for their members and adherents. In turn, quality worship will help people to live out their call to a Christian life in the communities in which they live. Christians who live out the call to love their neighbour can improve the health and welfare of their communities.

I do not anticipate any risks from this study. Further, participants have free choice to participate or to drop out of the study at any time.

Participation in this study will be kept confidential and the findings or results will be anonymized. The findings will be published in a final paper and a presentation that will be posted to YouTube at a later date. All participants will be notified of the presentation date and the availability of the paper and YouTube link. After the study is completed, all recordings, transcripts and notes will be destroyed.

If you would like to participate in this study, or if you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at dfschau@mts.net or 204-806-5490.

Thank you for considering this invitation. I look forward to hearing from you.

Blessings,

Don Schau

Appendix D: Informed Consent

I have received a description of the research project, “Who Ya Gonna Call? Lay Worship Leaders in Rural Congregations.” I know that participation in this project is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any point in the process. I understand that should it be required professional help will be available. In the event such help is needed, I may contact Rev. Bob Gilbert at 204-504-5275 or bob.augustine.uc@mymts.net.

I understand that participation will be kept confidential and that the findings or results will be anonymized. While recording and transcription of interviews will take place and notes may be taken, I understand that all records will be destroyed following the project’s completion. Within all project materials produced, my name and any other identifying information will be changed to protect anonymity. This consent form will also be stored separately from the data to maintain anonymity.

This project has been approved by the research Ethics Board of the Atlantic School of Theology. Any questions or concerns about this study may be directed to Dr. Alyda Faber, chair of the Research Ethics Board, at afaber@astheology.ns.ca.

For questions or additional information please contact Don Schau, principal researcher, at 204-806-5490 or dfschau@mts.net.

By signing below I am consenting to participate in this research study.

Name

Date

Appendix E: Thank you letter to Participants

(Date)

Dear (Name),

Thank you for your participation in the research study, “Who Ya Gonna Call? Lay Worship Leaders in Rural Congregations.” I appreciate the time you have freely given to this project. The experiences you shared are a valuable contribution to this research.

As you are aware from my previous communication the results of this study were presented on November 28, 2018 at Transcona Memorial United Church in Winnipeg and live streamed using Zoom technology. The presentation was recorded and will be published on YouTube at a later date. A written summary will be on file at the Atlantic School of Theology Library. In all cases names and personal identifiers have been changed so that anonymity is maintained.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Once again, thank you for your participation in this project. It was a privilege and a pleasure to work with you.

Blessings,

Don Schau