

# **Community Choirs: Secular Gatherings, Holy Ground**

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**A Graduate Project Submitted to  
Atlantic School of Theology, Halifax Nova  
Scotia; in Partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Divinity.**

**April 9, 2018**

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## Table of Contents

Research Ethics Board Certificate .....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Research Question .....	2
Spirituality .....	3
Theological Considerations .....	5
Methodology.....	6
Data Analysis.....	9
Theme 1: Transcendence.....	9
Theme 2: Purpose.....	12
Theme 3: Struggle .....	16
Theme 4: Compassionate Connection.....	20
Theme 5: Hospitality .....	24
Implications for Pastoral Theology .....	27
Notes .....	32
Bibliography .....	34
Appendix A: Literature Review .....	36
Appendix B: Theological Essay .....	44
Appendix C: Letter of Invitation to Participate.....	56
Appendix D: Informed Consent .....	58

## Research Ethics Board Certificate

### Certificate of Ethical Acceptability for Research Involving Humans

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

AST REB File number:	0072017
Title of Research Project:	Community Choirs: Secular Gatherings, Holy Ground
Faculty Supervisor:	Dr. Dave Csinos
Student Investigator	Angela MacLean

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: 26 October 2017 to 16 April 2018

Dated this 26th day of October, 2017 at Halifax, Nova Scotia.

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## Abstract

“Community Choirs: Secular Gathering, Holy Ground” is a phenomenological study that examines the how the experience of singing in a community choir influences one’s spirituality. While singing together in voice and song is an ancient practice often found in worship services of different faith traditions, there is a recent phenomenon that sees people of all ages participating in community choirs that seem to be popping up all over our communities. Although singing chorally together might have been traditionally reserved for Sunday morning worship, it is now trendy to sing in a choir of one’s own choosing. Participants selected were from two community choirs who have the lived common experience of singing in a community choir. These choirs have no particular reason to gather except for the love of singing. Four people from each choir were interviewed and the data from these interviews were analyzed. This study uses the doctrine of the Incarnation and a theology of beauty as a theological framework. Several themes related to spirituality have emerged such as struggle, purpose, and transcendence. Given the growing trend of community choirs, this study also casts a light on implications for the church, the practice of ministry, and the role of ministers as public theologians.

Submitted: April 9, 2018

## Introduction

One doesn't have to look far into biblical history to see that singing together is a core activity of those who practice their faith. This is for good reason when one considers how one of my participants describes music. Music is "joyful, sober, reflective, and solemn. It's anguished, it's sad, it's despairing, it's depressing, or it's uplifting. That is what music is." Music speaks to the core of our humanity like nothing else can and there is no better place to look for this biblically speaking than in the psalms. The writers of the psalms poured out their hearts before their God, capturing the essence of human emotion whether that emotion is deep pain or joyous celebration. For example, in Psalm 42, we read of an anguished soul telling itself to put its hope in God despite the pain the writer is in, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God."<sup>1</sup> Additionally, in Psalm 139 we read the beautiful words of a writer praising God for God's wonderful works of creation, "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well."<sup>2</sup> These psalms, meant to be sung aloud in community, are a way to express the diverse emotions we experience as human beings.

For generations, the western way of practicing the Christian faith would have people join the church on Sunday morning while a certain few who were gifted with the ability to carry a note might find themselves in the church choir. While that still might hold true to a certain extent today, it is no secret that the population trend in churches is declining; therefore we see a decline in church choir participation. This is coupled with a growing trend of community choir popularity where people of all talents and abilities join together in song. This current phenomenon draws diverse people from the local

community and the singing event happens in church venues, community halls, and even the local downtown pub. Granted that recent studies of the phenomenon have scientifically proven that singing together is good for one's wellbeing, I, on the other hand, am curious about looking at this phenomenon through a theological lens. By studying community choirs in this way, this timely and relevant study hopes to crack open a wider conversation about the nature of singing together, the nature of what is subjectively happening with our hearts, our minds, our bodies and our souls, and how we might be encountering God in the process of singing together. Further to this, this study hopes to empower choirs of faith traditions to consider what their roles might be in this new context of post-modernism that we find ourselves in by considering new ways that church might be erupting in our communities and how we might engage our communities in new ways through singing together.

## **Research Question**

With all of this in mind, the question that has underpinned my graduate research project is "How does the experience of singing in a community choir influence one's spirituality?" Allister McGrath writes that lack of public engagement with institutionalized forms of religion, a growing cynicism toward material possessions, and the discovery that spirituality has a positive therapeutic effect on individuals around health and wellbeing are all markers that might point to the reasons we see more attention being paid to spiritual dimensions of life.<sup>3</sup> Combine this with the growing trend in community choir popularity and I naturally wondered what affect this act of singing together in community, often with strangers, might have on people's spirituality.

Furthermore, I even wondered what this might tell us about how to live in Christian communities.

## Spirituality

Although most writers generally agree that spirituality includes a social dimension such as that found in choirs, I did find a gap. There was little to no information found that specifically researched the impact singing in a community choir had on one's spirituality. So where was I to start? I looked for aspects of spirituality around singing and community choirs, I asked my participants how they would describe spirituality, and then I considered my own working definition. For example, the term *spiritual* was first coined by St. Paul to "describe that which pertained to the Holy Spirit."<sup>4</sup> Some writers, such as J. MacQuarrie, explore spirituality in terms of "what it means to be a human being....spirituality has to do with becoming a person in the fullest sense."<sup>5</sup> Yet Diana Butler Bass describes spirituality this way, "Spirituality is not just about sitting in a room encountering a mystical God in meditation or seeing God in a sunset. It is a deep awareness that we are creators who work with the Creator, in an ongoing project of crafting a world."<sup>6</sup> Ruth Wills, whose writing interests include the spiritual dimensions of music,<sup>7</sup> writes "music is a way to enable individuals to fulfil their innate spiritual potential and experience transcendence, noting that spirituality emerges from common human experiences."<sup>8</sup> At the same time, a music therapist in Africa, speaking of community choirs, writes that she has experienced "exhilarating public combustions when we have all, by magic, become as one, moving and being moved together by music that seemed to enter our bones and collect us, in spite of ourselves, as one society celebrating itself."<sup>9</sup>

My participants' descriptions of what spirituality means to them were as diverse as what I found in the literature review (Appendix A). For example, Lilly said spirituality is "connection with other people. It's everywhere. It's not just internal but external too." Louis shared that "spirituality is not something you can acquire. You are born with it and you have to nurture it and if you don't nurture it, it will wither." Conversely Charlie said "spirituality is seeking to be present connecting myself and my soul with others in the natural world to understand and gain comfort in this life." The next response might be rather humorous but its depth contains elements of truth for the church. Ella said "Spirituality is supposed to be an expression of a contact with God. I would say I'm a spiritual person meaning I'm someone who thinks maybe there is something else whether it's Star Trek, the force, or Jesus – but NOT the church Jesus – something greater than myself – no idea."

It was also important to consider my own working definition of spirituality. Spirituality, for me, is absolutely grounded in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and the role the Trinity plays in that. It is part of who I am. What does that mean? It means that my connection to God is inherently first connected to the work of the Holy Spirit which means that any spiritual connection for me will point to Jesus Christ. If I don't see Jesus in the face of the other, if I don't recognize Jesus in the midst of the messy ordinariness of daily living, and if I don't connect with and be in authentic community where humility and justice and healing are being sought and served, my spirituality is not being nurtured and I won't flourish into the fullness of my God given gifts.

While I can consider what my participants, myself, and the literature say about spirituality, it is important to acknowledge that it is near impossible to define a broad

working definition of the word. As noted earlier, it is amorphous and, furthermore, we can't seem to control it. Perhaps that might be as broad a working definition we can get.

## **Theological Considerations**

The doctrine of the Incarnation is the central defining event in Christianity.<sup>10</sup> It teaches that God, the Creator and Ruler of the Cosmos, became a human being in the person of Jesus Christ and dwelt among us as, John 1:14 describes. This God, through Christ, took on humiliation, shared in humanity and made humanity's necessities God's own in order to relieve them.<sup>11</sup> For me, the researcher, it means that the invisible God became visible<sup>12</sup> in the person of Jesus Christ and forever bound God's self to humanity in loving partnership. John of Damascus, among others, called this notion Christological perichoresis.<sup>13</sup> The term perichoresis is a theological term used in the doctrine of the Trinity used to indicate intimate union or mutual interpenetration of the three members of the Trinity who can be described as "being-in-one-another, permeation without confusion."<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the idea of Christological perichoresis is about the divine nature of Christ not usurping his earthly, creaturely nature. Rather there is an intrinsic relationship happening that does not confuse nor separate the divine nature from the earthly one. Similarly, as Christians, when we abide in this Christ, we are participating in this partnership, in this life of God that already exists because of the Incarnation. This partnership does not usurp our personality or our humanity but rather the two are in deep intimate union with one another through the Holy Spirit, and when we gather in community we can recognize Christ in the other. Therefore, if we want to know God more fully, if we want to be in relationship with this God through Christ, we, as followers of Christ, have the capacity to look at and consider this Jesus in the other and gaze

through Jesus to see the character of God who makes things beautiful. As such we can see God in the other, thanks to the Incarnation.

With respect to a theology of beauty, C.S. Lewis writes, “We do not want merely to see beauty... we want something else which can hardly be put into words- to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it.”<sup>15</sup> Like Pope Benedict,<sup>16</sup> I believe that beauty is inherently theological. It can lead us unto a path toward God who is beauty especially when that beauty is recognized inside us and inside the other. The doctrine of the Incarnation, coupled with a theology of beauty, is a way for us to lean into the life of God.

With these things in mind, my research question involves taking what is a public and seemingly secular phenomenon and observing it through a lens of the doctrine incarnation and theology of beauty in order to make spiritual connections. In this case, we have community choirs that might speak of God-In-The-Flesh dwelling among us. How might they incarnate Christ? How does the beauty we see expressed in many community choirs lead us on a path toward God?

## **Methodology**

The best way to get to the essence of my research question was to use the phenomenological method of qualitative research. This approach to research studies a lived experience that is shared among participants. That information is then analysed by the researcher as they attempt to describe how the participants experience the phenomenon under study, in this case how singing in community choir influences one’s spirituality. The focus of this method, according to Merriam, is “on the experience itself

and how that experience is transformed into consciousness.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, the goal is “to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence.”<sup>18</sup>

It should be noted that in “some forms of phenomenology, the researcher brackets herself/himself out of the study by discussing personal experiences with the phenomenon.”<sup>19</sup> Creswell and Poth say this practice serves to identify the researcher’s past experience of the phenomenon and set them aside so he/she can focus solely on the participant’s experience.<sup>20</sup> Given that I, the researcher, have no prior experience of singing in a choir this means I have no past personal experiences with the phenomenon that might influence the result of my project. This lack of experience provided me with a great perspective as a researcher as I went into the project a simple assumption that the experience of singing in a choir does influence one’s spirituality. That assumption is built into my research question itself.

One thing that is common across the wide spectrum of spirituality is the fact that it is inherently relational. While the goal of phenomenology is to get to the essence of the phenomenon, Shawn Wilson writes of three story styles when he speaks of relational accountability in research. He writes, “A third style of story is about relating personal experiences or the experiences of others.”<sup>21</sup> As a way of complementing my phenomenological study, I have also incorporated Wilson’s third style of story as a way of presenting my findings. As an attempt to transfer knowledge out of the research I have analyzed, I have attempted to describe the common lived experience of others who sing in a community choir through this story style. This was important to me because I, the researcher, have no experience of singing in a choir. I am an outsider to this lived

experience. While I do not have an inside perspective of singing in choir, I can claim my story, as the researcher of this study and my stake in the research as well as the voices of others. According to Wilson, this is equally important because research is “built on relationships and when you use a story, yours or others, you are claiming a voice and establishing a relationship.....so presentation or knowledge transfer is again all about continuing healthy relationships.”<sup>22</sup> By getting to the universal essence of the common lived experience of all my participants and building relationship with them, my hope is that by presenting the findings by through my story and what I heard on this journey into community choirs, it might tell us ways of being and living in healthy relationship with one another in Christian community. We are accountable to one another. Recognizing our relational accountability to one another is critical in this process.

The phenomenon being examined for this project is how the experience of singing in a community choir influences one’s spirituality. All of my participants came from two different community choirs. Both choirs have no particular reason to gather except they share a love of singing. I sent an email to the directors of both choirs, and both were very helpful in finding possible participants. I went to a practice at each choir. I identified myself to the group and I received a very warm welcome from both choirs. Folks who wanted to participate either came forward to speak personally while I was at the choir practice and others sent me an email saying they wanted to contribute. I interviewed eight participants in total; four participants from each choir. I interviewed two males and six females. I audio recorded and transcribed all my interviews. All interviews took place in one of three places: a) participant’s homes b) coffee shops c) church sanctuaries. In order

to preserve anonymity, I used a random name generator to give pseudonyms to my participants: Ella, Louis, Charlie, Lilly, Sheena, Gertrude, Molly, and Phoebe.

## **Data Analysis**

After I transcribed all of my interviews and read them thoroughly, I coded them using sticky notes posted on my wall to give a larger visual of the data coming out of the information I received. I color coded each participant and wrote relevant words and phrases on each note. As I studied the big picture and drew out common themes, there were 18 themes that emerged and I further color coded those themes. As I sat with these 18 themes I realized they could be grouped into groups of three under six broader themes: transcendence, purpose, struggle, compassion, connection, and hospitality. As I considered the data further, there were two themes that I allowed to converge. Thus, I will discuss five major themes: transcendence, purpose, struggle, compassionate connection, and hospitality.

### **Theme 1: Transcendence**

Transcendence is the experience of an alternate state of reality that is beyond the physical senses as we know them. The notion of transcendence was a very clear theme that came through in my interviews. It consisted of three sub-elements that I perceived as presence, one-ness, and movement. I recalled Kathleen Harmon's words after my interview with Charlie at a downtown coffee shop. Harmon writes, "All sound communicates presence. When the sound heard is voice, the interiority is personal: for the spoken word proceeds from the human interior and manifests human beings to one another as conscious interiors."<sup>23</sup> Likewise Charlie described his sense of transcendence

in terms of presence. “There is definitely energy in the room,” he said, “and it fills my desire to be present. We are focused on singing together so we are all trying to be present. I think afterwards the benefit of going and singing is not just singing yourself but singing with others – it opens a different portal into one’s life.” For Charlie, it seems the act of singing with other people takes him to a different level where he can to hold space together in terms of connection – whether it’s a spiritual connection or singing together – however that might manifest.

I was reminded of Hildegard of Bingen as I listened to my next three participants’ stories. Bingen was a 12th century poetess, musician, artist, healer, scientist, theologian, prophet, and mystic.<sup>24</sup> She absolutely insists on harmony and humility in her singing because the singers must subordinate their desire for power for self-assertion to the common good.<sup>25</sup> Is that not an example of Christ being incarnated in our midst? Not thinking more of oneself than one ought to definitely is a Christ-like act. For Bingen, when harmony and humility are at play the sound, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, becomes beautiful like Christ who makes things beautiful. Ella describes that harmonic sound as “the sweet spot.” It is here where the sense of One-ness was experienced by my participants.

Lilly said “I notice that sometimes when you are singing you don’t even feel that it’s coming out of you – you know what I mean? That’s the best moment because it’s also coming out of everybody else. You don’t hear yourself, you hear the group so to me that’s a really cool experience as it gets you out of your ego and you just become part of that group.” Later in the interview she put it this way: “there are moments when you are

feeling like it's not even coming out of your mouth but coming out of your pores and there is this sense of one."

Molly who has sang in both church choirs and community choirs shared this same sense of transcendence. Describing her spirituality this way, she said "I recognize that I'm one in this huge body but at the same time that huge body is me. I'm part of it, its part of me. All the rhetoric falls away," she went on to share that same aha moment in the community choir "sometimes there are these moments when we take a new song and we work it and work it and work it and we all did our part and all of a sudden it was just like it meshed, everything melted and you were there. Here we are. It's amazing."

Ella, grew up with lots of music but realized after retirement she had an urge to join a community choir. She shared her sense of transcendence like this: "I find the choir more of a moment. It gives me great happiness especially when you hear other voices harmonizing around you. It does something inside you. You know that in a couple of lines you are getting to some crunch crescendo when this voice or that voice are going to come together and it's going to do that vibration and I go "Let me die!" It's that crunch sound in your heart that makes you just.....there are a few songs like that."

All three of these participants spoke of either getting out of their ego in some way and becoming part of that group, hearing the harmony around them and in them and through them, and in that moment everything dissolves and they are there. Looking through the lens of the doctrine of the Incarnation, I would argue that these participants have experienced something of the divine and possibly have participated in God's self-giving love toward them in those moments.

The sub-theme of movement was also identified and I located it under the theme of transcendence. Ruth Wills speaks of singing together like this, “The event of singing in a choir involves being ‘in the moment’ away from the presence of real life and within a dimension that appears to transcend time and space.”<sup>26</sup> In the same fashion, Phoebe described her sense of transcendence as inner movement. “There is something special about music. There is another dimension to it or something that is spiritual. There is something about the words and the music of certain songs that really sink in or something. They become more moving, something moving in your spirit, moving your feelings and when you sing them it’s a deep and moving feeling, I think.’ She went on to say that “it can happen with non-worship songs because the words have meaning, and that includes a lot of different songs – but singing about ending war – for me that’s really big.” Phoebe remembers World War 2 and for her if the lyrics have meaning, they hold the possibility of taking her to another dimension that is transcendent, something beyond herself.

## **Theme 2: Purpose**

The nature of this theme that I discerned in the data came about these three ways: sense of accomplishment, common goal, and identity. As noted earlier, Diana Butler-Bass acknowledges a sense of purpose in spirituality when she writes, “Spirituality is not just about sitting in a room encountering a mystical God in meditation or seeing God in a sunset. It is a deep awareness that we are creators who work with the Creator in an ongoing project of crafting a world.”<sup>27</sup> In this short quote, Butler Bass encompasses the sub-themes of accomplishment, identity, and common goal.

More than half of my participants in these two community choirs have a deep awareness of crafting a world that includes beauty and purpose through their choirs. A sense of accomplishment is just one way some of them experienced purpose by singing in a community choir.

For example, one person was very resistant to the idea of spirituality being influenced by singing in a choir. Louis determined there was absolutely no connection between his spirituality and singing in a community choir at all. However, upon further reflection of Louis' words and in light of Diana Butler Bass' description of spirituality, it seems that that Louis has a profound and deep spirituality and singing in community choirs for him, I think, is a way of using his gifts in crafting a world of beauty in partnership with his Creator giving him a sense of accomplishment.

Louis, has been singing in choirs since he was ten years old and he shares that when he joins a choir or goes to a new church he asks himself, "Would I enjoy being in that choir?" and "Can I make a contribution to this choir?" He goes on to say that "I enjoy singing, I enjoy choirs, I just enjoy it. It doesn't matter how many are in the choir, I just enjoy the singing. It's the molding of something you know.....it's taking something that is raw material and turning that something into something beautiful." Later in the interview, Louis said, "I don't go to choir in anticipation of getting a warm fuzzy feeling about my church. I am there to sing and sing as well as I can and to make a contribution to the good of the choir. You learn something every time you attend. And when I leave choir practice, I drive home and I am fulfilled."

Later in his interview, Louis used an excellent metaphor to describe his experience. He said “It’s about blending the voices. It’s like preparing a nice meal, the individual parts of the meal, you know by themselves are fine and they taste good but it’s a meal when they are all together.” He went on with joyful laughter, “If it tastes good, it looks good, it smells good...it must be good! The whole is better than the individual parts.” Louis was quiet for a moment before he finished his thoughts, “I could have easily stayed home and not gone out but I would have missed that so it just leaves me with a good feeling.” In the act of contributing to the choir and creating something beautiful, Louis’ spirit is filled with deep meaning and accomplishment through his strong sense of fulfillment.

In similar fashion, Ella says “The choir is purpose for me....you know a sense of accomplishment.” “The choir has become my volunteer thing” she shared as she prepares the space for their weekly choir gathering. “I’ve taken the time to come much earlier, I take care of the music, and if anything needs copying I’ll do that – I’m in charge of welcoming people so I open up the front to let them in, turn the lights on.... so that gives me a good feeling of having some sort of purpose. I feel like sometimes the things you do you don’t really know why you do them....you just do them because they bring you joy, fulfillment, or purpose.”

Some of my participants experienced a sense of purpose by sharing a common goal with others. Sheena shared how a sense of purpose is an aspect of community choirs that influences her spirituality: “Because it’s a community and you are there for a common purpose which is to enjoy the music, to enjoy the voice, and to enjoy the gift that you have been given, you recognize that gift in the people around you and it makes you

co-operative. So we sing like this – we lean into each other so that she can hear me and I can hear her and then sometimes I kind of lean over to the other side because this gal - she’s really got the notes in her head so I can say ok I can lean over here and do this you know...so I think um it brings people together for something that is good and it brings people together to a common purpose.”

Sheena’s sense of purpose is expressed in terms of the common goal of the choir which is to make a joyful noise. One could say creating a joyful noise in partnership with the Creator is participating in the divine, perhaps even being transformed and experiencing the incarnated Christ in that moment.

Other participants expressed their sense of purpose in terms of identity. Writing about conflict-healthy congregations, David Brubaker writes, “A shared sense of identity and purpose bind the congregation together; a social glue that bonds diverse individuals.”<sup>28</sup> Identity, then, is closely linked with purpose. Bruebaker further writes, “As Richard Rohr says in *Falling Upward*, ‘When you get your ‘Who am I?’ question right, all the ‘What should I do?’ questions tend to take care of themselves.”<sup>29</sup> The same might be said in terms of community choirs. Charlie described it this way, “The choir is people who want to sing together.” He continued.... “Yeah....I think in terms of...I think of British soccer and a lot of the coaches are asked what do you ask of your team and they go well ‘I just tell them to go out there and express themselves on the field’ and I think the choir is allowing all of us to go there and express ourselves collectively and individually I guess. And really, to me it means being present because you get caught up in the...you know...you lost two games and you are trying to win another one and the reality is you just need to get out there and be present to the game and express the talents

you have as a soccer player....or in our case....community choir members. I really think it's a good goal in general." Singing in community choir is a way that allows Charlie and perhaps other participants to be who he/they are (people who like to sing) individually and socially, thus giving them individual/shared purpose through singing with others in community.

For Gertrude, singing in the community choir is an avenue to let her spirituality out and her sense of purpose flows from that. For Gertrude, not only does she love to sing for the sake of singing, her spirituality seems to be something that she gives away to make the world a better place. Singing in community is her expression of that. "It's my ministry" she shared "It makes a difference to other people." She says "We are not a performance choir so any worry about performance goes away and you just sing your best to them."

A sense of purpose then, however that is manifested, is a genuine fruit of spirituality and people experience that in community choirs.

### **Theme 3: Struggle**

The theme of struggle was manifested in three ways: through neighbours, new music, and professionals. While this theme quantitatively ranked last in terms of how many times it was spoken to, in qualitative research this doesn't negate its importance. To consider the theme of struggle I perceived in the data, it is important to think about what a community choir is. Sheena captured it best when she described it this way, "The community choir is an entity in and of itself. It is very representative to the community which draws the people. You have all socio-economic groups, all education groups, you

have young and old and everyone in between – you have new moms and grand-moms and grand dads and such. You have blue collar and very professional, retired and unemployed. It's a reflection of the community itself." This description truly apprehends and clarifies the diversity that is found in a community choir. It is almost a microcosm of the church, if not the entire global community. Those of us who live in community in some way recognize that struggle is part of our spiritual growth; it is part of our humanity; it's part of who we are. The same can be said of community choirs. For example, John Bell has no illusions to this when it comes to the act of singing together. In his book, *The Singing Thing*, he makes careful note that

We bring all of ourselves to the music: our childhood, our adolescence, our cultural and political sensitivities and all the associations and memories they engender. We are equally creatures of our conditioning and to distinguish between one and the other requires sometimes honesty, sometimes integrity, and sometimes humble heroism.

Recognizing the things John Bell describes about community gathering and knowing we all have our baggage that we bring to things, I felt it was important to ask my participants if they had experienced any bumps along the road while participating in community choir. All of my participants (except one) spoke of some struggles, but none of these struggles outweighed the benefits that their community choirs bring to them. The struggles people spoke of were internal and external in nature.

Sheena shared her struggles in terms of neighbours like this, "There are always struggles in any community regardless of what it is you are doing. You have to remember that people are there because they love what they are doing just as much as you do. The talent, the musical knowledge, the ability to read music is all over the map.

There are always people who never quite get it at all and there is always somebody who gets it quicker than everybody else. And so we struggle together. We lean into each other and we listen.” Sheena continued, “I hear the music in my head but that does not mean that my voice will be able to reproduce it....I mean I have some beside me who read music eloquently but can’t sing and some who can sing beautifully but can’t read music. You can’t judge anybody because they can’t read music.”

Echoing Sheena’s thoughts on the matter, Lilly expressed it like this, “When you sit beside the person that sings off key – that’s the bump, really.” She continued, “You learn it is my problem or it is her problem and it’s my problem and I can choose to accept it, fight it, be in a bad mood about it...”

Related to the neighbour sub-theme, the act of listening was also identified as key to navigating through struggle. Learning to listen is part of the struggle and part of the influence community choir has on people’s spirituality. Ella shared “singing in the community choir improves my ability to listen: to listen to what’s around me.” Similarly, Sheena said the same thing, “Listening is probably the most important thing – we yatter back and forth and we hear but we don’t always listen. In music, you really have to listen to people around you to know where you are on the page or where you need to come. You have to listen and that is probably the most important thing you can learn. I also try to reflect that in my everyday life – sometimes I’m successful, sometimes I’m not.”

Phoebe mentioned her struggle in terms of professional singers. She is one who loves to sing but feels she would be one of the folks who might sing off-key. She said “Yeah...it’s kind of complex – you know...there are those who are beautiful singers and

then you have the rest of us – many of us who are there are there just because we like to sing, we like the music, and we like the fellowship – but really I think everyone is just happy to have good singers among us because they help us all to learn.” There was no moment during my research process when I sensed there was a spirit of competition among my participants as they described the experience of struggle.

Molly gives a lot of credit to church choirs as they nurtured her gift in singing. As a result, her biggest struggle came when she was forced to choose between church choir and community choir due to a practice conflict. After a period of reflection, she felt ‘nudged’ to choose the community choir. She couldn’t really explain her decision beyond that sense of nudging but after some time she thought, “Maybe the church choir gets a little stale because you are dealing with the same personalities all the time.” The sub-theme of neighbours, then, is also a factor in Molly’s description of struggle.

Some of my participants experience the struggle in ways that don’t necessarily relate to their neighbour. Perhaps it’s more of an inner struggle when it comes to learning new music. For example, Charlie finds it challenging to read the notes and identify the pattern in the song. Later in his interview he said “There is vulnerability singing in public, so overcoming vulnerability or experiencing it – it’s kind of allowing you to manifest that in others.”

Other participants also mentioned their resistance to new songs, which is a symptom of our human nature to resist change. Ella’s response to this part of the struggle was “at first you go ohhhhh I’m not sure about this but then two weeks later it’s your most favorite song on earth.” Phoebe also talked about her resistance to new music

“I like to sing things I know rather than things I don’t know. I love to sing hymns, things that are really familiar.”

The struggles described in this research project are universal to the human condition. I think if it wasn’t for the struggles, the opportunity for personal and collective spiritual growth might be lost.

#### **Theme 4: Compassionate Connection**

A common lived experience among all my participants had to do with compassionate human connection. At first, I identified these as two separate themes in the data, but as I analysed it more the two overlap so much that I have combined these two themes into one. I identified the theme of connection in three ways. These ways were through fellowship, relationship, and unity. Coupled with this, I have identified the theme of compassion and mercy in three ways: comfort, healing, and listening. Not only are these themes inherently theological if we think of God as the initiator of God’s relationship with humanity through the incarnation but I would also add that compassion and connection are in tandem with each other as well as the incarnation. In other words, compassion cannot exist without connection to the other. If we are going to have comfort, healing, and listening then we have to have fellowship, relationship, and unity.

The participants’ responses embodied the notion compassionate connection and their desire for it. When I asked Phoebe what she liked most about singing in the community choir she immediately responded, “It’s always the people. I like being with other people. I like the fellowship. I really like the sound of the harmonizing, it’s very beautiful. I just like the people. I like visiting with them, talking with them, hearing their

stories, getting to know them and in truth getting to be known. When you move a lot it's hard when nobody really knows who you are, what you do, so yeah, just the interaction." In addition to the harmonizing sound, getting to be known and getting to know others was an important aspect of healthy spirituality for Phoebe and community choirs provided this for her.

Likewise Lilly shared "I used to connect my spirituality with nature but it has grown to include other human beings." The relationship and fellowship that Lilly found at community choir has greatly influenced her spirituality. For Lilly, "it reinforces the fact that we are all one, we are all in it together, and connection is what the important thing is." An important aspect of spirituality for Lilly has grown to include other people and remembering we are all in this life together, that we are all one. It is one way her spirituality is influenced through community choirs.

When Lilly is at the choir she finds "connection, community, and support" that strengthens her spirit. She continued, "Music can open up places which you've maybe closed that isn't healthy and you can let the grief, stress, and tears out at community choir. I used to be exhausted on Mondays but not since I've joined the choir." Lilly continued, "It diffuses everything you have built up from the week. I feel real comfort at the choir." Elaborating a little more she went on, "The understanding that there is a support mechanism is a feeling of great comfort." When I asked her if she wanted to share anything else she thought for a minute and then continued, "Some have even become good friends there." That connection with others is very important to Lilly. Not only does she receive connection to others at community choir but it has become a place of comfort and healing for her.

Ella echoes those thoughts. She said “This is a place to share life’s difficulties and grief. The choir might be the only social interaction some people receive during the week.” She thought for a moment and went on, “It is non-stressful, non-judgemental and a wonderful, healing thing even if it’s only once a week. People receive comfort and support here.”

Sheena spoke of comfort and healing in a more physical way which in turn influences her ability to sing from the heart, “community choir and singing together releases tension from your body, your throat, from your breathing. If you make a mistake nobody is going to know. That is very freeing. It allows you to sing much more freely in a much more relaxed fashion. You can sing from the heart.”

Important aspects of compassionate connection are the elements of fun and joy that bubbled up through all of my participants’ experience of community choir. All of my participants said it was fun and Gertrude even said, “We laugh and we laugh at each other. It’s a great stress relief and we all need that.”

In like manner, Louis shared that, “It is refreshing and enriching.” Ella described it this way, “I get great joy out of holding a tune....mellow joy is the word for me....this choir brings a lot of people joy.” She repeated, “It is a real joyful thing for them. It also gives you a feeling of pride and a little bit of self-confidence.” Pausing thoughtfully for a moment she went on to say, “Some people don’t smile but they come back week after week so you know they are smiling inside and when we leave, we leave happier than when we came.” In the same way Charlie, shared “I am always amazed when we leave at how uplifted we feel. We always feel really good energy afterwards.”

In addition, listening is also noted as something that was an integral theme of compassionate connection and was spoken of in great detail in the theme of struggle. Listening is built into the aspect of healing as people are able to express their grief, stress, and tears, and joy. As Sheena described it earlier, “We are diverse people who all come together to help each other out and to listen.” There was another aspect of listening that Ella alluded to in one of her comments that I think is important to take note of in our cultural climate that finds it difficult for people to have different views, often lacking the ability to agree to disagree. Ella spoke of Edward Cornwallis, a controversial historical figure in Halifax, NS who is known for his brutal colonial atrocities toward the Mi’kmaq people. In a jovial manner that got her point across she said “I could be standing by someone who loves Cornwallis and we are singing together.” There is depth in these few words. While this theme was not mentioned by any other participants, nevertheless it is important. Ella may have no use for Cornwallis, but the very fact she said this bears witness to community amidst disagreement and difference.

Louis’ words capture the essence of compassionate connection. Louis didn’t believe that his spirituality was even remotely connected to singing in the community choir and when I asked him how he would describe spirituality he said, “I hate to answer your question with a question but I am going to.” He continued, “How would you describe compassion? How do you acquire trust? How do you acquire compassion? How would you describe love? I think spirituality, however it is defined, I think everyone in their own way knows what it means to them as an individual.” Despite the different interpretations of the word “spirituality,” my participants have lived experiences of finding and giving compassionate connection in the community choir with one another.

As such, they are participating in the beauty of God's self-giving love toward us because of the gift that we know as the incarnation, God-In-The-Flesh dwelling within and among us in the "sacred arena of people's lives."<sup>30</sup>

### **Theme 5: Hospitality**

I discerned the theme of hospitality in my research in three ways: welcome, acceptance, and strangers. Rule 53 of St. Benedict says, "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: I was a stranger and you welcomed me (Matt 25:35). Great care and concern are to be shown in receiving poor people and pilgrims, because in them more particularly Christ is received."<sup>31</sup> Hospitality, then, is a core biblical value and strong aspect of spirituality. Furthermore, recognizing Christ in the other in this way is bearing witness to his incarnation.

Ken Collins words shares that "spirituality is an invitation, a call, to forsake selfish group commitments and ethnocentrism that deflects actualization of the very highest values of life, such as the universal love of God and neighbor."<sup>32</sup> In an era where it is tempting to stay within our own tribes of those we know and love; only providing hospitality toward a particular group of people; community choirs bring people of all walks of life together providing opportunities to live out and experience what the universal love of God and neighbour actually means. Where community choirs are concerned, your neighbour might be someone you don't know but is the one beside you. As such, the act of hospitality toward the other becomes a way that peoples' spirituality is influenced in community choirs. The sub-themes of welcome, acceptance, and strangers were what the participants spoke of as important to them and gave them a sense of belonging.

Over and over again, all of my participants spoke of how welcoming the community choir is that they participate in. For example, when I asked Gertrude what she liked most about her choir she immediately shared, “We are just a bunch of very accepting people that love to sing. It’s a casual choir, there is no expectation to be perfect and it’s for anybody and everybody. You don’t have to have an audition, you don’t have to know how to sing, and you don’t have to have experience in any other choir. They are a real accepting bunch of people.”

Lilly pressed in further by describing her lived experience of acceptance in the community choir. Lilly said, “The acceptance of all people, regardless of who they are or where they are from, the understanding that there is a support mechanism and the fact you are both giving and accepting support,” is the aspect of community choir that most impacted her spirituality. She went on, “There’s old, young, you know some people can’t even sing, some people you don’t want to sit beside but you have to anyway and you deal with that so it’s all acceptance and community and support.” Lilly went on later in the interview to say, “Yeah, there is no expectation, you just show up and if you don’t that’s ok, come the next week, or a month later or whatever.”

Not only do Gertrude and Lilly find places of belonging at their choirs, but Lilly’s spirit has grown to include other people through the hospitable aspect of spirituality that is organically present there. Perhaps this kind of spiritual growth also includes other participants as well as they describe their lived experiences of receiving and or giving hospitality. I am reminded of the Rule of St. Benedict as quoted earlier on the value of hospitality toward the other.

Phoebe described her experience of hospitality this way, “We are a non-auditioning choir. If you like to sing and you like music then come and see. There is no embarrassment if you don’t get it, we just keep practicing and learning and that is good.” Likewise, Charlie said, “If you have a voice and you want to sing, you are in.” Ella echoed these thoughts most expressively. “You come. You sit down. You sing. It is non-judgemental, very accepting, and very welcoming. You mutter, mumble, and fake it, whatever you want to do. If people say it’s too hard, I say fake it until you make it. There are no auditions and there are all talents and all levels. We are very casual and there is no expectation of singing ability. We just practice” and she repeated again, “There are no expectations here. We are all held accountable but no one ever feels like they are not up to par.”

One of the things that I interpret as how people might receive or give hospitality is found in the experience of “no expectations.” This is something that was spoken of repeatedly by most participants. Both of these choirs have sung in concerts. Both of these choirs’ participants would be careful to say they are non-performance choirs, meaning they consider all singing time together (including concerts) as “practice” time and they would say they are not professional. I would argue that the notion of having “no expectations” is an aspect of hospitality that makes the people in these choirs welcome and comfortable. While participants in both choirs say they are held accountable and are encouraged to learn, the idea of going into the choir with no expectations might remove any pressure one might experience if choir singing is linked to performance in any way. Lilly senses this kind of community identity that removes itself from the notion of performance, saying that being clear that “there is no expectation” actually engages any

audience they find themselves singing with. Lilly says, “I think that because we are not professional...um...I really find the audience is engaged because of that. It’s not perfection so all feel welcome and part of the experience.” Hospitality, then, is a theme that has emerged in the data as a way in which singing in a community choir influences one’s spirituality.

## **Implications for Pastoral Theology**

This project exposes some light on the implications for the institutional church, the practice of ministry, and how we do theology. The data received for this project speaks to the practice of ministry as well as ideas about theology in several ways. I began this project with a certain theological framework as a way of doing practical theology. Then, through my interviews and interpretive methods, the lived experiences of people’s lives and theology entered the picture and showed us that there are not only implications for the institutional church and the leaders within it, but that there are also theological implications that have to do with the role of ministers as public theologians, as those who go outside the church and help make spiritual connections among the public, in this case community choirs.

While there are limits to any research, this study causes me pause to consider the insights gained from this study in terms of what they mean for the institutional church and our leaders. For example, how do church choirs experience the holy? Do church choirs feel the same way as my participants in community choirs do? What is the role of the choir in the church today with the growing popularity of community choirs?

One of my participants, Molly, said “We don’t often hear other church choirs sing because we are all in our own little churches on Sunday morning. We are trying to bring church choirs together in our community but the denominational differences are still very strong.”

Maybe the role of the church choir remains unchanged but in light of Molly’s comment we must wonder if there are new ways for church choirs to reach out to their communities. For example, maybe local church choirs in the community can find ways to come together despite theological differences. Perhaps they could offer something that invites the greater community to participate with them in a weekly singing event besides Sunday morning. Whatever these new roles might look like, they need to be grassroots and particular to the community from which draws the people.

Other implications that have arisen have to do with the practice of ministry. What does this theme of struggle tell us about how to live in Christian community with the other? How does the theme of hospitality lend itself to building a theoretical theology of Christian community? What is the role of ministers as public theologians as we go outside the church and make spiritual connections among the public?

With respect to the latter question, Jerome Berryman writes, “Christians need a deep and solid, yet open and creative appropriation of their own language and way of life to be able to talk with people of other religions from depth to depth.”<sup>33</sup> He continues, “This is of growing importance because the people from other religions used to live across the ocean now they live across the street.”<sup>34</sup> Followers of Jesus are called to be witnesses to the gospel (Acts 1:8) but what happens when an entire generation of people

have no experience of church or Christian education? Ministers today not only play a critical role in making spiritual connections among the public but also making these spiritual connections among their congregations so members of their congregations have the ability to make these spiritual connections outside the church walls.

Speaking back to my theological grounding, some of the theological implications that I highlight have to do with the nature of iconography. Can music actually be iconic? Can the beauty of the music sung in community choir lead one into an encounter with God, thereby being turned on a path toward God? How can music do the things John of Damascus says it can do? If this is possible then what does this tell us about the nature of iconography today? Maybe the nature of iconography has to do with all of our senses and not just our sight. Perhaps the nature of iconography, because of the incarnation, through sound, touch, smell, and taste also have the ability to take us past what we physically experience to the God behind these things and as a result bringing us into a point of contact with the God of the Incarnation, who is the God of beauty thus setting us on a path toward God, experiencing transformation.

While not specifically addressed in this study, I also find myself wondering about what this research tells us about the nature of sacrament. There are many people who attend community choirs today that have no traditional church experience. Prior to the 1960s, the familiar songs of most people might have been hymns as is suggested by some of my older participants. However, I wonder about the generation who was not introduced to Jesus through church and therefore lack the “hymns” the generations before them hold dear as meaningful memories. Rather, the generation I know might relate to childhood songs such as “Bridge over Troubled Water” by Simon and Garfunkel. Couple that with

an innate desire for ritual and sacrament within the human genome and I wonder if coming together and singing pop songs that are meaningful to the participants are a type of ritual/sacrament that might actually point back to my theological grounding in new ways.

As I think of the notion of sacrament, I am reminded of an Anglo-Welsh poet David Jones words, “with man there is sacrament at every turn and all levels of the profane and the sacred, in the trivial and the profound, no escape from sacrament.”<sup>35</sup> If there is no escape from sacrament, then how might the desire for ritual or sacrament be played out in those who attend community choirs today? How is music sacramental and how does it mediate God to us through the beauty of the sound coupled with community?

With respect to the former questions it’s important to consider the historical background of the word *sacrament*, but that is beyond the scope of this research project. However, I will consider St. Augustine of Hippo’s description of sacrament which is “is an outward and visible sign of invisible grace.”<sup>36</sup> Traditionally, churches, according to their denominations, participate in formal sacraments such as Baptism and the Lord’s Supper as an outward sign that points to an inward grace received from God. Maybe the ritual of participating in community choir, especially if there is a meaningful song sung weekly, has the ability to make the participant to think about its deep meaning thus readying the heart for a relationship with the God of the Incarnation awakening the peace and joy of God within them. The aspects of spirituality that have emerged as lived experience of the participants in this project seem to point in that direction and I think is worthy of further theological research.

This project seems to have left more questions than answers and might even seem to push the boundaries of traditional theology in some ways, but all of it has to do with generating new theological ideas that open up paths for people to find themselves on a journey toward God who has opened wide the doors for all people to be in healthy relationship and partnership with the Creator and one another.

In closing, Vincent Donovan writes two things need to come together to lead us to that new place: “the gospel and the sacred arena of people’s lives.” My experience researching this project tells me that community choirs are sacred arenas of people’s lives. While listening to one of my participating choirs sing Oscar Hammerstein’s “A Few of My Favorite Things” from *The Sound of Music*, I felt like Jesus gently grabbed hold of my spirit and quietly said, “I’m about to show you a few of my favorite things.” I felt like the gospel was already there dancing and swirling about. Through this study, I heard stories of healing, comfort, and joy. I heard stories of how the sheer power of our collective voices impacts our hearts, our minds, and our souls. And I heard stories of purpose and of people coming out of their comfort zones to sing together, stories of relationship, acceptance, struggle, and hospitality all rolled into one. There is a new thing on the horizon. If we have the ears to hear and the eyes to see, maybe we will perceive it.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 42:5-6 (NRSV).

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 139:14 (NRSV).

<sup>3</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction*. Oxford UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Collins, ed. "Introduction," *Exploring Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 10.

<sup>5</sup> John MacQuarrie, "Part Two: Spirit and Spirituality," in *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins, 63-73 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 63.

<sup>6</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Grounded: Finding God in the World, A Spiritual Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 275.

<sup>7</sup> "International Association for Children's Spirituality," Consultancy from the International Association for Children's Spirituality: Ruth Wills, published 2018, <http://www.childrenspirituality.org/support/consultancy/ruthwills.asp>.

<sup>8</sup> Ruth Wills, "The Magic of Music: A Study into the Promotion of Children's Well-Being through Singing," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 16, no. 1 (February 2011): 39.

<sup>9</sup> Mercedes Pavlicevic, *Groups in Music: Strategies from Music Therapy* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd., 2003), 14.

<sup>10</sup> John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, Iain Torrance, eds. "Chapter 9: Incarnation," In *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 160.

<sup>11</sup> "Biblehub," Online Bible Study Suite, accessed March 14, 2018, <http://biblehub.com/lexicon/hebrews/2-14>.

<sup>12</sup> Col 1:15 (NRSV).

<sup>13</sup> John Webster, et al., "Chapter 9: Incarnation," 170.

<sup>14</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 271.

<sup>15</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory: And Other Addresses* (HarperCollins E-Books, Digital Ed., 2009), 43.

<sup>16</sup> "Catholic Online," Pope Benedict XVI Affirms Beauty, Revealed in Art and Music, published September 3, 2011, <http://www.catholic.org/news/international/europe/story.php?id=42635>.

<sup>17</sup> Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 24.

<sup>18</sup> John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2018), 75.

<sup>19</sup> Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 77.

<sup>20</sup> Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 77.

<sup>21</sup> Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 98.

<sup>22</sup> Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 125.

<sup>23</sup> Kathleen Harmon, "Toward a Spirituality of Liturgical Singing", *Liturgical Ministry* 9 (Fall 2000): 237.

<sup>24</sup> Matthew Fox, ed., *Hildegard of Bingen's Book of Divine Works with Letters and Songs* (Santa Fe: Bear and Company Inc, 1987), 10.

<sup>25</sup> Dr. David Deane, AST Class Lecture, October 26, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Wills, "The Magic of Music," 41.

<sup>27</sup> Butler Bass, *Grounded*, 275.

<sup>28</sup> David Brubaker, "The Importance of Shared Identity and Purpose," *Congregational Consulting Group*, January 25, 2015, <http://www.congregationalconsulting.org/the-importance-of-shared-identity-and-purpose/>.

<sup>29</sup> David Brubaker, "The Importance of Shared Identity and Purpose," *Congregational Consulting Group*, January 25, 2015, <http://www.congregationalconsulting.org/the-importance-of-shared-identity-and-purpose/>.

- <sup>30</sup> Vincent Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), xiii.
- <sup>31</sup> "Chapter 3: The Reception of Guests," Monastery of Christ in the Desert, accessed March 30, 2018, <https://christdesert.org/prayer/rule-of-st-benedict/chapter-53-the-reception-of-guests/>.
- <sup>32</sup> Collins, *Christian Spirituality*, 14.
- <sup>33</sup> Jerome Berryman, *The Spiritual Guidance of Children: Montessori, Godly Play, and the Future*, (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2013), 9.
- <sup>34</sup> Berryman, *The Spiritual Guidance of Children*, 9.
- <sup>35</sup> Andrew Louth, *St. John Damascene, Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford Early Christian Studies), (USA: Oxford University Press, 2005), 136.
- <sup>36</sup> "What is a Sacrament?," Diocese of Westminster, accessed March 30, 2018, <https://rcdow.org.uk/att/files/faith/catechesis/baptism/sacraments.pdf>.

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## Appendix A: Literature Review

In reviewing the literature for discovering how one's spirituality is influenced through the experience of singing in a community choir, I have identified several trends. First, there is lots of literature on what spirituality is and is not, there is lots of literature on why we sing, and lots of literature on community choirs. Second, while the literature does not deal specifically with the influence on one's spirituality by singing in a community choir, there are several aspects of spirituality identified that are found in the literature around singing and community choirs themselves. This paper will explore the literature that is available, looking for aspects of spirituality found in the act of singing and community choirs.

Collins says that spirituality is a buzzword in contemporary society.<sup>1</sup> In other words, it is cool to be spiritual. However, the term is “largely amorphous, lacking definitional precision and it often refers vaguely to some interior state or heightened awareness.”<sup>2</sup> While this paper acknowledges the impossibility of mastering a definition of spirituality<sup>3</sup>, it does explore several different aspects<sup>3</sup> of it. For example, MacQuarrie explores spirituality in terms of what it means to be a human being: he believes that spirituality has to do with becoming a person in the fullest sense.<sup>4</sup> Lapierre writes that R.S. Goldberg, a psychiatrist, defines spirituality as “a search for universal truth”<sup>5</sup> while Butler-Bass says “Spirituality is not just about sitting in a room encountering a mystical God in meditation or seeing God in a sunset. It is a deep awareness that we are creators who work with the Creator, in an ongoing project of crafting a world.”<sup>6</sup> Wills writes that spirituality enjoys close links with resilience and wellbeing<sup>7</sup> while MacQuarrie believes

“that the more people go beyond themselves, the more their spiritual dimension of life is deepened and the more they become fully human.”<sup>8</sup>

From a Christian perspective, Peterson uses the Gospel of St. Mark 8:27-9:9 to write about spirituality. In true spiritual theology, writes Peterson, there is always a strong ascetic element<sup>9</sup> and a strong aesthetical element.<sup>10</sup> Following Jesus, he asserts, means not following your impulses and whims, which are damaged by sin, nor does it mean following the death-procrastinating, death-denying practices of our culture.<sup>11</sup> Ascetic practice, Peterson continues, “Sweeps out the clutter of the god-pretentious self, making space for God and embracing a kind of death in our culture knows nothing about, making room for the dance of the resurrection.”<sup>12</sup> Beside the ascetic element of spirituality sits the aesthetical element of spirituality which “has to do with training in perception, acquiring a taste for what is being revealed in Jesus.”<sup>13</sup> Peterson writes, when God’s Spirit makes its appearance, we recognize that appearance as beautiful.<sup>14</sup> Harper writes that Christian spirituality is grounded firmly in the Bible.<sup>15</sup> He notes that “Holy Scripture provides the objective revelation which prevents spirituality from deteriorating into private and subjective discipline.”<sup>16</sup> Harper asserts this is particularly important today when a wide variety of experiences are defined as spiritual.<sup>17</sup> This is the same notion Collins wrote of earlier in this paper.

The way spirituality is described is a concern for many scholars. Historically, the term ‘spiritual’ was first coined by St. Paul to “describe that which pertained to the Holy Spirit.”<sup>18</sup> As such, Collins is clear to write “though the Christian origins of the term are clear, this fact must not blind us to the reality of other spiritualities.”<sup>19</sup> For instance, Collins writes that an atheist who intentionally rejects the grace of God may lose herself

in some lofty goal or purpose, experience transcendence, as well as a measure of integration, thereby developing a genuine spirituality, broadly understood.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, a theistic spirituality will experience the transcendent as a personal God as expressed in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.<sup>21</sup> In any event, most writers in the literature agree that true spirituality includes a social dimension. Collins sums it up best when he writes “spirituality is an invitation, a call, to forsake selfish group commitments and the ethnocentrism that deflects actualization of the very highest values of life, such as the universal love of God and neighbor.”<sup>22</sup>

Bell writes that “one in four people in many Western countries don’t sing because they believe they can’t – a belief grounded in comments made to them when they were young.”<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, Willis suggests music as a way to enable individuals to fulfil their innate spiritual potential<sup>24</sup> and experience transcendence, noting that ‘spirituality emerges from common human experiences.’<sup>25</sup> In the same way, Bell writes that music provides us with a regular pulse or beat, ensuring we keep in time with each other.<sup>26</sup> Pavlicevic, by the same token, uses the word ‘musicking’ which explains that “rather than think of music as an object or product that exists separately from us as human beings, ‘musicking’ denotes that we are engaged in music, with music, and through music – whether we listen, play, hum, dance, or imagine it in our minds.”<sup>27</sup> In similar fashion, Bell writes that “singing is a natural activity, and peculiarly suited to humans. For while birds improvise melismatic lines, donkeys bray and hyenas laugh, only humans have the ability to ally words to melody and produce songs for a community to sing. We sing because we can.”<sup>28</sup> We sing to express group identity<sup>29</sup> and we sing to express our emotion.<sup>30</sup> Bell is not naïve when it comes to the act of singing together. He makes careful note that we

bring all of ourselves to the music: our childhood, our adolescence, our cultural and political sensitivities and all the associations and memories they engender.<sup>31</sup> As such, he says, “we are equally creatures of our conditioning and to distinguish between one and the other requires sometimes honesty, sometimes integrity, and sometimes humble heroism.”<sup>32</sup>

While Harmon writes about the spirituality of liturgical singing, some of her works applies across the broad spectrum of what singing does to the human heart. Harmon writes that all sound communicates presence.<sup>33</sup> The result of singing, according to Harmon, is it “generates within us a feeling of at-placeness, of body awareness that is self-awareness, and a simultaneous feeling of being beyond our body.”<sup>34</sup> Moreover, Harmon notes that “singing makes us present to one another.”<sup>35</sup> For that reason, Harmon writes when the sound heard is voice, the interiority is personal: For the spoken word “proceeds from the human interior and manifests human beings to one another as conscious interiors.”<sup>36</sup>

Shifting to the literature found on community choirs, Pavlicevic, a music therapist, learned about the compelling power of groups in music and the power of music to create electrifying collective experiences of social bonding.<sup>37</sup> She writes that in Africa, she has experienced ‘exhilarating public combustions when we have all, by magic, becomes as one, moving and being moved together by ‘music’ that seemed to enter our bones and collect us, in spite of ourselves, as one society celebrating itself.’<sup>38</sup> McCoy writes that most people sing in community choirs for the pure joy of singing.<sup>39</sup> In addition to this, McCoy also writes that she found two themes that to the creation of

community: a) singers desire a social experience and working toward a common goal b) self-identification of individual singers and their contribution to the whole is important.<sup>40</sup>

Yet, in this same article, McCoy writes that Ra-Sink Hoff found that although singers want to work toward a common goal, they don't necessarily want to contribute to the surrounding community.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the "typical singer of a community choir is very driven by their own individual performance abilities and seek to continue their musical performance education when joining a choral ensemble."<sup>42</sup> In another study by Wilson looking at the motivational factors of joining a community choir, she writes that a love of singing, a sense of community, singing for the beauty of music, and personal enjoyment were the top four factors<sup>43</sup> motivating people to join community choirs. With respect to community choirs, Will also writes that "the event of singing in a choir involves being 'in the moment' – away from the pressures of real life and within a dimension that appears to transcend time and space."<sup>44</sup>

A review of the literature has revealed some very interesting insights and a significant gap in the literature. First, it has revealed that all three parts of this research question: spirituality, singing and choir are interconnected with the very question I'm researching, which is how the act of singing in a community choir influences one's spirituality. While there are aspects of spirituality found in the literature around choirs and singing, there is no specific literature on the topic itself. While acknowledging that there is more literature out there than I was able to include in this literature review, I hope that this research project will address the gap in the literature around the influence on one's spirituality is impacted by the community choirs. I also hope that through these

interviews that more qualitative data will be revealed that might help the church in some way reach out in a deeper way to their community.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Collins, ed. "Introduction," In *Exploring Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Collins, "Introduction," *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. David Deane, AST Class Lecture, October 26, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> John MacQuarrie, "Part Two: Spirit and Spirituality," In *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins, 63-73 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 63.

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence I. LaPierre, "Part Two: A Model for Describing Spirituality," In *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins, 74-82 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 77.

<sup>6</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Grounded: Finding God in the World, A Spiritual Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 275.

<sup>7</sup> Ruth Wills, "The Magic of Music: A Study into the Promotion of Children's Well-Being through Singing," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 16, no. 1 (February 2011): 39.

<https://doi:10.1080/1364436X.2010.540750>

<sup>8</sup> J. MacQuarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, (London: SCM Press, 1977), 40.

<sup>9</sup> Eugene Peterson, "Part 6, Spirituality and Scripture: SAINT MARK: The Basic Text for Christian Spirituality," in *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, ed Kenneth J. Collins, 327-338 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 335

<sup>10</sup> Peterson, "Part 6, Spirituality and Scripture: SAINT MARK: The Basic Text for Christian Spirituality," 336

<sup>11</sup> Peterson, "Part 6, Spirituality and Scripture: SAINT MARK: The Basic Text for Christian Spirituality," 335.

<sup>12</sup> Peterson, "Part 6, Spirituality and Scripture: SAINT MARK: The Basic Text for Christian Spirituality," In *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, 335.

<sup>13</sup> Peterson, "Part 6, Spirituality and Scripture: SAINT MARK: The Basic Text for Christian Spirituality," In *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, 336.

<sup>14</sup> Peterson, "Part 6, Spirituality and Scripture: SAINT MARK: The Basic Text for Christian Spirituality," In *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, 336.

<sup>15</sup> J. Steven Harper, "Part 6, Spirituality and Scripture: Old Testament Spirituality," in *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, ed Kenneth J. Collins 311-326, (Grand Rapids: Baker Boks, 2000), 311.

<sup>16</sup> Harper, "Part 6, Spirituality and Scripture: Old Testament Spirituality," in *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, ed Kenneth J. Collins 311-326, (Grand Rapids: Baker Boks, 2000), 311.

<sup>17</sup> Harper, "Part 6, Spirituality and Scripture: Old Testament Spirituality," in *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, ed Kenneth J. Collins 311-326, (Grand Rapids: Baker Boks, 2000), 311.

<sup>18</sup> Collins, "Introduction," in *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, 10.

<sup>19</sup> Collins, "Introduction," in *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Collins, "Introduction," in *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Collins, "Introduction," in *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Collins, "Introduction," in *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, 14.

<sup>23</sup> John L. Bell, *The Singing Thing Too* (Chicago: GIA Publications Inc., 2007), 13.

<sup>24</sup> Wills, "The Magic of Music: A Study into the Promotion of Children's Well-Being through Singing," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 16, no. 1 (February 2011): 37-46.

<sup>25</sup> Wills, "The Magic of Music: A Study into the Promotion of Children's Well-Being through Singing," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 16, no. 1 (February 2011): 37-46.

Wills, "The Magic of Music: A Study into the Promotion of Children's Well-Being through Singing," 37-46.

<sup>26</sup> John L. Bell, *The Singing Thing*, (Chicago: GIA Publications Inc., 2000), 17.

- <sup>27</sup> Mercedes Pavlicevic, *Groups in Music: Strategies from Music Therapy* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd., 2003), 17.
- <sup>28</sup> Bell, *The Singing Thing*, 16.
- <sup>29</sup> Bell, *The Singing Thing*, 20.
- <sup>30</sup> Bell, *The Singing Thing*, 21.
- <sup>31</sup> Bell, *The Singing Thing*, 157.
- <sup>32</sup> Bell, *The Singing Thing*, 157.
- <sup>33</sup> Kathleen Harmon, "Toward a Spirituality of Liturgical Singing," *Liturgical Ministry* 9 (Fall 2000), 236-238.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.
- <sup>37</sup> Pavlicevic, *Groups in Music: Strategies from Music Therapy*, 14.
- <sup>38</sup> Pavlicevic, *Groups in Music: Strategies from Music Therapy*, 14.
- <sup>39</sup> Rickard K. McCoy, "The Diverse Communities of a Community Choir: Fostering a Sustainable System", *Choral Journal* 53, Vol 11 (June – July 2013), 20-31.
- <sup>40</sup> McCoy, "The Diverse Communities of a Community Choir: Fostering a Sustainable System," 23.
- <sup>41</sup> McCoy, "The Diverse Communities of a Community Choir: Fostering a Sustainable System," 23.
- <sup>42</sup> McCoy, "The Diverse Communities of a Community Choir: Fostering a Sustainable System," 24.
- <sup>43</sup> Wilson, Elizabeth, "Community Choir: What Motivates People to Join, Stay, and Sing, accessed Oct 31, 2017,  
[http://dspace.library.uvic.ca/bitstream/handle/1828/3499/Wilson\\_Sarah\\_MEd\\_2011.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y](http://dspace.library.uvic.ca/bitstream/handle/1828/3499/Wilson_Sarah_MEd_2011.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y).
- <sup>44</sup> Wills, "The Magic of Music: A Study into the Promotion of Children's Well-Being through Singing," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 16, no. 1 (February 2011): 41.

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## Appendix B: Theological Essay

This theological essay will examine the question “How does the experience of singing in a community choir influence one’s spirituality?” through the lens of the doctrine of the incarnation. Scripture tells us that “the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”<sup>1</sup> Scripture also tells us to “speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord,”<sup>2</sup> and “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.”<sup>3</sup> This ancient practice of singing, then, is not only a way of expressing lament and celebration, but also a way of building up the assembly through worship, providing space for an encounter with God, and increasing the resilience of the human spirit through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. But how might this be? In the Christian context, singing “enables people to come together, and prayer, often spoken by the one who acts as a presider, sums up the sense of the song, interpreting that coming together as being before God.”<sup>4</sup> Reflecting on the nature of the incarnation, choral song, and spirituality, this paper will take us on a biblical, historical, and theological journey through voices of the past and present, although not necessarily in that order. Finally, this paper will reflect on the implications for the church and its future where this topic is concerned.

The Doctrine of the Incarnation is the central and defining event of Christian theology.<sup>5</sup> This doctrine of the church traditionally teaches that the second person of the Trinity assumes human nature, becomes a human, in order to bring about the salvation of fallen human beings.<sup>6</sup> In the modern era, this doctrine has been subject to historical

biblical criticism, the skeptics of the Enlightenment thinkers, and most recently, the denial of metanarratives associated with post-modernism.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, sought to comprehend what scripture teaches concerning the person of Christ.<sup>8</sup> The result was the proposition that “Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human”, of one substance (homoousios) with the Father.<sup>9</sup> Thomas Aquinas affirms this notion,

We must say that in Christ there is a perfect divine nature and a perfect human nature, constituted by a rational soul and human flesh; and that these two natures are united in Christ not by indwelling only....but in one hypostasis (entity) and one supposit (fundamental substance).  
(Aquinas 1975:189)<sup>10</sup>

While the notion of this hypostatic union was a source of embarrassment for some theologians in the latter half of the twentieth century,<sup>11</sup> the issue of Christological perichoresis was advocated among others by John of Damascus<sup>12</sup> who lived the whole of his life in the Middle East in the period of the Umayyad caliphate (651-750 AD), first in Damascus, where he was born, and latterly in Palestine, where he became a monk.<sup>13</sup> The term perichoresis is a term used in the theology of the Trinity to indicate the intimate union, mutual indwelling, or mutual interpenetration of the three members of the Trinity with each other. It is also used for the relation for the two natures of Christ.<sup>14</sup> The term has been used as a way to describe the inner life of the Trinity<sup>15</sup> in addition to “being-in-one-another, permeation without confusion.”<sup>16</sup> As such, the idea of Christological perichoresis is about “the divine nature of Christ somehow penetrating his human nature, but not conversely, and without compromising the integrity of either of the natures in Christ’s theanthropic person.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, the divine nature of Christ does not usurp his earthly, creaturely nature. Rather, there is an intrinsic relationship happening

that does not confuse nor separate the divine nature from the earthly nature. Essentially then, John of Damascus largely appeals to the fact that,

the Son of God assumed a material form in the incarnation arguing that if the veneration of images was forbidden in the Old Testament (which he claims it was not) because God had no visible form, the situation changed as a result of the Incarnation, in which the invisible and incomprehensible God has taken on himself a material form.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, it is through the doctrine of the incarnation that John of Damascus dwells on the value of beauty and matter in his strong argument against the iconoclastic heresy of the eighth century.<sup>19</sup>

Considering this notion, Johnson reminds us that God is not a static being but a plenitude of self-giving love ~ a saving mystery that that overflows into the world of death and sin to heal, redeem, and liberate.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, it can be said that John of Damascus is working toward the idea that God's self-giving is constant because of the incarnation. As a result of God's self-giving constantly, things in the world are participating in God's self-giving<sup>21</sup> and God is uniting God's self to the material things of creation to renew its sacred power and overcome the unrelatedness that is due the fall.<sup>22</sup> Damascus' focus is primarily art. It is the art that is the icon that wants the gaze to pass through to see God through the iconic representation.<sup>23</sup> In this way the gazer is incarnated by participating in the beauty of the life of God through the artwork and therefore transformed in that moment.

The same thing can be said in terms of music. Can music, in particular choral music sung in community, be iconic? If so, how can it or how does it facilitate a union between God and the hearers rather than an adoration of the performer?<sup>24</sup> Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179 AD) was the founder and first abbess of the Benedictine community

at Bingen. She was a poetess, musician, artist, healer, scientist, theologian, prophet, and mystic.<sup>25</sup> Fox writes that Hildegard's music makes her poetry, her theology, her faith, her God all incarnate. And those of us who participate in it, whether as singers or listeners, are also rendered into living images of the living God. Moreover, Fox writes that we, too, are made incarnate once again, provided we have the ears to hear and the heart to listen openly.<sup>26</sup> It is further noted that Hildegard absolutely insists on harmony and humility in her singing because they must subordinate their desire for power for self-assertion and to the good of the whole. That is itself is a Christo form act which can deal with the basis of the Holy Spirit which enables them to participate in Christ which makes beauty and therefore the sound is beautiful.<sup>27</sup>

One might say that God is musical. Singing, in particular, is an activity that Judaism frequently places within a group setting.<sup>28</sup> Biblical history tells us how our ancestors of faith used the act of singing together as sacred practice. The Hebrew Scriptures remind us of one of the "oldest literary units in the bible, likely 12<sup>th</sup> century BCE: Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord; they said I will sing to the Lord..."<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, "King David is credited with establishing the first Israelite orchestra and choir, with the purpose of enhancing the spiritual mood of sacred services. Most of the musicians and singers David employed came from the tribe of Levi," as described in 1 Chronicles 15.<sup>30</sup> As such, music, especially singing as a group activity, can be a major spiritual stimulant.<sup>31</sup> Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi writes a powerful metaphor and one might wonder how much more this might hold true in the act of choral singing: "If words are the pen of the heart, then song is the pen of the soul."<sup>32</sup> He expounds his metaphor in this way:

The soul's pen writes in the opposite direction from the heart's. While words carry meaning downwards from G-d's own primal consciousness into the minds of sages and the lips of prophets to inscribe them upon human hearts, song carries the soul upwards to be absorbed within the Infinite Light. That is why the ancient prophets would sing and play musical instruments as they awaited the gift of prophecy.... In this way they would strip themselves of the barriers of body and mind, opening themselves as channels of the Infinite Light. Not for the sake of transcendence alone, but to draw that transcendence down to earth, to awaken the hearts of humankind to the inner truths of life on earth.<sup>33</sup>

These words cause one to wonder if the contemporary community choirs we see rising up today incarnate the risen Christ. Do they have the ability to bring us into a spiritual awakening? More recently, in their approach to interfaith singing, Rosauer and Hill write "we've all experienced a sense of wonder and magic when a great choir performs sacred music."<sup>34</sup> They further go on to write,

the effect is even greater when we participate in singing together. Joined in song, our emotions are not merely stirred; they merge and dissolve with the emotions of others, deepening our human connection. When we gather to sing sacred songs, the song and the act of singing together strengthen our spiritual community by bolstering our sense of fellowship. The act of singing strengthens the community and the group's comradery enhances the beauty and power of the songs.<sup>35</sup>

Music then can be literally beautiful in that it can be literally God filled not as a metaphor but by a logical re-presentation and participation in that beauty.<sup>36</sup> Katy Taylor sums it up best when she says, "Group singing is much more about interaction, energy and blending between us, and hopefully that leads to a movement toward the divine."<sup>37</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI, on the other hand, would argue that contemporary music shouldn't be used because it's aimed at individual self-gratification over God. For example, he writes, "rock music is the expression of elemental passions, and at rock festivals it assumes a cultic character, a form of worship, in fact, in opposition to Christian worship."<sup>38</sup> While Pope Benedict XVI affirms beauty as a pathway to God and

beauty is an inherent part of his theological vision<sup>39</sup>, this is an important thought when it comes to considering how the experience of singing in a community choir is influencing our spirituality. How does the music we sing and the words we breathe shape us? How does it incarnate Christ who dwells within us richly over and over again in this post-modern world? How does the beauty we see expressed in many community choirs today lead us on a path toward God? Elaborating on his vision of beauty, Benedict draws on Plato to give us more of a phenomenological account describing the experience of beauty, rather than seeking to define its precise nature. He teaches us that the dominant effect of beauty is to give us a healthy “shock” that draws us out of ourselves, and the rut in which we sometimes find ourselves entrenched throughout our daily routine. Beauty gives us wings, lifting us up so that we may soar to the transcendent and rise to greatness.<sup>40</sup> These thoughts of Pope Benedict XVI gives rise to the thought that there might be more than the need for fellowship and community that is the draw for those who participate in community choirs. Maybe there is a desire to participate in something that is spiritually sacramental. As the Anglo-Welsh poet David Jones is quoted as saying, “with man there is sacrament at every turn and all levels of the profane and the sacred, in the trivial and in the profound, no escape from sacrament.”<sup>41</sup>

There are several implications of this project but the first statement that must be made is it is impossible to come up with a mastered definition of the word spirituality. For the purposes of this project it is interesting to note that Rosauer and Hill write, “The word spirit is derived from the Latin *spirare*, ‘to breathe’, the act of singing moves our breath, the essence of our spirit, from our deepest core out into the atmosphere.”<sup>42</sup> Keeping that in mind, the first implication is the church is being led to a new place and

we need to be open to following that lead. I agree wholeheartedly with Vincent Donovan when he says two things need to come together to lead us to that new place: the gospel and the sacred arena of people's lives.<sup>43</sup> If the act of participating in a community choir is not a sacred arena of one's life, I don't know what is. If, as is noted at the beginning of this paper that the doctrine of the incarnation is the central doctrine of Christianity, then the substance of this must be "brought to bear on the real flesh and blood world in which we live."<sup>44</sup> How do we see this lived out in the context of community choirs?

The implication of this is clear. As the church as we know it crumbles from the top down, we are being led further and further away from the buildings and sanctuaries as we know them. We are being led by Christ himself into, "the midst of human life as it is lived in the neighborhood, the city, politics, law, sports, commerce, entertainment, and music. It is a new thing that includes all of life and the entire world."<sup>45</sup> The second implication is a call for the people of the church to engage the daunting word 'spirituality' that has such very broad meanings for different people. That doesn't mean we negate our Christian expression of spirituality but it does mean there is a deep call for us to seek to understand how human life in the world around us is interpreting spirituality which in turn means we must reflect and know our own working definition of spirituality. It is an implication for those of us who call ourselves Christians to find our voice and lose our fear of speaking about our God with one another. A great way to start is to engage those who participate in community choirs. These choirs, even though they may come together for fellowship and song, are finding a way to meet people's needs at their deepest core. What does the music ministry of Christ's church need to learn from this? Given the historical, theological, and biblical history presented in this paper, it might be fair to say

that in discerning the spirit of God at work in this community choirs we must ask ourselves: are we humble enough to see humility presented, is this beautiful act leading one on a path to God and dissolving entitlement and self-assertion, and can the words and the meaning of the words being sung together be the message of the gospel?

This essay has examined the question of how the experience of singing in a community choir influences one's spirituality. Through the lens of the incarnation, perichoresis, and the theology of beauty, we have considered the ways in singing in a community choir might be participating in God who is beauty. There has been an in depth reflective journey of the voices of the past and present calling out to us and in dialogue to one another biblically, theologically, and historically. In addition it has also considered some of the possible future implications that this project might have for the church as we go through these times. I'll close with some words from Psalm 84 who for me sums up the essence of the topic of this paper: How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. Amen.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> John 1:14 (NRSV).

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 5:19 (NRSV).

<sup>3</sup> Col 3:16 (NRSV).

<sup>4</sup> Gordon W. Lathrop *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Oliver D. Crisp, "Chapter 9: The Incarnation," *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, 160-175, (NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 160.

<sup>6</sup> Oliver D. Crisp, "Chapter 9: The Incarnation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrence, 160.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., 170.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., 170.
- <sup>13</sup> Andrew Louth, *St. John Damascene, Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford Early Christian Studies), (Oxford University Press, USA, 2005).
- <sup>14</sup> Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 207.
- <sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*, (NY: Bloombury Publishing Plc., 2007), 213.
- <sup>16</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 271.
- <sup>17</sup> John Webster et al, "Chapter 9: The Incarnation," *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, 170.
- <sup>18</sup> St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images: Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 12.
- <sup>19</sup> St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images: Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, 11.
- <sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*, 213.
- <sup>21</sup> Dr. David Deane, GS3000 Seminar Oct 2017, Atlantic School of Theology.
- <sup>22</sup> Andrew Louth, "Beauty Will Save the World: The Formation of Byzantine Spirituality", *Theology Today* 61 (2004):67-77.
- <sup>23</sup> Dr. David Deane, GS3000 Seminar Oct 2017, Atlantic School of Theology
- <sup>24</sup> Dr. David Deane, GS3000 Seminar Oct 2017, Atlantic School of Theology
- <sup>25</sup> Gabriele Uhlein, *Meditations with Hildegard of Bingen*, (Santa Fe NM, Bear & Company 1983), 10
- <sup>26</sup> Matthew Fox Ed., *Hildegard of Bingen's Book of Divine Works: with Letters and Songs*, (Santa Fe: Bear and Company Inc., 1987), 14.
- <sup>27</sup> Dr. David Deane, GS3000 Seminar October 2017, Atlantic School of Theology.
- <sup>28</sup> "The Wisdom Daily", The Spiritual Value of Jewish Choral Singing, published April 10, 2017, <http://thewisdomdaily.com/the-spiritual-value-of-jewish-choral-singing/>.
- <sup>29</sup> Exodus 15:1 (NRSV).
- <sup>30</sup> "The Jewish Magazine", The Choir in Jewish History, published may 2008, <http://www.jewishmag.com/123mag/choir/choir.htm>
- <sup>31</sup> "The Wisdom Daily", The Spiritual Value of Jewish Choral Singing, published April 10, 2017, <http://thewisdomdaily.com/the-spiritual-value-of-jewish-choral-singing/>.
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- <sup>35</sup> Ruthie Rosauer and Liz Hill, *Meditative Singing: Together in Sound and Silence*, loc 232, Kindle.
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*\*\*All Bible Sources Cited from the New Oxford Annotated Bible NRSV Bible, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*

## Appendix C: Letter of Invitation to Participate<sup>1</sup>

(Date)

Dear (Name),

My name is Angela MacLean and I am in my final year of the Master of Divinity degree at the Atlantic School of Theology. As part of my studies, I am completing a qualitative research project that is exploring how singing in a community choir influences one's spirituality. I am inviting you to participate in this study.

### Study Description

This is a phenomenological study and data will be collected through in-depth interviews with participants. These interviews will be conducted either in-person or over a video call (e.g. Skype), and will last approximately 1 hour. While my expression of spirituality is through the Christian faith and tradition, I make no claims to say that to be spiritual is to specifically identify as Christian. As such, the questions will focus on your experience singing in a community choir and how that experience has influenced your spirituality. An audio recording will be made of the interview. Field notes may be taken during this interview. The time of this interview will be arranged at your convenience.

Participation is fully voluntary. You will be asked to sign a consent form prior to the interview, and at any time you can choose to end your participation, in which case the interview will be ended and the recording destroyed.

The results of this study will be presented at Atlantic School of Theology in a public presentation on March 7, 2018, as well as being written up and made available in the Atlantic School of Theology library.

### Benefits of the Study

I anticipate that participation in this study will be of benefit to you personally, as it will give you an opportunity to reflect on how your participation in a community choir influences your spirituality. The results of the study may also be of interest to my colleagues in ministry as it might give a deeper understanding of how God is moving in community through participation in community choirs.

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<sup>1</sup> This letter of informed consent is adapted from the REB proposal of Kate Jones, an AST student enrolled in GS 3000A/B in 2016-2017.

### Risks of the Study

I do not anticipate any risks associated with participating in this study. At any time during the study, if you are not comfortable, you can choose to end your participation.

### Confidentiality

Your participation in this study is fully confidential. In both the public presentation and the written summary of this research, your name and any other personal identifiers will be changed. The audio recording of the interviews as well as the transcripts of the interviews will be destroyed on completion of the research.

If you have any further questions related to this study, or if you would like to participate, I invite you to contact me at [angelajeanmaclean@gmail.com](mailto:angelajeanmaclean@gmail.com) or (902) 495-1196. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Angela MacLean

## Appendix D: Informed Consent

I acknowledge that I have been given a description of the research project, “Community Choirs: Secular Gatherings, Holy Ground” I am aware that my participation is strictly voluntary, and that I can end my participation in the project at any point in the process.

I am aware that my participation is confidential. An audio recording of the interview will be made, and field notes may be taken. This recording along with the transcript of the interview and field notes will be destroyed following the completion of the research project. My name and any other personal identifiers will be changed in order to maintain confidentiality. This consent form will be stored separately from the research data in order to maintain confidentiality.

This project has been approved by the Research Ethics Board of the Atlantic School of Theology. Any ethical concerns about this project may be taken to this Research Ethics Board, which may be contacted through the Academic Office at AST, [academic@astheology.ns.ca](mailto:academic@astheology.ns.ca), 902-423-5592.

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

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**Name of Participant**

**Date**

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**Signature of Participant**