

E Contemplative Vensong

Unlocking the Spiritual Power of the Sung Office

CHARLES HOGAN



Dedicated in memorium to Peter Hallock (1924–2014), who guided not only the writing of this book, but generations of liturgical musicians, and inspired countless souls to occasions of song in the evening. MorningStar Music Publishers, Inc. 1727 Larkin Williams Road, Saint Louis, Missouri 63026-2024 morningstarmusic.com

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Blessed are you, Lord God of our fathers, creator of the changes of day and night, giving rest to the weary, renewing the strength of those who are spent, bestowing upon us occasions of song in the evening.¹

How does the Church, in the early part of its third millennium, address the hunger for liturgies that embody this benediction? What outlets do we offer for the world to express its need for peace? Where can souls find moments of stillness and solace? Many of us in positions of designing worship for the modern Church grope for spiritual experiences to satisfy these needs.

In 2006, James Diamond (then dean of Christ Church Cathedral in Cincinnati, Ohio) asked me to engineer a weekly service of Compline similar in style to St. Mark's Cathedral in Seattle, Washington. Like many music directors across the American Church, I had familiarity with Compline, given that I had worked for the prior six years in a parish which offered the Office. There, at Holy Comforter, Burlington, North Carolina, the service seemed ideal because the volunteer choir could confidently sing the few and fixed chants with flexibility and understanding (we used David Hurd's reworking of the Latin rite as found in The Hymnal 1982). Further, we combined this music with some modern-harmony Anglican chants and gave careful attention to creating an ambiance conducive to quiet prayer. This combination equipped us with a setting fertile for the contemplative experience. Using the 1979 Prayer Book version of Compline, we provided our fellow worshippers repose and restoration through a meditative, spiritual experience in contemporary language.

^{1.} The Book of Common Prayer, (The Church Hymnal Corporation, New York, and the Seabury Press, 1979), page 113.

Toward the end of those six years, questions emerged for me. Why were we Episcopalians using Compline? When Archbishop Cranmer crafted Evensong, did he strip the two antecedents of Vespers and Compline of their character in order to create a new aesthetic, or did he leave room to develop a character for the hybrid service that could lean more in one direction than the other? With a little thought, I realized that my experience of Evensong up to that point had been very much Vespers oriented; that is to say a service at five o'clock with great attention paid to festival settings of the canticles, a grand anthem, and elaborate prayer responses. What if, in response to my dean's request, I instead explored Evensong from the Compline aesthetic using fixed, contemplative chants sprinkled with modern harmonies in a candlelit service closer to bedtime? I seized upon this opportunity to more fully explore the Anglican rite of choral Evensong.

The next two years proved to be very satisfying. To my delight, this experiment was successful. I created a meditative, spiritual experience consistent with Compline, using the principles of the Latin rite, while conforming to the format of Evensong. I did not expect, though, the paucity of resources for this style of music. While such music exists in plenty, I found no compendium of atmospheric harmonized chants. Further, I favored fauxbourdon settings of the canticles. Of these settings, I only found editions with texts either in Latin or in sixteenth century English. In order to conform to 1979 Prayer Book language (the cathedral exclusively used Rite Two), I had to re-point texts to go along with all of these settings.

This book endeavors to make a strong case for incorporating Evensong in the liturgical offerings of the Church. With intent for integrity to the historic liturgy, I advocate for the use of chant and chant-based music, which also serves the purpose of creating a meditative ambiance. We provide additional resources on MorningStar's website to assist the Church in formulating such services. These resources also aid the program which uses contemporary language rites. The prose here discusses many aspects from approaching chant to selecting prayers. The website provides a dynamic resource of editions of psalms, canticles, and antiphons from which one should be able to piece together many services. Also on the website, recordings of the editions should provide good models for the realization of chant and prayers in addition to being

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a source of inspiration for private meditation. I hope that this book and resources will inspire the Church to a new reality of the Office, one which will bring encouragement and solace to her people. May God be with us all in this endeavor.

Our starting point is having a reason for integrating it into the liturgical offerings of our own churches. This is partly rational. It is partly respecting the rich heritage of the Church. It is partly a response to a cry from our society for a spiritual experience that quiets the busy world and gives context to the uncertainty of the present by mingling with antiquity. What matters most is that the Office of Evensong and the manner in which it is offered be a spiritual blessing to God and to the people who sing and hear it. It is in exploring the beauty and mystery of our heritage that we connect with Christians in body and spirit, near and far, departed and not-yet-born. It is in offering the summit of our ability, energy, and integrity that we create "musical incense," wafting from voices and choirs through the spheres to hover in worship and prayer before the very throne of our God. The practical aspects discussed in this book are, therefore, intended only as means to the end of unlocking the spiritual power of the Office.

May this book be an inspiration to you. May it guide your ministry in creating thoughtful liturgies for the Church to the consolation of her people. And may the Lord support you all the day long, until the shadows are lengthened, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and your work is done.²

^{2.} Adapted from The Book of Common Prayer, 833

A Rationale for the Power of the Office in Contemporary Life

THE PRESENT QUANDARY

Church worship meetings, vestry retreats, church growth seminars, and all like-mannered things sound so often like an endless political campaign. "What the American people want..." becomes "What this church needs is..." or, "People want..." or, "We need more young people; so, we have to..." In most instances, as in political campaigns, the pronouncements are mere conjecture and rarely seem realistic, even when supported by data. Further, the phrase "we have to..." allies with an unuttered half of the phrase, "while I really don't want to, we have to..." The discernment process is exhausting, if not demoralizing. No one person possesses a singular solution to church growth or health or relevance. One may be able to draw a fairly detailed picture of a "typical Christian" in thirteenth century Europe, but can we fathom such a thing in twenty-first century America?

What is evident is that we live in a spiritual climate that is unparalleled since the Middle Ages in pluralism, cross-fertilization, and selection. Even secularism has deep spiritual tendencies and secularists advocate for spiritual practices to enjoy both physical and mental health benefits. We also live in a world that, fueled by technology, is unparalleled in human history for its velocity of daily life and its broad geographical nature. How much of this technology should the church incorporate (in order to be part of society) and how much asylum *from* it should we provide? How close is our allegiance to traditional theology when science and pluralism provide convincing alternative explanations to the nature of us and our world?

Verifiable data can draw broad understandings of our current spiritual climate, both for the public in general and its wide array of demographic units. Some of this data provide reference points to guide the discussion of this chapter. A stark realization came after collecting such data and being constantly vigilant for new statistics and polls: None of it really matters. There is an intangible part of the church growth/ modern relevancy puzzle that refuses to be quantified, but is of paramount importance—what the church does must be an earnest reflection of who the church is. The chief occupation of the Church is to reconcile us humans to God, and the church that can be genuine in this work is sure to be effective and to grow. The church that imitates what it thinks it *should* be is sure to lose its credibility, and younger folks can smell such disingenuousness from farther away than the trademark "Episcopal Church Welcomes You" sign is usually posted. Further, the church that buys into programming that aims for growth without its roots in earnestness loses its viability. Rachel Held Evans, in an editorial on the CNN Religion Blog, perfectly captures the frustration that the quest for data, and its interpretation, evokes.

I'm often asked to speak to my fellow evangelical leaders about why millennials are leaving the church.

Armed with the latest surveys, along with personal testimonies from friends and readers, I explain how young adults perceive evangelical Christianity to be too political, too exclusive, old-fashioned, unconcerned with social justice and hostile to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

I point to research that shows young evangelicals often feel they have to choose between their intellectual integrity and their faith, between science and Christianity, between compassion and holiness.

I talk about how the evangelical obsession with sex can make Christian living seem like little more than sticking to a list of rules, and how millennials long for faith communities in which they are safe asking tough questions and wrestling with doubt.

Invariably, after I've finished my presentation and opened the floor to questions, a pastor raises his hand and says, "So what you're saying is we need hipper worship bands..."

And I proceed to bang my head against the podium.

Time and again, the assumption among Christian leaders, and evangelical leaders in particular, is that the key to drawing twenty-somethings back to church is simply to make a few style updates—edgier music, more casual services, a coffee shop in the fellowship hall, a pastor who wears skinny jeans, an updated Web site that includes online giving.

But here's the thing: Having been advertised to our whole lives, we millennials have highly sensitive BS meters, and we're not easily impressed with consumerism or performances.

In fact, I would argue that church-as-performance is just one more thing driving us away from the church, and evangelicalism in particular.

Many of us, myself included, are finding ourselves increasingly drawn to high church traditions—Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, the Episcopal Church, etc.—precisely because the ancient forms of liturgy seem so unpretentious, so unconcerned with being "cool," and we find that refreshingly authentic.

What millennials really want from the church is not a change in style but a change in substance.

We want an end to the culture wars. We want a truce between science and faith. We want to be known for what we stand for, not what we are against.

We want to ask questions that don't have predetermined answers.

We want churches that emphasize an allegiance to the kingdom of God over an allegiance to a single political party or a single nation.

We want our LGBT friends to feel truly welcome in our faith communities.

We want to be challenged to live lives of holiness, not only when it comes to sex, but also when it comes to living simply, caring for the poor and oppressed, pursuing reconciliation, engaging in creation care and becoming peacemakers.

You can't hand us a latte and then go about business as usual and expect us to stick around. We're not leaving the church because we don't find the cool factor there; we're leaving the church because we don't find Jesus there.

Like every generation before ours and every generation after, deep down, we long for Jesus.¹

Now these trends are obviously true not only for millennials but also for many folks from other generations. Whenever I write about this topic, I hear from forty-somethings and grandmothers, Generation Xers and retirees, who send me messages in all caps that read "ME TOO!" So I don't want to portray the divide as wider than it is.

Thus, with data trepidly in hand, we proceed to look at Evensong as a vehicle for being both eternal and modern, fixed and responsive, for young and old.

Evensong?

The title *Contemplative Evensong* is sure to elicit quick response from those familiar with Evensong, the crown jewel of Anglican liturgy.² Exactly what spiritual power is waiting to be "unlocked" that hasn't already been realized? Evensong has been a part of the daily life of the Church for over 450 years, and it is based in the prayers that have been part of the Church's daily existence for 1,000 years before that.

While many are deeply fed by Evensong, there are others who consider it to be an antiquated service, so to begin any discussion is to start with the question: Why turn to Evensong for spiritual renewal? For some, language from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer is a barrier to both the common pew-dweller and the unchurched. For some, the choir-led service elicits feelings of elitism and snobbery, or it seems an impossibility given the small-scale resources that the local music program can muster. Through such lenses, many then look for worship inspiration in sundry places, inventing services in an effort to overcome these obstacles. Quite a few of these services aim at evoking a quiet, consoling atmosphere in hopes to be relevant to modern culture.

^{1.} Evans, Rachel Held. "Why Millennials Are Leaving the Church," CNN Belief Blog, July 28 2013, http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/07/27/why-millennials-are-leaving-the-church/ (accessed September 28, 2013).

^{2.} In the course of this discussion, Evensong will refer to the form of Evening Prayer as observed in the Anglican (Episcopal) Church. Other churches have equitable forms of worship. The arguments and suggestions presented throughout this book are applicable over denominational lines. Chapter 5 more fully explores how to incorporate these suggestions in other churches.

The liturgical form of Evening Prayer, its words and the music underlying them continue to speak across the centuries and, in our own time, glorify God and build up the people. While one might advocate for an updating of the language, the baby must not go out with the bath water! Local liturgical architects may have good intentions in creating liturgical forms that attempt to address their communities, but services that have no basis in the history of our Church raise questions of integrity. How does this honor the wisdom that comes through centuries of trial and devotion? How does this connect our communities to the faithful who have found strength and solace in traditional liturgy? How does this preserve our faith for those who are yet unborn, who will need a spiritual anchoring in the decades or centuries to come? How does inventing liturgy affect our integrity toward the canons of the Church? Can these liturgies truly compare to Evensong's efficacy in enriching people in the worship and understanding of our Eternal God?

A Proven Format

The general outline of the liturgy is elegant and is the basis of morning and evening worship in many Protestant denominations. Its essence comes from the Roman Church's monastic Offices: God is invoked. Praise is offered with psalms. Holy word is read and the people respond. They affirm their faith, pray for the Church and the world, and sing. In some places, a sermon is preached. Final prayers lead into a blessing and dismissal. This form has beautiful flow and forward, though unrushed, momentum. Whether speaking of the two greater Offices of the Anglican Church or the typical main services of Presbyterian or Methodist Churches, the form has stood the test of time as a fundamental design of worship.

Part of the appeal for Evensong is this proof to be effective over centuries. The wheel need not be re-invented; but, the wheel must also fit the vehicle. Not all wheels have identical scale or tread, but rather are tailored for their size and purpose. Such should be the same for liturgy. Without compromising the integrity of its design, the scale and expression need to be formatted in an appropriate way to be an earnest offering of devotion. Contrarily, worship that is designed without the wisdom of the ages can be short-sighted and vapid. People need something strong to bolster their faith. Providing liturgy that is older than us all is but one way the Church demonstrates that the Divine is greater than us. The

knowledge that we are part of something much larger than ourselves and our own times anchors a foundation of peace and stability in our spiritual lives.

Thus, the first part of the reason for incorporating Evensong into a church's offerings is that it respects the rich heritage of the Church—a heritage that crosses denominational lines and has proven itself an invaluable foundation in the architecture of Christian worship for centuries. It is in exploring the beauty and mystery of our heritage that we connect with fellow Christians in body and spirit, near and far, departed and yet to be.

Ancient Meets Modern

Frankly put, Evensong is not dead, nor does it need to be fixed. It is eloquent in its prayers and elegant in its rhythm. Rather, what can be addressed is the way the modern Church interacts with modern people. The second part of the present appeal is that Contemplative Evensong responds to a cry from our society for spiritual experiences that mingle our modern culture with the mystery and wisdom of antiquity.

The Church does not worship in a vacuum; instead, key elements of societal change in the past half-century play pivotal roles in the resurgence of traditional worship in the new millennium, and scientific studies in human consciousness inform us of means to engage our spirits in ways we may never have otherwise considered. Modern science consistently confirms that the Church's ancient practices employ many activators for advanced conscious awareness and for both mental and physical health. In the convergence of myriad influences, many of us in the Church puzzle over the state of things and what we can do to be relevant to our own day while maintaining historical, artistic, liturgical, and—above all—spiritual integrity. Evensong in a contemplative guise offers the Church one such way to interface historical liturgy and contemporary society.

Flexible Resources

Another part of our appeal here is that the contemplative form of the service does not require lavish resources. One, two, or three singers chanting are as viable (and often as beautiful!) as dozens. I encourage unaccompanied singing, though one or two soft stops from the organ can provide a harmonic underpinning to aid singers. Indeed, neuroscientists researching music perception posit that we humans respond more to tunes accompanied by harmony than to melodic patterns on their own.³ The chants are repetitive and, thus, easy to learn for even modestly skilled choirs and singers. It is fairly simple to enrich them with extemporizing, with harmonizing (fauxbourdons), and so forth. There is tremendous flexibility in crafting Contemplative Evensong, making it a feasible format for those with both meager and prolific resources.

The Apologia

The continued persuasion to incorporate Contemplative Evensong takes a path through discerning some of the influences on the Church over the past fifty years that have led us to the 2010s, i.e., "Where Are We" and "How Did We Get Here?" As just mentioned, part of that journey jaunted through studies on consciousness and human processing of music. Embarking on that jaunt, we see similarities in spiritual practices common to both traditional Western and Eastern philosophies—practices that can be part of contemplative style Evensong. Such practices lead adherents on a path of transformation, and this transformation lies at the heart of the rationale for the service ("Contemplation and Transformation"). We must understand why the offices are still important in a Eucharist-centered Church and explore some reasons and pitfalls for including Evensong in liturgical offerings. The second chapter gives some context for the contemporary, contemplative, chantbased aesthetic within an historical legacy, but first we ask: Why does any of this matter?

OUR SPIRITUAL CLIMATE

Across the Internet on national, diocesan, synod, and conference websites, American churches wrestle with whether worship should be traditional, contemporary, or blended. There is a prolific call for congregations to examine their worship styles, viewing our times as particularly transitional. In our cultural arena there seems to be a particular focus on reaching the unchurched. Does every congregation need to examine their worship? What is especially transitional about modern times and the life of the Church?

^{3.} Reyna L. Gordon and others, "Words and Melody Are Intertwined in Perception of Sung Words: EEG and Behavioral Evidence" *PLoS ONE* 5, no. 3, (2010): 2.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, reform and rebirth were at the forefront of the Church's life. Young people flocked to Brother Roger's recently founded community in Taizé and its new style of prayer and chant. Pope John XXIII called for the Second Vatican Council, on the premise that the liturgy of the Church was worn out and needed refreshing. Peter Hallock, with a small group of students in Washington, explored the body of chant and revitalized the sung Office of Compline in the American Church.

Within ten years, the Western world experienced a Cultural Revolution. War in Vietnam sparked debate and protest. Young intellectuals actively scrutinized (and refused to trust) anyone over thirty-years old. Hippies from places such as San Francisco (specifically in the Haight-Asbury area) introduced Eastern philosophy and spiritual practices to America, and gurus from places such as Big Sur imbedded this spirituality into American religion.

As a result of the Cultural Revolution, the way the Church interacted with the main society changed. Skepticism of tradition led some away from the Church. Introduction to the mind opening properties of Eastern spiritual practices led others away. Among "ten dozen" New Age philosophies that attracted children of the 60s, the ongoing "search for spiritual discipline and a palpable contact with the divine more wandered than tracked as it made its way through pseudo-Buddhism, aromatherapy, yoga, angels, [and] mantras." On the other hand, frustration over the perceived pandering to youth caused alienation to traditional churchgoers, young and old alike. However, times change and pendulums swing. A newer generation now looks into a deeper past.

In an address to the North Carolina Baptist State Convention in 2002, Norman Jameson purported that worship based in popular culture is being made obsolete by an "emergent church." Contemporary church-climate writers such as Phyllis Tickle and Diana Butler Bass delve into this notion of the emergent church. Marilyn Ferguson, in her epic social commentary on the 1970s, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, speaks

^{4.} Phyllis Tickle, *Prayer Is a Place: America's Religious Landscape Observed* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 205.

^{5.} Norman Jameson, "Emerging Church Makes 'Contemporary' Obsolete," *Biblical Recorder* (North Carolina Baptist State Convention), December 13, 2002.

^{6.} Diana Butler Bass, A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 12.

of a similar phenomenon in secular society with an emergent culture.⁷ The emergent church is characterized by adults in their twenties who "find comfort in ancient rituals" and "prefer majesty, mystery and awe in worship." Jameson holds that these same young adults reject the characteristic noisiness of pop-based worship and Victorian-influenced love-affair-with-God theology.

The early 2000s church culture encounters Christians who pine for a return to worship and theology that others find obsolete and who find value in practices that others worked to disband. An April 2011 article in *Musica Sacra* hints at this in its title, "St. Louis Conference Signals Growing Interest in Chant." Thus, as the national and diocesan websites appeal, it *is* critical that the Church ascertain its current worship practices. There is more variety in worship style now than in the last 1,500 years. We are transitioning into a time when those who shaped the 1960s and 70s have exerted (and possibly exhausted) their influence through leadership and are now retiring. New generations are now shaping the prevailing attitudes of culture, social action, and spirituality. Mainline churches' financial woes and declining membership rolls have led to an attitude of evangelism as preservation, instead of sharing the Good News.

Contemplative Evensong explores tradition rather than dismissing it. In this exploration, it embraces ancient Eastern and Western spiritual practices towards the goal of enlightenment, self-realization, and a mystical awareness of God's presence. This attempt to engage both new and old ideas into an informed, applicable whole coincides with a general cultural attitude of persons born between 1960 and 1985, i.e., those who are currently shaping the general cultural ethos.¹⁰

Where Are We?

There seem to be as many theories as there are people on how various demographic pockets of our contemporary society view the current state of the Church, its liturgy, and its music. While no model

^{7.} Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in Our Time* (Boston: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 1980), 38.

^{8.} Jameson.

^{9.} Benofy, Susan. "St. Louis Conference Signals Growing Interest in Chant." www.adoremus.org/0411Benofy.html (accessed January 15, 2012).

^{10.} Tickle, Prayer Is a Place, 134-136.

can unimpeachably represent current spiritual practices and societal attitudes toward spirituality and music, pollsters and pundits mutually agree on some fundamental points. Writers and data show that cultural proclivities in the early part of this millennium tend toward ancient, mystical spirituality.

Research through the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life conducted through polls in early 2010 shows that more than half (57–59%) of youth of the Millennial generation agree that they are spiritual but not religious.¹¹ More than three-fourths of young churchgoers—those inside the faith!—identify Christianity as judgmental, hypocritical, out of touch, insensitive, boring, and exclusive.¹² Alas, official conclusions on polls conducted through The Episcopal Church measure success in churches by attendance and pledges or offerings, viewing a church's relative strength in its ability to grow its congregation, rather than to refine or to develop its spiritual core. Yet, the same study reveals that, while nearly every local church emphasizes worship, "a minority help members grow in their faith by regular emphasis on spiritual practices (prayer, meditation, etc.) and ongoing, serious educational opportunities such as theological study groups. Transforming worship creates interest in these practices and there's no reason why Episcopal churches cannot do more to facilitate the formation of communities with the capacity to change lives."13 How can we infuse our worship practices with spiritual practices, all the while honestly engaging in liturgies that intrinsically reflect our character?

On a national level, our churches are not really addressing our spirituality. The Episcopal Church's official publication, *Episcopal Life*, addresses many issues, but not much about spirituality. A visit to the online edition of *Episcopal Life* will direct you to articles on interfaith dialogue, conflict in the world, controversies on same-gender blessings,

^{11.} National Study of Youth and Religion, http://www.youthandreligion.org, whose data were used by permission here, was generously funded by Lilly Endowment Inc., under the direction of Christian Smith, of the Department of Sociology at the University of Norte Dame and Lisa Pearce, of the Department of Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

^{12.} David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity... and Why It Matters (Dartmouth, MA: Baker Books, 2007), 31.

^{13.} C. Kirk Hadaway, "A Report on Episcopal Churches in the United States." Prepared and distributed by the Office of Congregational Development of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society (The Episcopal Church, 2002) 83.

and goings-on in the lives of dioceses and people. Only in the bottom right hand corner of the page will you see a mention of spirituality and, upon following that link, you will find assistance in writing sermons, but not in spiritual practices.

Is the reason there are so many Americans who claim to be spiritual but not religious perhaps because American religion is not especially spiritual?

One heading in the Pew Forum's summary of their 2010 poll states that Millennials are "less religiously active than older Americans, but fairly traditional in other ways."14 True, attendance at worship and affiliation with a particular religious sect may be waning and that may indicate lesser activity. But isn't one of the lessons we learned from the baby boomers' church that serving society and promoting social justice are intrinsically connected to living a life of faith? Neil Dunnavant, a minister at First Presbyterian Church in Greensboro, North Carolina, identifies a shift in perspective: Volunteers in social action projects (such as feeding the hungry) comment on how they themselves are spiritually fed by their volunteering; whereas, the perspective coming out of the 1960s has heretofore been more simply about attending to basic physical needs in a humanist mindset of obligation. 15 Have social action and support of social service agencies become part of the spiritual practice of the Church? If so, are the polls inaccurate about the religious activities of Millennials?

Part of this newer preoccupation with caring for the needy comes from a generational call for validation. Generation X brought with it an attitude of skepticism and cynicism, insisting that the Church actively demonstrate the principles it preached. They were, on the whole, prepared to "roll up their sleeves" in order to preach the Gospel without words and wondered if the Church would do this with them. Additionally, religiously-inclined Gen Xers favor "pre-Enlightenment mysticism and the rituals of pre-Reformation times." They challenge Cartesian reliance on rationale because it seems to deny much of the human spirit and condition.

^{14.} Allison Pond, Gregory Smith, and Scott Clement, *Religion Among the Millennials: Less Religiously Active Than Older Americans, But Fairly Traditional In Other Ways* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2010).

^{15.} The Rev. Neil Dunnavant, conversation with the author, April, 2011.

^{16.} Tickle, Prayer Is a Place, 134-135.

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