

Spring 2009

# Moving Into the Holy: Exploring Liturgical Dance in a Small Group Setting

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MOVING INTO THE HOLY:  
EXPLORING LITURGICAL DANCE IN A SMALL GROUP SETTING

by

Laura L. Padgett

A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
Specialization: Storytelling Through Creative Movement

Regis University  
April, 2009

## ABSTRACT

### Moving Into the Holy: Exploring Liturgical Dance in a Small Group Setting

Liturgical dance is a way to offer prayer, praise and worship to God. Although done primarily in performance and by trained dancers, this project offers guidelines for leading non-dancers and non-performers in exploration of this ancient art form. This applied research project examines a variety of opinions from church leaders, worship artists and dancers to determine elements to include in the guidelines. The elements presented in this model are from the perspective of liturgical dance and small group dynamics. Utilizing scholarly articles, in addition to interview responses and personal experience, the investigator has designed a model combining essential small group components and principles of liturgical dance to aid facilitators in leading adults in this art form.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Liturgical Dance Notes

Balletic slim with gently nubile curves  
 And sweetly graced extensions of long limbs-  
 They sway, step, bend to syncopated hymns.  
 Their mothers beam. How well, they think, dance serves  
 God's glory (and their own) in finer style  
 Than old processions jumbled full of tots,  
 White-veiled and bumptious, tasting nuns' DO NOT's  
 Surging off center down the middle aisle

Lord as You look on such eclectic prayer,  
 Such very now liturgic elegance  
 With its proponents all quite blind to where  
 It self-creates less happy circumstance,  
 Hold tight and tenderly within your care  
 Little fat girls who won't be asked to dance.

Mary Margaret Millbrath (2003)

What is liturgical dance, and who is it about or for? Can all participate or is it exclusively for a select few, as secular dance is? One could read the poem above and substitute the word "fat" with old, plain, not dance trained, other-abled or a myriad of adjectives that give permission to exclude. In many churches and in many liturgical dance groups today, the emphasis is on performance in service or in festivals. The performance groups many times feature extensive and complicated choreography that showcases the style of the choreographer and the skills of the dancers. But what is liturgical dance supposed to be? Are there deeper roots in dance and a deeper purpose in this art form as an expression of

worship, prayer and praise, regardless of the person or persons dancing? Is there a format that can serve as an avenue for adults to explore this art as a form of worship and inclusion?

### Statement of the Problem

Because of an understanding that liturgical dance is only for those who are trained as dancers, young, athletic and performance oriented, modern church parishes are missing an opportunity to engage parishioners in an ancient art form that can bring them into deeper worship and faith experiences with God. Additionally, church leaders are looking for ways to incorporate innovation and variety into development of adult small group programs that provide formats for spiritual exploration and expression.

### Overview of the Problem

"Since ancient times, dance has been of major significance in expressing the most profound elements of human spirituality" (Stewart, 1994, p. 136). According to Branigan (2007), "Dance is said to be our oldest art form and every culture uses it to express faith and celebrate important life events. Liturgical dance has as its purpose the deepening and focus of worship" (p. 33). This means there is a place for liturgical dance when leading individuals and communities into a deeper spiritual experience with God, even if they are not dancers and/or have no interest in dancing in a public setting such as a church service. Unfortunately dance in the Christian faith is done rarely and is seen as entertainment or performance rather than as ministry or worship.

The face of ministry within church groups is changing, and it is no longer possible for pastors to minister to all the spiritual needs of the parishioners. Because of this, lay people within congregations are being encouraged to use their gifts to facilitate small groups that



represent smaller communities within the larger community. Small groups are proving to be valuable in leading parishioners into deeper relationships with God and into rich spiritual growth experiences. Lemmons (2007) stated, “Most groups are made up of fewer than a dozen members. They usually meet regularly to pray, read scripture and reflect” (p. 3). It is felt that small groups are able to minister to participants on an intimate level because they meet the needs of individuals to pray, understand and reflect as churches have become large and do not lend themselves to needs of personal relationships (p. 3).

Bird (1994) believed many church leaders feel that much of the work of the church is being done within small groups and “the last 40 years have seen a significant rise in the small group movement in North America” (p. 26). As the concept of small group ministry grows and evolves, there is need for innovative and varied ways to help parishioners find avenues to pray, praise, explore, experience, share, express faith and worship. Bible study, fellowship and prayer are essential elements of church small groups. However, because the need exists for variation in conducting small group work, additional avenues such as the arts can be useful in helping parishioners grow more deeply in their relationship with God. One art form that can be valuable in helping people come into a deeper connection with God, faith and spirituality is liturgical dance.

#### Purpose of This Project

The purpose of this project was to offer an arena where adults could grow spiritually by worshipping with their whole being, including their bodies, in the form of liturgical dance. In this project, the author created a model to lead parishioners in learning to pray, praise, explore, worship and express faith through liturgical dance by incorporating the elements of

small group communities. The elements included establishing scripture reading, prayer, meditation, journaling, personal reflection, sharing, and movement singly and within groups.

The focus of this project was to build a model for a four to six week small group instructional and experiential session using liturgical dance to lead adults into deeper spiritual experiences by using their body, mind, and spirit to worship God. The project incorporated a format of church small groups using the elements listed above.

Because adults all learn at different levels and in different ways, a small group setting was an acceptable format for this project. The intimate setting of small groups can allow the leader and the participants to explore various learning styles that can meet the needs of participants. Additionally, the series of meetings was designed to help each participant value liturgical dance as a form of worship that is inclusive and not just performance or entertainment. By keeping the group to no more than eight people, the learning styles and preferences of individuals can be honored, and liturgical dance can be explored by all participating without exception or exclusion.

### Chapter Summary

It was the purpose of this author to build a program that will invite and include all who are interested, without exception, in exploring the ancient art form of dance as expression of faith and worship. The small group format was used to provide an avenue for participants to accept that invitation.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In recent years how people see worship and ministry is changing. There is an emphasis on the use of small church groups to help parishioners grow personally, spiritually and in community. Additionally, some art forms are being incorporated within church bodies to help lead parishioners into a deeper level of worship and spiritual growth. One art form that may be useful in accomplishing this is the ancient art of liturgical dance.

The purpose of this project was to explore liturgical dance as an avenue to help parishioners enter into deeper worship and spiritual growth. This author believes it is possible to offer liturgical dance as an avenue of spiritual growth by using the setting and elements of small group ministry. In a time when church leaders are seeking innovative ways to engage parishioners in exploration and expression of their faith, the marriage of the small group ministry model with liturgical dance could prove to be a valuable tool in accomplishing that goal.

In this chapter scholarly works that explore liturgical dance and small group ministry were discussed. First, the validity of liturgical dance as worship from historical and biblical standpoints was discussed. Second, liturgical dance as a form of religious experience and expression, community and inclusion, and worship and ministry was explored. Third, the church small group model as a way to engage parishioners in community and inclusion, personal and spiritual growth, and ministry was reviewed.

## Validity of Liturgical Dance in Worship and Community

The topic of liturgical dance offered in churches as a form of praise, prayer, worship and expression of faith has long been debated by scholars, artists, church leaders and parishioners. However, this ancient art form has an historical and biblical basis, which defends it as a valid form of worship. Additionally, the art of liturgical dance can offer parishioners another way to be included within communities of faith as they explore, express and grow personally and spiritually.

### *Historical Basis of Liturgical Dance*

According to Branigan (2007) dance is said to be our oldest art form and has been used by every culture in order to express religious phenomena and to celebrate important life events such as death, birth, and healing (p. 33). She further stated early Christian and Jewish faith traditions commonly used dance in worship. In fact, Branigan explained the term “rejoice” in Aramaic, the language used by Jesus and the early Christian Church, actually means to jump or dance (p. 33). She described the original meaning of choir as referring to a group of dancers, stanza meant the dancers were still while a soloist danced alone, and chorus meant the dancers danced together as a group (p. 33). As dance became more social and secular in its uses, it was rejected as a form of worship, especially during the Protestant Reformation period. Branigan confirmed this was true of music in worship as well. The musical aspects eventually returned to worship, but dance has remained in only a few countries today.

LaMothe (2005) stated throughout history Christians have danced and are still dancing their faith, but this has gone unnoticed by theologians and philosophers. She declared that nineteenth century European Christians began to look at dance as entertainment

and titillation (p. 101). Lamothe further remarked that although dance has been done in Christian worship, scholars have tended to see it as symbolic enactment of the more reasonable verbal statement of religious practice. “Scholars have tended to perceive ‘dance’ as offering an indirect contribution to religion at best” (p. 102).

The Jewish and early Christian worshipers were not the only people to use dance as worship. As Johnson-Hill (2004) explored dance and worship in the Pacific Islands, he discovered dance was done in a deeply spiritual way that was not understood by early missionaries. He noted dance was part of almost all aspects of Pacific life. “However, the relationship between dance and the Church has been, at best, a cautious one, and at worst a hostile one since the arrival of the missionaries in the nineteenth century” (p. 362). The early Methodist missionaries considered dance to be against spiritual perfection and self control, especially when done in worship. According to the Methodist missionaries, dance was seen as “pagan and offensive to God” (Forman, 1982, as cited by Johnson-Hill, 2004, p. 363).

Johns (2002) explored the influence of the Quaker missionaries on the Alaskan Eskimo population with relation to the art form of dance in worship. He noted the early Quaker missionaries, while converting the native people of Alaska to Christianity, discouraged the native customs, including dance, in favor of the use of speech or silence in worship. Up to the point of arrival of the Quaker missionaries, Johns stated, “Drumming and dancing had been a regular practice for generations” (p. 201). Johns remarked that Quakers preferred to employ silence in their worship. While many other Christian groups employed some form of expression physically, Quakers restricted the use of dance or movement in the cultures they were sent to convert to Christianity.

### *Biblical Basis for Liturgical Dance*

There are many biblical references to dancing in Old and New Testament accounts. Branigan (2007) referred to Psalms 149 and 150 where God's people are instructed to praise him with dancing. This same scripture reference was made by Kast as she explored the pros and cons of dancing in the spaces considered sacred by modern churches. Branigan mentioned at the Last Supper, according to the apocryphal acts of John, Jesus instructed his disciples to encircle him and he called them to dance (p. 33).

Sachs (2006) referred to scripture where King David danced with joy and praise to God before the Ark of the Covenant, a sacred and revered symbol of the Jewish people's devotion and belief in their God. According to Sachs, the word m'karker is defined, by the New Jewish Publication Society, as meaning to whirl or turn on itself. He referenced I Samuel 19:11 to explain this sort of praise dance and remarked that David was not dancing to praise himself as king but to recognize that God was King (p. 262). Sachs called attention to dance in the Old Testament by citing the dance of Saul in I Samuel 10:5-6 and the prophets of Baal as they faced Elijah on Mt. Carmel in 1 Kings 18:28-29.

### *Liturgical Dance as Experience and Expression*

While trying to place the body in the life of religion, LaMothe (2005) said dance is "a medium for religious experience and expression" (p. 101). She traced the influences of modern dance pioneer Isadora Duncan and Dutch phenomenologist Gerardus van der Leeuw in their pursuit to bring dance into religious studies as a valid way to experience religious phenomena. LaMothe described the work of Kant who believed religious studies should be centered on reason or the mind and that the body was not a mature way to experience or express religious aspects. However, LaMothe related, "Dance is a practice that exercises

attention to bodily sensation, and thus, develops a range of aesthetic sensibilities diametrically opposed to those Kant deemed necessary for cultivation of a mature reason and rationally defensible view of ‘religion’” (p. 107). She explained Duncan saw dance as a renewal of religion and as “generating new ideas of human relation to the constitutive forces of the universe - ideals of God, beauty, and love; and it does so when a dancer moves from an awakened ‘soul’” (p. 116).

LaMothe (2008) revealed that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Duncan, Ruth St. Denis and Martha Graham, also modern and religious dancers, were concerned scholars favored the tasks of reading and writing over experience. Because of this, they felt people were no longer able to “experience and know divinity through their bodies” (p 581). LaMothe attributed this to the religious scholars of the time trying to convince people that verbal arts were privileged over dancing as a medium of expression and experiencing the Divine. She further declared scholars tried to extract symbols and codes from dancing in order to verbalize their meanings rather than experience them. In examining the dances St. Denis, Duncan and Graham created, Lamothe maintained it was dancing that appeared to have been a “medium for cultivating the kinds of sensory experiences that enable us to think and feel and act religiously at all” (p. 585).

When discussing her reflections on liturgy and performance, Kast (2000) described the spiritual experience from the perspective of the dancer as well as the audience in terms of performance and liturgy. She noted “both performance and liturgy are symbolic processes expressing human experiences” (p. 219). She discussed the experiences of a dance troupe composed of professional modern dancers and community dancers in a series of organ and dance performances in 1993-1995. Kast maintained liturgies name the experiences in our

lives and performance of liturgy is a “symbolic process that expresses human experience” (p. 219). Kast stated many of the dancers were deeply moved by their experiences as they rehearsed, performed and used movement to tell sacred stories. She noted some dancers experienced a deeper level of intimacy with the sacred as they physically expressed the emotions and stories in the performances over the three-year period.

Johns (2002) maintained the Quakers, when converting the Alaskan Eskimos to Christianity, may have constrained their voices in worship, denying them the full range of expression by discouraging their use of dance as expression. He argued the movement of the liturgy gives a marked advantage over the spoken or thought word in experiencing God. Johns defended the experience of the Divine in movement by this statement, “These divine movements in creation resulted in life and the experience of new creation. God’s spirit moves still” (p. 210).

#### *Liturgical Dance as Inclusion and Community*

As Johnson-Hill (2004) considered aspects of worship among the Pacific Island people, he declared, “The spiritual power of dance affects all members of the community, even those not dancing” (p. 369). He maintained, “Communal dancing can play in fostering a sense of equality between worshipers of all ages, and all denominational and ethnic backgrounds” (p. 370). He pointed out, “Individual freedom and diversity is allowed, but all within continuing concern for the shape of the total community” (J. Adams, 1976 as cited in Johnson-Hill, 2004, p. 370). Johnson-Hill studied three different peoples in the Pacific Islands, the Fijians, the Kongans and the Kiribanti. In observing their various forms of dance, he decided, that in an ecumenical way, “Each of the cultures under discussion could benefit greatly by learning the dances of other cultures” (p. 370).



While performing in an organ and dance performance, Kast and her dancers taught a dance to the audience to engage them in movement pieces. This was done before the actual performance started. The audience joined in at the end of the performance. This resulted in the audience becoming part of the community within the movement. Over the three-year period, the audience began to look forward to becoming an integral part of the project, especially as they joined into the dancing at the end.

Branigan (2007) explained, “Dance is a powerful art form in which people of all ages can participate and to which all ages can and do respond. Dancers do not need to be thin or young” (p. 34). She instructed, “All God’s children should be welcomed into liturgical dance groups” (p. 34). She made the case that we are all dancers and we all have the ability to express ourselves with movement. She explained dancers who are not trained in dance technique have done some of the most authentic liturgical dance. Branigan said in worship dance does not need to be pretty or sweet. Instead, she advised that just as life offers experience from joy to despair, these experiences are present in the communities where we worship. She offered the following statement concerning dancing within the liturgical seasons. “Dance during Lent, for instance, allows us to deal with not only Christ’s pain and death, but also our own” (p. 35).

Scott (2008) advocated for the use of movement through congregational dance. She described the congregational movement of two churches she attended at Yale University. Congregational movement in these churches was done in a variety of ways and Scott described after prayers of the people, the congregation joined in a simple four-step dance and circled around a table until they were gathered, and there they celebrated the Eucharist, in community. She pointed out, “To walk or dance with others fulfills some deep yearning in

each of us to communicate with our bodies and not with words. To dance with others is to enter into communion, allowing your body to respond to the bodies of others” (p. 51).

*Liturgical Dance as a Form of Worship and Ministry*

In *En Media Res: Some Theologies of Congregational Movement in Christian Worship*, Scott advocated for the use of movement through congregational dance and processional as a part of Sunday morning worship. She described services at St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church where the congregation was encouraged to “see God’s image in all humankind, to sing and dance to Jesus’ lead and become God’s friend” (Mission of St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, as cited by Scott, 2008, p. 49). She related physical images she observed such as a light shining in the eyes of congregants as they processed into the chapel together. Scott observed the love of God grew among the congregants as they moved together. She explained outward movement of people often reflects what is going on inside of their heart and that moving and stepping with friends and fellow congregants on this same journey of faith allowed her to more fully worship God.

Branigan (2007) stated, “Dance in worship must never be thought of as performance but as ministry” (p. 35). Having over 30 years’ experience in choreographing and dancing liturgical dance in the United Methodist Church, she spoke about the need to consider liturgical dance as worship and ministry to the dancers and the congregation. “Liturgical dance requires the dancer to bare his or her soul in worship. Unless this happens, dance in worship becomes at best a technical exercise and at worst a mechanical performance” (p. 38). Branigan shared several guidelines to help the dance leader use liturgical dance as ministry. These included believing each person has worth and beauty and a soul that longs to express feelings that are “too deep for words” (p. 38). She cautioned that while leading others in

liturgical dance for performance, worship or ministry it is vital to love the dancers unconditionally more than the dance.

Johns (2002) explored Quaker missionary worship style in relation to the indigenous people of Alaska, the Eskimos. Since 1897 there have been Quakers among the Eskimo people. Like other missionaries, the Quakers urged the Eskimos to abandon some of their cultural customs including dance. He explained in traditional Quaker worship, worshipers are restricted by limits that are placed on expressions such as movement and dance.

Although supportive of some elements of Quaker worship such as the time for silence, Johns remarked that by not considering the full range of human expression, including the physical, Quaker worship style may risk “constraining the human spirit by silencing the voice of the human body” (p. 203). He referred to the work of von Hugel within this article. Von Hugel, according to Johns, felt that the Quakers sought the minimum in spiritual experience and worship by restricting the physical expression of worship (von Hugel 1998, as cited by Johns, 2002, p. 203). Johns supported von Hugel’s position and stated the adoration of God and experiences of worship are not truthful if they exclude the ability to express ourselves in worship to God with our bodies. In being honest about ourselves, Johns stated, we need to express ourselves in words, gestures and movement within the worship setting.

Movement can enhance the worship experience for the congregation as well as the dancer, according to Kast (2000). She explained a dancer moving down an aisle whether slow or fast can bring the viewer into an awareness of movement and sense of passage. “The sense of performance can be dulled by routine worship and jolted to life by the shock of a dancer’s body moving in a sacred space” (p. 222).

## Church Small Groups

In recent years, church small groups have become very important in ministry, spiritual growth and personal growth of church communities. Typically these groups meet to study the Bible, pray and spend time in Christian community with fellow believers. The benefits of this type of ministry within churches have been seen from various angles and by various authors as presented below. There also are warnings offered to those who plan to start or maintain small groups within the church for the purposes of ministry, personal and spiritual growth and community connections.

### *Small Groups as Community*

The aspect of belonging is vital to the health of any community in terms of retaining membership in those communities. In church groups, the sense of belonging is important for the laity to feel they are part of the church community and have some say about the programs within the churches. According to Withrow (2003), the increased participation within small groups in church communities is due to the transient nature of families and individuals. She noted, "Small group communities provide elements of belonging and allow individuals to determine their level of commitment to the group" (p. 143). She pointed out when belonging to a group, individuals look beyond their own needs and begin to focus on the needs of the group as a whole. This development of concern for others in the group was expressed by Leslie (1964) as he quoted a pastor who noted in a small group setting there was, "a growing awareness of individuals and their relationship to one another" (p. 38).

In exploring the theology of small groups, Kennedy (1996) noted God's plan for the human family is to be in community. He explained God is community within the trinity. He created male and female in community and planned for them to continue community through

children. “The mandates of God towards human beings are toward this community” (p. 176). Kennedy referred to small church groups as small communities called out of a larger community to be a blessing to the larger community. He pointed out, “God has shown us that in order to be fully ourselves, we must risk handing ourselves over to a community of others who will help us to grow” (Gorman, 1993, as cited by Kennedy, 1996, p. 177). He also noted the church should not have small groups because the early church had them but because God calls humans into community with each other as part of His plan.

Reverend Ashbrook (1970) described his work at Colgate Rochester Divinity School with small group models among the seminarians over a three-year period. Although his experiment was designed to see if small groups could provide avenues for personal growth and institutional change, he described other objectives as well. He explained two other objectives were to facilitate sensitivity among the students towards others in the group and to “assist the individual to become a person within a community of persons” (p. 179). Additionally Ashbrook’s aim was to teach students how to be with themselves as well as develop the ability to be with others. In describing the feedback from some of the seminarians, Ashbrook stated one of the men in the group felt he “was not alone and many of the things he was dealing with, others were also” (p. 188).

Zersen (1981) explored the Lutheran roots of small groups. Discussing the history of Lutheran small group communities based on the example of Martin Luther, Zersen proclaimed preaching and teaching may call Christians to love one another but “if love is to be experienced, there is a need for a setting in which people can interact” (p. 234). Zersen stated that by studying the model of Martin Luther, it is clear Christians are responsible for caring for one another.

Part of the power of small groups is their ability to be sources of “mutual support for group members” (Reid, 1963, p. 395). If an individual is a member of a small group meeting together frequently, he is not alone and within the group can find the support to be “fully a person” (p. 396). Reid also stated being part of a small group affords opportunity to develop strength and confidence by realizing other people share some of the same problems.

In the introduction to her thesis entitled “*Regathering: The Small Church Community Experience*” Barbara Howard (1991) pointed out small Christian communities develop and gather as a new way of being church. “People need warm, caring relationships along with relationships that enable task completion” (p. 1). For her project, Howard reported on her own experiences with small group membership. She reflected that meeting with her Catholic neighbors in a small group led to a 21-year commitment and created a group bound together by love of God and one another (p. 3). Howard maintained, “We come to small church communities as humans in need of God’s love mediated through the members of our small community” (p. 10).

#### *Small Groups as Avenue for Personal and Spiritual Growth*

In *Disciples for the Future: Small Groups and Vital Faith Development*, Withrow (2003) explained growing a church means not only making disciples but using small groups to nurture and instruct people in the faith and then sending them forth to bring more people into the church. “Small groups, properly focused, have tremendous impact on the faith journeys of those persons connected to the church” (p. 141). Because faith narratives are enriched in small groups, she stated discipleship is deepened for participants. In discussing the heritage of John Wesley in the Methodist Church, Withrow noted one of Wesley’s goals in developing small groups was to help believers keep their relationship to Christ vital. “His

intent was to provide arenas for faith sharing and mutual accountability while encouraging people to grow in their likeness to Christ” (p. 143).

While discussing the uniqueness of church small groups, Leslie (1964) expressed a reason why small groups help people grow in their faith. The small, intimate groups have attempted to share on a fairly personal level, and “they perceive themselves as involved in deepening the life of faith” (p. 33). Leslie maintained emotional sharing that is part of these intimate groups is a way for participants to experience personal learning. Because people in the group are always seen from the religious perspective of God’s plan for them, personal sharing is never mandatory, but encouraged as part of spiritual and personal growth. By keeping God the center of the group, Leslie declared, “a new awareness of the significance of relationships emerges” (p. 38).

Reid (1963) stated when a small group member is known by their first name and “known as a distinct individual, his personal dignity, his faith in himself and his sense of personhood are all enhanced” (p. 395). As a person begins to have insight into themselves and others, these insights can lead to personal growth according to Reid. This insight and growth must be fostered within an arena of trust and acceptance, which also are elements of the intimate small group.

The growth in individuals is a natural outcrop of small groups as they represent a “lifestyle change in persons and in churches that facilitate change and growth” (Clemons and Hester, 1974, as cited in Price, Terry and Johnson, 1980, p. 187). Drakeford referred to small groups as Bible study that is experiential in nature. He stated this type of experiential Bible study “tries to help each member decide what to do with the truths encountered in the study” (Drakeford, 1974, as cited in Price, Terry and Johnson, 1980, p. 187).

Ashbrook (1970) found when working with seminarians for a period of three years in small sharing groups, students felt they were more able to be free to be themselves and found more genuine friendship (p. 189). Ashbrook's objectives were to help students grow in terms of sensitivity to others, ability to handle conflict, independence as well as dependence, handle affection and hostility and deepen their religious faith. The relevance of faith proved to be a constant theme in Ashbrook's experiment. Although no evaluative instruments were used to assess the outcome of Ashbrook's experiment, he had the following observation with reference to student interchanges within the group. "Such interchanges demonstrate the use of the group as a method of increased awareness, changed attitudes and changed interpersonal competence" (p. 187). He further reflected several students saw the group as not only a place to share oneself but also a place to "see oneself more clearly" (p. 187). One member expressed that by allowing everyone their differences in the sharing group, the whole group was enriched.

Kennedy (1996) spoke of the theology of the small group. He noted small groups were composed of people called out of the larger body of the church according to certain works God wants done. He stated, "A good theology is never accomplished until it enhances or challenges the life of the church. The theology of small groups founded on biblical concepts of election or being called out, has implications for the church" (p. 182). Kennedy explained when a small group is called out and is clear on the purpose of God's call, that small group "becomes an instrument of blessing for the whole body" (p.183).



*Small Groups as an Avenue for Ministry*

Leaders in the United Methodist Church have begun to look at issues of Christian ministry by using the Covenant Discipleship Program. This program “summarizes how congregations can form small group ministries to develop disciples for faith and works in the church and the world” (Withrow, 2003, p. 147). Small groups, according to Withrow, should have within their narratives a challenge to their members to continuously go beyond their own needs and desires.

According to Reid (1963) the importance of small groups in the work of the church is being investigated by many different scholarly disciplines, including Christian scholars. He explained the church is involved in communicating the Good News of Jesus Christ in the world and small groups are necessary to this communicative process (p. 393). Reid remarked that when an individual feels genuinely accepted and loved in a small group, he naturally wants to “be part of the Church’s mission in the world” (p. 401). He further stated the churches that are most alive and contributing to their communities and the world are churches that employ “creative groups operating within the larger organization” (p. 403).

Ministry is not always outside the walls of the church or the small group. When discussing the Lutheran roots for small group ministry, Zersen (1981) explained that despite the history of small group ministry within the Lutheran church, most congregations are not using small groups as ministry. However, he stated “here and there significant experiments are realizing the promise which belongs to all who are freed to be in ministry to one another” (p. 234). He discussed the theology of Martin Luther and stated, “Luther intended we be priests to one another” (p. 235). Luther often preached in his home to small groups. He used his home to preach and nurture other believers including his family and guests. By using

Luther's model to minister to one another in small groups and intimate settings such as our homes, Zersen stated we would be building on the original vision of Luther and Lutherans "will all be enriched by it" (p. 238).

### *Warnings for Small Group Leaders*

A discussion of the literature on the benefits of small groups within churches is not complete without considering the warnings offered within the scholarly literature. Small groups function on a more intimate and honest sharing level than larger groups do. Guarding against certain pitfalls was offered in several of these scholarly articles.

Because of the personal sharing and sometimes exploration of emotions, there is a danger of becoming therapy groups. Leslie (1964) pointed out there is a growing conviction that the small groups within churches must be designed around their own purpose of promoting Christian redemptive work. Using a small group for therapeutic purposes should not be attempted, according to Leslie. "The group is not meant to perform the psychological functions of a trained therapist" (Casteel, 1959, as cited in Leslie, 1964, p.35).

In order to encourage personal sharing, spiritual and personal growth, the atmosphere must be safe. Leslie (1964) offered some advice. He encouraged leaders to keep the conversations in the current time and place without discussions of the past. He stated members should use the first person and speak only their own perspective. He pointed out there is no place for personal criticism of anyone. He also stressed there should be no blame assigned for feelings or actions. Leslie believed these few simple ground rules would "make it possible to have free sharing without permitting the abuses of undisciplined or uncontrolled emotional explosions" (p. 35). He also instructed that personal sharing should never be compelled but invited and resistance to personal sharing accepted (p. 37).

Withrow (2003) warned small groups run the risk of becoming so comfortable that they are unwilling to change. Once the group adopts the habit of sharing personal narratives and affirming one another, the function of the group is to often make members feel good and “such a group no longer is open to spiritual challenge and accountability” (p. 142). She referred to another danger if the spiritual development of members becomes a private matter. “In groups where spirituality is seen as private, people may gather together but they do not experience true community” (p. 142). Withrow explained without experience of true community, members tend to focus on their own enrichment and growth and not on that of the whole group.

#### Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the author discussed scholarly articles written about liturgical dance and church small group ministry. Liturgical dance was described in the articles as useful for ministry and worship for dancers and congregational communities. Various authors defined liturgical dance as an avenue for personal and community praise, prayer, worship, exploration and expression of faith. However, the literature lacks information for instructing and including non-dancers in the participation of this art form for the purposes mentioned above.

Church small groups were described in the articles as avenues for personal and community spiritual growth. Additionally, several authors described the value of small groups in the ministry of the church. Within the literature reviewed, there were suggestions for elements necessary to establish and maintain successful small groups within church communities. Some authors offered warnings about the potential negative aspects of small group ministry.

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative applied research project was to offer an arena where adults can grow spiritually by worshiping with their whole being, including their bodies, in the form of liturgical dance. A model was created to lead parishioners in learning to pray, praise, explore, worship and express faith through liturgical dance by incorporating the elements of small group communities. The small group elements include establishing scripture reading, prayer, meditation, journaling, personal reflection, sharing, and movement singly and within groups. Qualitative research was conducted by interviewing a variety of subjects, as outlined below, to discover what elements to include in developing this model for teaching liturgical dance in a small group setting.

#### Targeted Population

In order to construct a model for teaching liturgical dance in a small group setting, the author's own experience as a liturgical dancer/dance leader as well as a small group participant and leader was used. To cover this topic from various viewpoints, interviews were conducted with pastors, small group leaders, liturgical dance and church art leaders, adult liturgical dancers and adult Irish dance students.

Prior to interviewing any of these human subjects, approval from the Regis University Institutional Review Board was obtained. This IRB application contained an outline of the proposal, the subjects chosen for the interview and why they were chosen.

Additionally this application contained a statement for disclosure of information, assurance of subjects' confidentiality, what subjects can expect from the interview process, and the rights of the subjects in this research project.

### Interviews

Interviews were conducted with pastors from three different churches. The pastors were chosen because they have expertise in the area of ministry within church small groups and insight into the spiritual development processes. They also have understanding of how the arts can be used and are being used to contribute to personal and congregational spiritual growth.

Two church small group leaders/facilitators were interviewed. These leaders have facilitated small groups and are aware of the successful and unsuccessful group dynamics necessary for building this model. Additionally, they have built small group models and were valuable resources for curriculum and text development.

Interviews were conducted with three liturgical dance team/worship arts leaders. These leaders have expertise in teaching and leading others in liturgical dance, drama, and music ministries within church settings. They provided valuable input into methods that work or do not work when leading adults in arts for the purpose of helping them grow spiritually and in worship experiences.

Three liturgical dancers were interviewed. The liturgical dancers provided information about what is needed in the model to engage participants in learning this art as a form of worship, prayer and praise.

Interviews with two people from the author's Irish Dance Class at Regis University were conducted. These dancers provided feedback about what helped or did not help them

engage in learning a new skill or art form. Even though Irish Dance is a secular form of dance, there are similarities in the adult learning aspects for creating the model for leading in the art of dance.

After the transcription of the notes from the interviews and offering the interviewees opportunity to review the transcribed documents, information was gleaned for construction of this small group model. Emerging themes and similar elements were examined.

### Review of Literature

Review of literature was continued on the subjects of meditative prayer, small group facilitation and leading people in the art of liturgical dance. This information was used in addition to the information from literature already reviewed and mentioned earlier in Chapter two. Some literature was not peer-reviewed, especially in liturgical dance, as there is a lack of academic literature on this subject.

### Product Development

The final project was the development of an intensive outline to support the facilitator in leading participants of small groups in exploration of liturgical dance as a means to grow spiritually as individuals and in community. The outline for facilitators contained suggestions for conducting the small group. These suggestions included guidelines for each of the six weeks that this group will meet. Also included were suggestions for assuring healthy and successful group dynamics, suggestions for resources for lesson plans to include scripture reading, reflection, journaling, and movement or dance exercises. The outline was developed from information discovered in the research processes described above. Also

included in the project developments were the author's experiences as a dancer, dance leader, small group participant and small group leader.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter contains an explanation of methods used for conducting qualitative research. The purpose of this research was to gain information for the construction of a model to lead participants in the art of liturgical dance in a small group (no more than 6-8 people) setting. A description has been given of the process of research including interviews and literature review beyond that mentioned in Chapter two. The results of this research were the foundation of this model. These results were used to create an applied project in the form of an outline for guidelines for facilitators.

## Chapter 4

### RESULTS

The construction of a model to lead adult small group participants in the art of liturgical dance was not possible without interviewing experts in the fields of church leadership, small group facilitation, worship arts instruction, and liturgical dancing. It was equally important, to this author, to interview two secular adult dancers to gain insight into adult education principles that contribute to the success of instruction in the arts for adults. People representing these areas were interviewed. A total of 13 interviews were conducted, and the results of those interviews are presented below.

#### The Pastors

Three pastors were interviewed. One pastor is female (A) and in a United Methodist Church in Burlingame, California. She was interviewed over the telephone. Two pastors are male (B and C) and from different Evangelical Lutheran Church of America congregations in the Denver Area. They were interviewed face to face. Responses to the following questions and statements were requested of each pastor.

*#1 - In your congregation what spiritual growth benefits have you observed from participation in small groups in terms of prayer, praise, exploration, worship, and expression of faith?*

All pastors observed spiritual growth benefits from small group participation including strengthening of relationships between individuals and God and between



individuals within the group. Small groups provide opportunities, through prayer and Bible study, for individuals to become confident in their personal faith.

Pastor C illustrated spiritual growth and the use of some elements mentioned above by citing the activities of one particular small group in his church. This group meets to crochet or knit prayer shawls that are given to individuals for a variety of reasons. The members have developed personal relationships by regularly meeting, using prayer to discern individual need for shawls, exploring experiences of listening for answers, and expressing their faith together by distributing shawls. Through gathering, prayer, exploration and expression, this group worships God and is growing in their relationships with each other and in their personal faith.

*#2 - What types of small groups does your particular congregation have at the present time?*

All respondents indicated their congregations have small groups devoted to Bible study, healing prayer, and support of arts such as music, writing, drama or dance. Each pastor gave examples of service groups such as mission groups concerned with local and global issues. For example, Pastor B discussed the activities of a group that travels yearly to teach farming techniques and address health issues in a mountain village in Bolivia.

Each congregation represented has small groups that meet for social purposes. These groups come together to form relationships and enjoy mutual interests such as theater or dining.

Pastor A's church performs services in English and Taiwanese. A small group was formed, bringing American and Taiwanese members together to help Taiwanese members

gain skills to acclimate to life in the United States. As the group progressed, relationships were formed around the sharing of cultural differences.

*#3 - In your opinion what makes a successful small group in terms of spiritual growth for individual participants and the congregation as a whole?*

The measurement of successful small groups, according to all the pastors, is growth in personal relationships. Individuals grow when they feel included and empowered to be the best they can be, according to Pastor C. Pastor A added when a person feels included and safe to be vulnerable, they are better able to handle conflicts. Pastor B described a successful small group as helping individuals explore or question their faith and/or doctrines of their faith.

The pastors agreed when individuals have strong personal relationships, they are more able to create a strong community within the church and in the community outside the church. When the mission of the church is being shown within the community, through the work of small groups, those groups are successful. Pastor A observed that through participation in small groups, the church is producing stronger leaders for the church and the communities at large.

*#4 - Please describe 1-3 elements you believe to be important when establishing and maintaining a church small group.*

All respondents identified several elements needed to establish and maintain healthy small groups. These elements include, but are not limited to, confidentiality, good leadership, and establishment of clear objectives for the direction of the group. The small groups need to have a basis in prayer, Bible study and safety in the form of permission to explore faith questions freely with differences treated respectfully among group members.

The pastors differed on the size of the group anywhere from 8-20 people and on flexibility of attendance. Pastors B and C agreed members should be allowed to attend group meetings as their schedules allow. Pastor A pointed out that small group members need to be accountable in terms of regular attendance at meetings. Without regular attendance, personal and group relationships do not have time to form.

*#5 - Please describe any downside to small group ministries in church.*

Pastor A stated it is a challenge to recruit leaders for small groups, even when training is offered. Pastor B estimated 2/3 of his church members have time constraints that may not allow members to participate in small groups. If the attendance is rigidly enforced, those with time limitations could be excluded from participation. Pastor C warned if prayer and Bible study are not included, there is a risk the group can find identity in certain members or a particular task instead of focusing on God.

#### Small Group Leaders/Facilitators

Two small group leaders were interviewed. Both leaders are from the same Evangelical Lutheran Church of America in the Denver Area. Both are female and were interviewed face-to-face. Responses to the following questions and statements were requested of each leader.

*#1 - What types of small groups have you personally led or facilitated?*

Both leaders have led Bible study groups. Leader A has led prayer and share groups, leadership groups, and book study groups. Leader B has led a small group for finding personal spiritual gifts.

*#2 - In your experience, what spiritual growth benefits have you observed from participation in small groups? Please be specific in terms of prayer, praise, exploration, worship, and expression of faith.*

The leaders agreed they saw growth in willingness of participants to pray openly and out loud. Leader B explained there appeared to be growth as group members moved from self-focused to other-focused prayers and as they realized prayer is an essential part of small group work. Members requested opening and closing prayers.

The leaders indicated gratitude instead of petition when praying was evidence of growth, and this is a form of praise to God. Leader A emphasized praise of God paved the way for prayer.

Both leaders stated benefit in small group work was realized when group members went from reluctance to explore their faith to willingness to question faith tenets and doctrines. Leader B gave an example of growth in a group when members agreed to study materials outside their denomination.

Both leaders commented on growth in worship within their small groups. Leader B observed members within a specific group found ways to worship outside traditional church services by using music, dance, and contemplative prayer.

Expression of faith, according to Leader A, was seen in one group when participants informed her they felt free to be vulnerable to others about their faith tradition due to their participation in the group. Leader B added in one Bible study group, members became willing to discuss their faith openly within the group and then seek ways outside the group and church to express their faith to others.

The small group leaders said they experienced, personally and within groups, growth in areas listed above when permission to grow was given within the group. Leader A explained that in some groups, permission was what led group members to find new ways of praying, praising, exploring, and expressing their faith. Growth in the areas listed above depends upon the members first entering into a “God-centered prayerful state.”

*#3 - In your opinion, what makes a successful small group in terms of spiritual growth for individuals and the congregation as a whole?*

The leaders defined successful small groups as affording individuals opportunities to grow in relationship to each other, God, the congregation, and community as a whole. Leader B commented that a successful small group welcomes new members and encourages all members to be open and vulnerable about spiritual struggles. The group and leader must be willing to acknowledge and process relationship issues or conflicts as they arise. Leader A emphasized trust is a vital element for making the group a successful vehicle for openness of members to one another and to God.

Leader B emphasized small group success in the congregation is seen when the mission and values of the church are reflected in the group. An example of reflecting mission and values might be outreach and/or service projects done together by the group members. Congregations benefit when leaders arise from the small groups, based on personal spiritual growth. Leader A explained when individuals are growing spiritually they become more willing to see the mission of the congregation come to fruition in the community outside the church walls. “Individual application always transfers to corporate application.”

*#4 - Please describe 1-3 elements you believe to be important when establishing and maintaining a church small group.*

The goals of the group must be clearly articulated, according to both interviewees. Additionally, there must be ground rules established and revisited periodically to maintain group health. Ground rules include, but are not limited to, safety (as discussed below), confidentiality, commitment to meeting times, listening, and respecting the dignity of each member present.

The interviewees observed prayer is an essential part of a small group. The practice of prayer must be established and maintained for groups to remain healthy and effective.

Safety was another essential element discussed by the leaders. Participants must be allowed to explore questions and express differences without fear of judgment or criticism. It is the leader's responsibility to help ensure safety by guarding against dominance of members or disrespect for opposing opinions.

Leader A suggested making the group "Christ-centered" helps members meet goals and observe ground rules. The unity of Christ is the basis for the group, and the function of the group should not be made central. For example, a book study group should not make the study of the book the focus.

*#5 - How have you measured the success of small groups you have led in the past?*

The leaders agreed the success of small groups is gauged by depth of sharing among group members, growth of relationships, and the ability to trust and be vulnerable with each other. Leader B described success in small groups is seen when members stretch beyond prior limitations, use their gifts, and step into leadership positions within the group and the church. Another measurement of success is when members learn to express their joy in their

salvation in God. Both leaders stated successful groups produce members who are growing in their knowledge of God, growing in faith and ability to trust God, growing in willingness to have difficult conversations, and growing in ability to resolve conflicts with others, including church leaders.

*#6 - Please describe any downside to small group ministries in churches.*

Leader A explained it is possible to have “an incompatible mix of people.” If a group is Christ-centered, personal differences can be overcome. However, resolution may not always take place. Leader B pointed out small groups could become isolative and view themselves with identity outside the community of the church or stand in opposition to the tenets of the church. An additional risk is a group could become closed to new members.

#### Worship Arts Leaders

Three worship arts leaders were interviewed; two females and one male. Leader A is female and from a nondenominational church in the Boulder Area. Leader B is female and from an Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Denver Area. Leader C is male and from an Episcopal Church in the Denver Area. Leaders B and C were interviewed face to face, and A was interviewed over the telephone. Responses to the following questions and statements were requested of each leader concerning leading adults in worship arts.

*#1 - What arts are currently used in worship in your congregation, i.e., dance, drama, music, and visual arts?*

The interviewees listed music as the art form most frequently used in worship settings along with visual arts such as videos. Leaders A and B noted dance is used on rare occasions in their parishes. Leader C explained his congregation uses storytelling and congregational movement, in addition to liturgical art that supports visualization and meditation in worship.

*#2 - What art form do you lead?*

Leader A leads a dance team. Leader B directs drama ministry. Leader C organizes/leads musical ministry and the liturgical prayer/poetry for the purpose of leading congregants in reflection and meditation.

*#3 - As an artist and leader in worship arts, how do you distinguish between worship and performance when leading others?*

All respondents defined worship arts as being done for the glory of God, to serve God's people and not for the glory of the artists. Artwork in worship needs to be the highest quality possible, but it is more important for the participants' and the congregation's spirits to be involved. In the secular world, the goal in learning and creating art is perfecting technique. Perfectionism is not the goal in worship arts, especially when including people of all skill levels. Leader C indicated there is a tension between producing a good art product for worship and maintaining an inclusion of all who want to participate.

Leader A maintained worship arts are separated from secular arts by the focus of the artist and the observers. An example was given of dance done with an emphasis on technique. In this case, the focus is on the dancer and not God.

*#4 - How do you use your art form to invite everyone with an interest to participate?*

Leaders A and B offer workshops outside worship services to help others explore dance and drama. Using simple and short pieces in dance or drama encourages inexperienced people to participate. Occasionally, Leader A has led congregations in movement pieces to a Psalm or prayer within a worship service. Leader C tries to see how best to use a person's gifts while helping them become the best musician they can be.



All three interviewees stressed the importance of inclusion by encouraging participants and not expecting perfection. Leader C explained the leader must know the motivation of the participant. It is important to know if participants are interested in working as soloists or in an ensemble. The community or ensemble is what works best for purposes of including all those interested in participating within worship arts.

*#5 - Do you see your art form being utilized to lead others in spiritual growth outside the worship service?*

Leader A described her workshops as sessions that teach people liturgical dance outside worship services. In these workshops she has seen people grow in their knowledge of scripture, prayer and community. Leader C indicated the nature of art is to engage people wherever and however it is expressed. This engagement leads to growth in individuals.

*#6 - What elements do you use to invite others to grow spiritually within your art form, such as prayer, meditation, personal sharing, and scripture reading or other?*

Leaders A and B always include prayer time within the workshops or training sessions they lead. Leader A pointed out that reading scripture and using movement to tell the stories of the scriptures has been part of her workshops. In drama training, Leader B integrates scripts based on principles/stories found within teachings from the Bible. She stressed personal sharing is a way for people to know each other, develop relationships, and become closer as a community while in the workshops. Training in the worship arts can also provide opportunity for growth as people discover their spiritual gifts.

Leader C explained prayer, meditation, personal sharing and scripture reading are important when using worship arts within services or when training individual participants.

Worship arts help worshipers remain cohesive within worship services when they support what the pastors are teaching.

*#7 - Please give specific examples where you have seen spiritual growth as a result of the use of your art form in worship services or other arenas.*

Leader A reflected that every time she dances in worship, a member of the congregation tells her how the dance touched their lives. “When the Holy Spirit anoints a dance, it has the power to speak to others.” She gave an example of a dance workshop participant who, while using movement, was able to identify and begin healing of an emotional wound which previously left her unable to move freely or to exercise.

Leader B stated drama reaches into the heart of the people performing the drama and those watching it in worship or workshops. On one occasion, in worship, she gave a drama monologue that demonstrated how those around us help form our self-image when we are young. Several congregants revealed it touched them deeply and helped start healing from past emotional wounds.

Leader C explained all people bring personal stories to worship to be shared and as people participate in worship and sharing through the arts, they form fellowships that help them be in community. It is this fellowship that is both a vehicle for and an indication of personal and spiritual growth.

#### Adult Liturgical Dancers

Three adult liturgical dancers were interviewed. All three are female. Dancers A and C are from Catholic parishes in Denver. Dancer B is from a United Methodist Church in the Denver Area. The dancers were interviewed face to face. Responses to the following questions and statements were requested of each dancer.

*#1 - What interested you in participating in liturgical dance?*

Dancer A was introduced to liturgical dance in a weekly Bible study when a visiting artist asked members to participate in some basic movements for expressing their faith. She has since participated in liturgical dance for several years in workshops and worship as a form of expressing her faith. Dancer B's greatest joys in life are spending time with God and dancing. Combining the two helps her worship and transforms her and others in their relationship to God. Dancer C was invited by a choir director in her Jesuit Catholic High School to perform a liturgical dance with the choir one Easter.

*#2 - Can you give specific examples of how liturgical dance has helped you grow spiritually in the areas of prayer, praise, exploration, worship, and expression of faith or in other ways?*

Dancers A and B indicated that entering freely into liturgical dance requires the dancer to first be still in prayer. This has enabled them to enter into and dance in the presence of God. Dancer A shared that when she is still and not fighting her body she is free to move in her body. Dancer B has taught the Lord's prayer as movement. The embodiment of the words with movement helps her, "pray more fully." In the moment of the dance, dancer C stated, there is a very spiritual experience for her.

Dancer A related her praise experience with dance by giving specific examples of movements. Lifting up her hands, bowing low and opening her arms demonstrate her openness to God and expression of her adoration. Dancer B explained that even though she sings in a praise choir, she does not experience the joy and praise with singing that she does when moving. An example she shared was moving to a song with an African beat that expresses thanksgiving to God for a new day. Although she sings this song, she expresses

praise by movements of her body. Dancer C described dance as praise in the worship setting because that is where the whole congregation comes together to offer praise and worship.

All three dancers indicated they have had opportunities within groups and in workshops to use various forms of dance to explore their faith. Dancer B gave the example of dancing one of the Psalms and understood the Psalm better after dancing it than when she had read it or heard it read. Dancer C explained exploration of her faith is seen as she tries to find an answer to the question, “How do I make this dance spiritual?”

The three interviewees agreed dance is a form of worship such as singing, reading scripture and listening to the scriptures read. Dancer A described the sanctuary as a “sacred space,” and when dancing in the church, she worships in a sacred space. Dancer B has been trained in secular dance as a soloist. When she is doing liturgical dance, however, she is part of a larger group, even when dancing alone. Dance is another way to be present in worship within that group. Liturgical dance is a channel for her spirit to worship and is not a performance. Prior to her experience with liturgical dance, dancer C explained church was about traditional and canonical ways to worship. Liturgical dance allows her to worship in a different way than how she was brought up to worship.

Dancer B expresses her faith by leading others in movements in prayers in workshops and classes. Currently, she leads two women weekly in movements to physically experience prayer for various times of the day. This class teaches others to express their faith and reconnect to God. Dancer A described expression of faith by citing the example of moving and waving palm branches on Palm Sunday. Dancer C expressed that by exploring various ways to worship, such as with dance, she is finding new ways to also express her faith.

*#3 - Would you describe the importance of the elements of prayer, meditation, personal sharing, and dancing singly or with others when entering into liturgical dance in a group setting?*

For Dancer B, the dance is a holy place and it reflects, in usage of the body, prayer and faith of the dancer. She always starts her practices with prayer, as a way of centering her and remembering that liturgical dance is worship and not performance. The other two dancers did not respond specifically to this portion of this question.

Dancer B commented that elements of meditation such as breathing are used to center her and those in her classes. Dancer C meditates in her daily faith practice. Recently she used meditation to reflect on a group dance she had done and realized part of the value of the dance was every person brought their own beliefs to the piece and openly shared them with the other dancers.

The dancers reflected that sharing of personal experiences is important because when people take the risk of sharing their lives, relationships are built. Dancer C pointed out that personal sharing is done on three levels – sharing of art and self, sharing of experiences and gifts with other dancers, and sharing all these with the community at large. Dancer B described herself as sharing her personal story when dancing solo, within a group and in front of a congregation.

#### Adult Irish Step Dancers

Two dancers from this investigator's Adult Irish Step Dance Class at Regis University were interviewed. One dancer came to this class for two years (A) but no longer attends the class. The other dancer joined the class within the last six months (B). The

dancers were interviewed separately and face to face. Responses to the following questions and statements were requested of each dancer.

*#1 – What was your experience in dance prior to taking this class in Irish Step Dancing?*

Dancer A had two years of ballet lessons and several months' instruction in ballroom dancing as a child. Dancer B had no formal dance instruction prior to this class.

*#2 – What interested you in this class (i.e., exercise, fun, community, history or interest in this art form)?*

Both respondents shared they originally came to the class for exercise. Dancer B also came because she had been told it was fun and she had observed the class prior to attending. Dancer A went at first because her co-workers were attending. She continued classes because she liked the instructor's approach and inclusion of all in the instruction.

*#3 – What elements did you observe that helped you feel included and engaged in the instruction of this art form?*

Both dancers explained that the relationships the class members formed helped them feel welcomed and valued. The other class members were encouraging and the teaching style was inclusive of all students, regardless of experience or skill level. Dancer B pointed out that the instructor and other class members were willing to work with her individually and help her increase her understanding of the basics in the class. Dancer A explained the guidelines were set so all were included. An example of this was there was to be no talking during explanations, so all could hear instructions clearly.

*#4 – What could have been done differently to help class participants feel included and engaged in this art form?*

Dancer A observed that as the group became more proficient, they had opportunities to perform. She offered that it would have been better to separate performance practice times from class time so the dancers not performing would not feel excluded. For Dancer B, nothing more could have been done to make dancers (new and experienced) feel more included. She remarked that the teaching style of the instructor assured inclusion and engagement on the part of the students.

Both dancers stated that as a direct result of participation in this class, they feel more confident in their abilities as dancers and in other areas of their lives. Dancer A has begun to take other forms of dance instruction such as ballroom and swing. She maintained she would not have had the confidence to do that without the experiences she had in Irish Step Dancing.

### Chapter Summary

The responses from the above questions aided this investigator in identifying central themes, suggested elements, advantages of and possible downsides to forming small groups designed to lead people in the arts (secular and sacred). Specifics of the comments and the practiced use of the elements will be discussed in chapter five. The outline found at the end of this chapter was constructed from integration of interview comments, review of literature analysis, and the author's personal experiences.

## FACILITATOR GUIDELINES FOR LEADING LITURGICAL DANCE IN A SMALL GROUP SETTING

### General Introductions/Purpose

The following is an outline designed to guide facilitators in leading adults in exploring liturgical dance as a form of prayer, praise, exploration, worship and expression of faith in a small group setting. Although typically seen as a performance art, liturgical dance can also be done by those who have no desire to perform and no previous dance experience. The length of time the group meets may vary from that suggested, as may themes explored. These decisions depend on the agreement and desires of the group. However, it is strongly recommended the facilitator build each group around and diligently employ the essential small group elements listed below.

Week one should be dedicated to explaining the purpose of the group as well as discussion of meeting times, length of meetings, decision on theme of group work, and small group rules and guidelines. This is an opportunity for group members to ask questions and obtain clarity on aspects of the group.

The format for weeks two through six is designed to provide consistency for members of the group. However, various elements may vary from week to week and more or less time may be spent in one area.

### WEEK ONE OVERVIEW

#### I. Opening prayer



- II. Introductions
  - A. Leader
  - B. Participants
- III. Description of Group and Explanation of Purpose
  - A. Meet together to explore Christian Faith and experience spiritual growth
  - B. Provide a forum for development of and maintenance of relationships through prayer and fellowship
    - 1. Expectations of facilitator
    - 2. Expectations of participants
  - C. Explore liturgical dance as a form of worship
    - 1. History of liturgical dance
    - 2. Liturgical Dance as performance versus personal worship
    - 3. Experiences/observations of participants with liturgical dance
  - D. Discuss possible themes (group and leader decide on theme for the six weeks - theme must be biblically based)
    - 1. Seasonal - Lent or Advent
    - 2. Topical - Forgiveness
    - 3. Liturgical Calendar - What the church will be hearing in the weekly message in the church service
    - 4. Scripture verses
    - 5. Bible stories - Prodigal son
    - 6. Other as agreed upon by the group - biblically based

#### IV. Explanation of Essential Small Group Elements

##### A. Confidentiality

1. Personal items shared in the group are to remain inside the group
2. Prayer requests offered by group members are to remain inside the group

##### B. Safety

1. Dignity of each member is to be respected
2. Openness to opinions of others is to be observed
3. Each member is given time to share

##### C. Time Commitments

1. Amount of time (suggested time is no less than 1 to 1-1/2 hour session per week)
2. Duration of the group (suggested six weeks)
3. Meeting days/times

#### V. Suggested Group Format for Each Week

##### A. Fellowship/visiting/unwinding time at the beginning

##### B. Centering prayer and meditation

1. Scripture reading
2. Elements of Lectio Divina explained

##### C. Movement to music or scripture

1. Simple movements
2. Work in pairs, groups or individually

#### VI. Questions/suggestions

VII. Closing prayer

WEEKS TWO THROUGH SIX

- I. Fellowship/visiting/unwinding time at the beginning
  - A. Brief sharing of prayer requests
  - B. Sharing of experience moving prayers from previous week
- II. Centering prayer and meditation
  - A. Scripture reading - to correspond to previously selected theme
  - B. Elements of Lectio Divina
    - Read to listen
    - Read to reflect
    - Read to discern response
    - Read to come into God's presence in rest in stillness
- III. Movement to theme decided by group in session one
  - A. Simple movements
  - B. Work in pairs, groups or individually
  - C. Share movements with group if comfortable doing so
- IV. Personal Reflections – outside of group
  - A. Read scripture from present week, (suggest three times)
  - B. Reflect on scripture and enter into praying through movements
    1. Movements learned in group
    2. Movements made up by individual in private prayer time
  - C. Journaling

V. Closing prayer

EVALUATION

- I. Evaluation forms handed out at final session or mailed to participants
  - A. Evaluation of sessions' structure
    - 1. What was done well?
    - 2. What could be done better?
  - B. Evaluation of benefits/growth seen by participants
  - C. Suggestions for future sessions
  - D. Suggestions of individuals that might be interested in participating in future sessions
- II. Facilitator reviews answers to questions on evaluation forms
  - A. Facilitator analyzing answers
  - B. Facilitator responds to participant answers

RESOURCES FOR FACILITATORS

- I. Liturgical Dance Movements
  - A. *Spiritual Principles of our Life and Work* (1981 available from **Laura Padgett**) by Paula Douthett
  - B. *Embodied Prayer* (1995, available through **Barnes and Noble Booksellers**) by Celeste Snowber Schroeder
- II. Prayer
  - A. *Be Still and Know That I am God* (2007, available through **Amazon.com**) by Judge and Amy Reinhold

- B. Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina (**1988, available through Amazon.com**) by Thelma Hall
- C. Living in the Question: Meditations in the Style of Lectio Divina (**2000, available through Amazon.com**) by M. Basil Pennington

#### CAUTIONS FOR LEADERS

- I. Group focus
  - A. Remain focused on God
  - B. Remain centered in prayer
- II. Group Dynamics
  - A. Adhere to small group elements as defined above
  - B. Be willing to address conflicts to small group elements
  - C. Always be willing to listen for ways to improve
  - D. Practice inclusion of all members to their level of comfort
  - E. Model good listening
  - F. Respect reluctance to share if evident

## DISCUSSION

### Review of Problem

Liturgical dance is an ancient art form used to offer prayer, praise and worship to God. Employing bodily movements is a valid way of exploring and expressing personal faith. Most often, in current times, this art form is associated with performance and is available only to those trained in dance technique. Teaching liturgical dance to non-dancers and/or people not interested in performing is not well documented. Yet, in the right setting, liturgical dance can be offered to everyone as an avenue to more fully enter into prayer and worship of God.

Church leaders have found small group settings to be effective arenas for participants to grow spiritually by developing personal relationships, sharing, questioning, and expressing personal faith. Pastors and congregants are looking for ways to incorporate innovation and variety into adult spiritual growth programs. However, thus far, the arts in general and dance in particular have not been considered beneficial in helping accomplish that goal.

### Evaluation of the Project

Some benefits of liturgical dance include establishing relationships with others, finding deeper spiritual growth through embodying prayer, and entering into movements that allow deeper worship individually and in community. When engaging adult participants in liturgical dance, inclusion of all participants is important. Leaders must welcome all skill levels and avoid expecting perfection from a dance perspective. Each person brings their personal life stories and faith questions to share when entering into worship, prayer and

praise. By honoring personal stories, the arts can give opportunity for personal as well as community expression of worship and the development of strong interpersonal relationships.

Small group settings have value in leading participants in spiritual growth by cultivating relationships and encouraging personal sharing, questioning, and expression of faith. For small groups to be successful there must be a strong foundation set in the beginning of the group's existence. This foundation must include being centered in God and incorporating prayer at all meetings.

Additionally, there are elements that make a small group successful. Those elements include clear statement of purpose, establishment of ground rules (including respecting the dignity of all members, willingness to listen to opposing views, and confidentiality), strong leadership and the commitment of members to regular meeting times. The benefits of small groups cannot be realized without commitment of the members to the ground rules and agreement upon the foundation and purpose of the group.

The product of this research was the construction of a model in the form of guidelines to lead participants in liturgical dance, in a small group setting. The model was based upon review of academic, peer-reviewed literature, responses from 13 interviewees, and the investigator's personal experiences. The interviewees represented a variety of church leaders and dancers in liturgical and secular dance. The guidelines for the model were presented in outline form in chapter four. This outline reflected integration of components of church small groups and instruction in liturgical dance.

### Objectives Achieved/Contribution to the Field

The creation of the model by combining the above mentioned elements was the primary objective of this project. The purpose of this combination was to offer opportunity to interested parties, regardless of ability or dance background, to explore liturgical dance for personal spiritual growth individually and within community.

Within the academic literature, there are multiple articles reflecting the spiritual growth benefits of church small groups and the validity of liturgical dance as a form of prayer and worship. However, literature and interviews revealed a lack in the area of guidance for offering liturgical dance as a form of spiritual growth and exploration outside of worship and performance. This project therefore partially fills that gap by offering guidelines for a model that combines the two. The project contributes to the field of worship arts by offering a design to facilitators that has not previously been developed.

### Limitations of the Study

Primarily the study was limited by the lack of literature supporting use of liturgical dance outside a performance or formal worship setting. In the experience of this investigator, there are few opportunities to introduce non-dancers to liturgical dance. Because there are no similar models available, this investigator had to develop original questions for interviews in order to find the information necessary to build the model. It was also necessary to develop the outline for the guidelines without previously piloting the model. There was therefore no opportunity for evaluation or revision of the model prior to submission.



### Recommendations for Further Study and Model Development

Further study in the form of piloting this model needs to be done. It is the intention of the investigator to lead several groups within the next year, using this outline and then interviewing the small group participants to evaluate efficacy of the model. It is anticipated revisions to the model will be necessary. Additionally there is need for a model from the perspective of the participants. However, until there has been work done with participants, it will be difficult to establish that model.

### Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the author described a model built to facilitate exploration of liturgical dance as a form of prayer and worship. The model was built from results of interviews, literature review, and the investigator's personal experiences. The lack of literature supporting the use of liturgical dance as a means of leading people into deeper spiritual growth, richer personal relationships and worship of God indicates the need for such a model. The evidence for benefits of spiritual growth in small groups indicates this may be an acceptable format to offer the opportunity to explore liturgical dance. Although this investigator's model has not been piloted to date, that is planned in the future. After piloting, the model will be revised based on feedback and evaluation from participants as well as observations of the leader. Development of an additional guide for participants is also anticipated.

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## APPENDIX A

### Definition of Terms

Church Small Groups - an intentional gathering of 6-12 people (approx.) who meet on a regular basis for the purpose of Christian spiritual growth. They are under the direction of a designated leader. The focus of the Christian small group is to grow in relationship with God and with each other.

Lectio Divina - Devine or sacred reading that includes listening to, reflecting upon, responding to and resting in Holy Scripture.

Liturgical Dance – Christian expression of prayer, praise, and worship through the use of the body movements.

Sacred Dance –Movements that enhance or express spiritual experiences within a faith tradition.

Worship Arts Leaders – Those individuals who lead others in the arts, such as music, theater, dance, and visual arts for the purposes of enhancing church worship services.

## APPENDIX B

## Additional Resources

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